

MAINSTREAM PSYCHOLOGY AND THE GENDER BINARY:  
TOWARD AN ACCOUNT OF BECOMING “NON-BINARY”

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## Abstract

Mainstream Psychology and the Gender Binary: Toward an Account of Becoming “Non-Binary”

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The gender binary haunts mainstream psychology’s history of medicalizing trans and gender nonconforming people, particularly its construction of their gender identities as psychopathological and in need of treatment for violating the binary logic of normative (cis) development. Drawing on interviews with 24 participants who identified as “non-binary,” this dissertation advances: (1) a genealogical analysis of the construction, interpretation, and administration of “transgenderism” (psychology’s parlance) which elucidates the discipline’s maintenance of the gender binary through said construction, interpretation, and administration; and (2) an account of “becoming” gendered (non-binary, in this case) as an alternative to the mainstream models of gender identity development. Becoming (a) shifts from the etiological “why” to the psychosocial “how” (as in, how to go about assembling oneself as non-binary; labels and pronouns are key); (b) eschews teleology (there is no end goal with regard to embodiment); (c) privileges gender self-determination; (d) attends to intersectionality; and (e) foregrounds intersubjectivity. The participants were largely concerned with asserting the validity of their gender identities as non-binary, which are routinely dismissed and invalidated, and this dissertation works toward undoing psychology’s own invalidating practices.

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Mainstream Psychology and the Gender Binary:  
Toward an Account of Becoming “Non-Binary”

This dissertation began with a question: What’s queer about “queer” now? About a decade ago, Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz (2005) posed a similar one vis-à-vis queerness in the academy: what makes queer studies queer is its commitment to queer epistemology, they concluded. Following Judith Butler’s assertion that queer must never purport to fully describe those it seeks to represent, Eng et al. (2005) defined queer epistemology as a “subjectless” critique which “disallows any positing of a proper subject *of* or object *for* the field by insisting that queer has no fixed political referent” (p. 3). They called for a renewed queer studies, one that would continue to attend, even more capaciously, “to those hegemonic social structures by which certain subjects are rendered ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ through the production of ‘perverse’ and ‘pathological’ others” (p. 3). Queer studies must remain ever vigilant to “a wide field of normalization” (Warner, 1993, p. xxvi). As the activist energies that helped to fuel queer academic work in North America in the early 1990s have declined (Halley & Parker, 2011), and as the authors around whom queer theory first crystallized seem to have spent the past decade pursuing new avenues – Butler (2004a, 2005) began writing about justice and human rights, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) about affect theory, and Michael Warner (1999, 2007) about sermons and secularism – some have wondered whether queer studies has reached its “afterlife” (O’Rourke, 2011). Did it ever really “exist” as a discipline anyway (see e.g., Berlant & Warner, 1995; Halperin, 2003)?

I was wondering the same as I set out to begin this dissertation. I started by searching for where these and other early authors’ commitments to interrogating the social processes that produce, recognize, normalize, and sustain identity might endure. In academia, I found, they had

been renewed by the next generation of new, rediscovered, and recently canonized queer scholars who have expanded the field's "wide" originating critique. Reinvigorated by intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991), queer of color critique (Ferguson, 2004), and critical trans politics (Spade, 2011), among other forms and commentaries, queer studies now provides an array of tools for theorizing normalization, resistance, and politics.<sup>1</sup> Beyond academia, however, "queer" seemed to me to endure more so as a popular (in certain circles) term of self-identification, usually meant as a synonym of LGBT, than as one that connotes a political ethic that seeks to problematize heteronormativity and its natural-law approach to sexual morality (Vasilovsky, 2014; Vasilovsky & Gurevich, 2017).

To answer my opening question, I'd turned to what I called "queer genders," which, according to the definition I was working with at the time of my dissertation proposal (see **Background**), includes those designated by the labels "genderqueer" and "non-binary." *Non-binary* describes people whose gender is not exclusively "female" or "male," including (but not limited to) those who identify with a gender other than "woman" or "man," as somewhere between the two, as both, but at separate times; with more than one gender; with a gendered neologism one's own coining; or with no gender (see Matsuno & Budge, 2016). ("Gender identity" tends to indicate one's "internal" sense of one's own gender, whereas "gender expression" is "external.") Non-binary is usually considered an umbrella term, encompassing other identities, including genderqueer, as well as "gender fluid," "agender," and "bigender." Some who identify as such also consider themselves to be "trans" or "transgender," two other umbrella terms that both refer to individuals whose gender differs from the one assigned to them at birth and/or from what others expect of their physical presentation.<sup>2</sup> Research has just recently begun to acknowledge the existence of non-binary folx (e.g., Beemyn, 2015; Harrison, Grant, &

Herman, 2012; Kuper, Nussbaum, & Mustanski, 2012; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). Despite some advocating for less binary measures of gender identity (e.g., Conron, Scout, & Austin, 2008; Frohard-Dourlent, Dobson, Clark, Doull, & Saewyc, 2017), most surveys of trans and gender nonconforming (TGNC) people have infrequently included “non-binary” as a forced choice option when soliciting respondents’ gender identifications; demographic statistics, as such, are hard to come by. According to the report of the *2015 U.S. Transgender Survey* (James et al., 2016), the largest yet to examine the experiences of TGNC people in the United States, more than one-third of 27,715 respondents reported their gender identity was best described as non-binary or genderqueer. In Ontario, the Trans PULSE Project, a community-based research study, surveyed 433 trans participants, and an estimated 27% of those who were assigned female at birth (AFAB) and 14% of those who were assigned male at birth (AMAB) identified as non-binary (Scheim & Bauer, 2015). However, large-scale, anonymous, online surveys sample only trans populations and therefore fail to capture non-binary folx who do not identify as trans (e.g., the majority of the participants I interviewed).

To refuse to identify with the existing terms of gendered identification – “woman” and “man,” of course, but also “trans woman” and “trans man” – is to queer gender as we have known it. Because there are those among us who say they are neither woman nor man, or both woman and man, nor stably gendered, and live their lives accordingly, our system of sexual conduct and kinship relations – wherein sex, gender identity and expression, and sexuality are aligned to produce heterosexuality as the culturally accepted natural order – is in trouble. That includes all that is organized around the norms of gender: its identities, expressions, roles, and relations. This system, heteronormativity, had been imposed violently, and it continues to be: from material (economic and legal), structural and physical forms of violence to symbolic

violence, including largely unconscious, internalized modes of cultural and social domination and erasure. Fortunately, the forms of resistance to heteronormativity's violence likewise range, from political struggles for sexual rights and material (economic) resistance to symbolic subversion of which non-binary self-identification is one such more-or-less public rebellion. The maintenance of such a self-identification, despite macro and microaggressions meant to deny one one's existence in this world, represents a struggle for both intelligibility and survival. This symbolic subversion is political, if not always intentionally so; its consequences are material and profoundly felt.

There are precedents for this kind of subversion, antecedent self-identifications, such as "neotranssexuality," "posttranssexual," and – most prominently – transgender. Queer genders belong to an epistemic (and academic) tradition that has positioned transgender as queer's "evil twin" (Stryker, 2004). In academia, under the rubric of transgender studies, and for certain trans activists and community members, "'trans-' conceptual operations" (Stryker, Currah, & Moore, 2008, p. 12) have suggested a constellation of embodiments, subjectivities, and communities for which "gender refuses to be the stable foundation on which a system of sexuality can be theorized" (Stryker, 2004, p. 212). That certain subject positions can queer – or, "trans" – familiar modes of subject production has been of much concern to this tradition, which reads trans genders as genders that destabilize the regulatory norm that intelligible human beings must live, for the entirety of their lifetimes, in the sex and as the gender to which they were assigned at birth. The introduction to the first issue of *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* names transgender as "a range of phenomena related to deep, pervasive, and historically significant shifts in attitudes toward, and understandings of, what gender itself means and does" (Stryker & Currah, 2014b, p. 5). "Transgender phenomena" (Stryker, 1998, p. 146) urge us to re-evaluate

what we think we know about sex, gender, sexuality, embodiment, and identity. They are said to have produced new possibilities for gender self-perception and expression. Through two sets of individual, semi-structured interviews with non-binary-identified participants, I sought to research these new possibilities, these genders under construction, which seemed to me to use the gender binary as their point of queerly creative, deconstructive departure. Both interviews followed their respective schedules, which were talk-based, though the second of the two incorporated an arts-based component, outlined below (see **Interviews**).

Below, I outline my two objectives for this dissertation. The first was to detail how the psy disciplines' construction, interpretation, and administration of TGNC subjectivities ended up – sometimes intentionally – maintaining gender as binary; these disciplines include those fields of knowledge associated with the mind, mental life, and behaviour, most typically psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis (see Rose, 1989). The second was to provide an alternative account of these subjectivities-identities – specifically, of how the participants I interviewed had sought to live legible and livable lives as “non-binary” persons. I call this account “becoming,” as opposed to the more familiar “development,” and present five of its “qualities” throughout this (second) section; the numbered ordering of these qualities is non-hierarchical, such that **Quality 1** is no more or less important than the following four. I chose the term qualities to indicate that these are not necessary conditions of a distinct kind of development (nor is becoming an essential property of non-binary subjectivity) but rather are descriptive of *some* of the ways – well, five, anyway – in which this dissertation's account of (non-binary) subject-formation differs from mainstream psychology's models of trans gender identity development. These differences may be attributed to my (and the participants') critical departures from the mainstream's metaphysical presuppositions: namely, that mental life is located within the

individual, that individuals are independent entities with inherent properties (positioned in absolute exteriority from cultural practices), and that, through certain formalized systems of methods, psychologists can themselves locate the data necessary to determine the models believed to accurately represent said individuals' mental lives.

By “mainstream psychology,” I mean the version of psychology you might read about in an introductory undergraduate textbook, the one that is “portrayed as a science, with objective researchers and practitioners who uncover the truth about human behavior and help individuals adjust to the demands of modern life” (Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997, p. 4). I use the term most in relation to its theories of gender identity development (see **Reconceptualizing Gender Identity Development**), and in contrast to “critical psychology,” an international movement that draws on a motley of intellectual traditions, including the “masters of suspicion” (i.e. Marx, Nietzsche, Freud), second-generation critical social philosophers and more recent movements (e.g., feminism, postcolonial theory, queer theory). Critical approaches to psychology foreground – much as this dissertation does – the societal embeddedness of subjectivity, the notion of intersubjectivity between researcher and participants, methodologies of change (that research should contribute to challenging or abolishing oppressive social situations), and processes of subjectification (see **Foucault: Power and resistance**) and of psychologization<sup>3</sup>, among other topics (see Teo, 2015). Though (mainstream) psychologists continue to play a role in administering the lives of TGNC people, most notably as gatekeepers to gender confirming procedures, numerous other kinds of professionals likewise play comparable roles therein, hence my use of “psy disciplines” throughout **The Psy Disciplines’ Trans** section.

The approach I take to the participants’ “practices of knowing in being” (Barad, 2003, p. 829), as detailed in the **Epistemological Framework** section below, is antithetical to this



representationalism (the belief that grammatical categories, or, in our case, certain theoretical conceptualizations of gender and its development, reflect the underlying structure of the world, and that these categories or representations are ontologically distinct from that which they purport to represent) and resistant to the individualization and psychologization of human subjectivity. I've sought, instead, to describe the myriad practices involved in rendering intelligible their first-person (experiential) knowledge of themselves as non-binary within the simultaneously constraining and enabling topology of the gender binary. Unlike the mainstream's fantasy of development as some intrasubjective maturation of the self, becoming recognizable (and worthy of validation) as a non-binary being entails engagement with the intersubjective, material-discursive forces through which we are all produced as (particularly gendered) subjects (see Butler, 1990b; Foucault, 1978), including the psy-sanctioned views of gender which claim merely to represent trans experience despite being, like other psychological constructs, constitutive of self-understandings, actions, and experiences (see Hacking, 1995). My approach throughout, as such, is historically- and theoretically-oriented, rather than purely empirical, and acknowledges that these qualities of becoming are but one interpretation among many possible interpretations of the transcripts of the participants' interviews (see Teo, 2011).

A notice for readers: what follows, therefore, isn't the traditional reporting of results (literature review, then method, then results, then discussion). I've deliberately adopted an organizational structure wherein my review of the literature, genealogy of psy's construction, interpretation and administration of TGNC subjectivities, and analysis of the interview materials are presented often in tandem. This synthetic approach deliberately deviates from the conventional reporting of qualitative material in psychology (such as recent American Psychological Association reporting standards for qualitative research, cf. Levitt et al., 2018),

which tends to be modelled on quantitative conventions. My preference has been to show the reader when and how my empirical interpretations were informed by the literature I'd reviewed, including, often, theoretical writings, which, in the case of some of the most frequently cited of such writings, were authored by TGNC people (e.g., Talia Mae Bettcher, Julia Serano, Susan Stryker) drawing from their own lived experiences and other sociological, anthropological, and historical engagements. Straightaway, with this presentation style, we see associations among conventional meanings of objects, actions, and/or events – say, transgender phenomena – within particular sociocultural collectives *and* the meanings the individual members of a given collective have made of said phenomena (e.g., the participants' intended meaning for “non-binary,” its personal significance to them). Again, this preference is epistemologically-driven: following Martin and Sugarman (2009), I believe interpretation (of data) in psychology, unlike interpretation in natural science, must contend with, and account for, the *self*-interpretations of persons who are themselves socially constituted and, if applicable, reactive to ways they have been classified and conceptualized by psychologists. They conclude that:

persons are uniquely emergent, both ontogenetically and phylogenetically as situated, embodied self-interpreting beings whose actions and experiences require ... levels of interpretation that go beyond those required for the scientific study of inanimate and animate entities/beings without the kind of reactive, self-interpretive capabilities displayed (at least some of the time) by persons. (pp. 35)

In attending to these various levels of interpretation, I demonstrate both self-reflexivity regarding my own role here – that I'm interpreting the participants' interpretations of themselves and of others' interpretations of them – and transparency about my influence upon the research process and the results presented herein (see Gergen, Josselson, & Freeman, 2015). I make no claim that

they mediate access to the material worlds of non-binary folx: that the aforementioned genealogy was itself informed by my interviews with the participants – and is presented as such – is meant to blur the subject-object split, so inherent to scientific knowledge (in its many representational forms), whereby the “knowing” scientists’ observations are said to “reveal preexisting properties of an observation-independent reality” (Barad, 1998, p. 94); this split has directed much psy-based writings on trans subjectivities, which understand (and produce) transsexuality as an independent, stable, and definite “disorder” that precedes its encounters with the psy disciplines (see Latham, 2017a, 2017b, 2019). Transsexuality, however, much like trans (and cis) people’s experiences of gender, is *not* singular but rather emerges through said encounters; antagonistic to such a “trans singularity,” as well as to the type of thinking that would obscure how, for example, transsexuality emerges this way, my stance is that the “agencies of observation” (Barad, 1998, p. 94) and the “objects of observation” (p. 94) are, in actuality, inseparable, as is the making of realities from the making of statements about those realities (discourses, research). Phenomena, including transgender phenomena, materialize through the apparatuses with which we see, measure, and understand them (see also Barad, 2007; Latour & Woolgar, 1979; Law, 2004). The results emerged and were co-constituted within a particular material and conceptual practice, and, in working to blur the subject-object split, via my research design and data-analytic strategies and their reporting, I’ve aimed to actively recover certain subjugated and delegitimized knowledges (i.e., the so-called objects’ experiential knowledges) whilst acknowledging that such results, and the apparatuses therein, necessarily entail constraints and exclusions. As Stryker (2008b) explains in her review of anti-assimilationist trans activism:

In an epistemological regime structured by the subject-object split, the bodily situatedness of knowing becomes divorced from the status of formally legitimated

objective knowledge; experiential knowledge of the material effects of one's own antinormative bodily difference on the production and reception of what one knows consequently becomes delegitimated as merely subjective. This in turn circumscribes the radical potential of that knowledge to critique other knowledge produced from other bodily locations, equally partial and contingent, which have been vested with the prerogatives of a normativity variously figured as white, masculinist, heterosexist, or Eurocentric. (pp. 154)

My aim to de-subjugate the participants' experiential knowledges (see also Stryker, 2006) is especially pertinent given that, as I report throughout this dissertation, so much of the participants' talk addressed the invisibilization and invalidation of their gender identities by those, including (some) binary-identified trans folks, who claim to know better. De-subjugation is aligned, furthermore, with this dissertation's affirmative and participatory action ethos, as outlined below, which, in the context of conducting research with, as opposed to on, TGNC people (see dickey, Hendricks, & Bockting, 2016; Singh, Richmond, & Burnes, 2013), advocates subverting the traditional positioning of trans subjects as the objects of psychological inquiry.

Lastly, I've also strayed somewhat from the views of gender transgression and resistance I'd begun to develop with this dissertation's proposal, which necessitated a perhaps more-substantive-than-usual **Background** and **Method** sections to clarify relevant historical trajectories and epistemic distinctions.

## **Objectives**

All the interviews were conducted with one question in mind: What's it like to live as "non-binary" in a thoroughly binary world? I'm acutely aware of the irony of posing such a question to these participants from my position within the discipline of psychology. Here, gender

is treated as binary (see Hyde, Bigler, Joel, Tate, & van Anders, 2019). Examples are countless: its management of women's mental health (see Chesler, 1972; Ussher, 1991), the androcentric bias of much of its research (see Eagly & Riger, 2014), the "gender differences hypothesis" (see Hyde, 2005; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974), certain forms of evolutionary psychology, from Herbert Spencer's and Edward L. Thorndike's functionalism to E. O. Wilson's and David M. Buss's sociobiology, and on and on. Its canonized theories of gender identity development – cognitive-developmental (Kohlberg, 1966), social learning (Bandura, 1977), gender schema (Bem, 1981; Martin & Halverson, 1981), and social cognitive (Bussey & Bandura, 1999) – have been, in actuality, models of *cis*<sup>4</sup> gender identity development (a caveat, always implicit but never specified). The gender identity that a developing child comes to acquire will just so happen to match their sex assigned at birth, either "boy" and then "man" or "girl" and then "woman," without deviation. This is the norm, and deviations have been, and continue to be, pathologized.

For decades, mental health professionals openly viewed gender nonconforming children as mentally disordered. Research on gender-variant boys provided the initial foundation for the creation of the psychiatric diagnosis of "gender dysphoria in children" (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013), which first appeared as "gender identity disorder of childhood" (GIDC) in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III*; APA, 1980). By the 1970s, research on gender nonconformity had combined the experiences of homosexual, intersex, and trans individuals into a single category of study and clinical intervention: "feminine boys" (Tosh, 2015). Gender nonconforming masculinity, or "masculine girls," never attracted the same attention. Earlier editions of the *DSM*, for example, held boys to a stricter standard of gender conformity: according to the *DSM-IV-TR* (APA, 2000), a boy risks diagnosis if he "prefers" cross-dressing, whereas a girl must "insist" on it; he need only show an

“aversion” to rough-and-tumble play, she a “marked” aversion to feminine attire. The “official” explanation implicates greater societal tolerance for “tomboys,” rather than “sissies” (Green, 1987), though others have argued this disparity reflected our culture’s devaluation of femininity (e.g., Burke, 1996; Sedgwick, 1991; Serano, 2007; Winters, 2008), as well as “the strong arm of regulatory anxiety in the construction of masculinity” (Corbett, 2009, p. 355). Historical disparity aside, both boys and girls can be diagnosed still, should they endorse a “marked incongruence between [their] experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender, of at least 6 months’ duration” (APA, 2013, p. 452) and find themselves “distressed” or “impaired,” to a “clinically significant” degree, by their “condition.”

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, researchers were already beginning to study feminine boys to understand the supposed antecedents of later non-normatively gendered identities and behaviours, often “treating” those same boys by encouraging more typical (masculine) identifications and behaviours in hopes of preventing “atypical” adult psychosexual outcomes (see Bryant, 2006). The “homophobia critique” (Bryant, 2008) of GIDC asserts that the diagnosis functioned to target homosexuality by capturing pre-homosexual children within its diagnostic net (e.g., Bartlett, Vasey, & Bukowski, 2000; Bem, 1993; Burke, 1996; Haldeman, 2000; Morin & Schultz, 1978). Though GIDC researcher-clinicians have long denied that the diagnosis was a “backdoor” maneuver” to keep homosexuality under the purview of psychiatry (see Zucker & Spitzer, 2005), much has been made of the fact that GIDC (as well as “transsexualism,” for adults) was included in the *DSM* following the removal of homosexuality (see Drescher, 2010). Sedgwick (1991), for example, argued that “the *depathologization* of an atypical sexual object-choice [was] yoked to the *new* pathologization of an atypical gender identification” (p. 21), such that “proto-gay” children could be “counselled out” of their gender

nonconforming ways. “Revisionists” within psychology who advocated for homosexuality’s depathologization were at the time prepared to construct positive accounts of “the healthy homosexual” (p. 19), so long as he “(a) is already grown up, and (b) acts masculine” (p. 19), leaving the effeminate boy “in the position of the haunting abject” (p. 20). According to Valentine (2007), depathologization was secured through such an account of homosexuals as essentially the same as heterosexuals but for the “private” difference of sexual practice. Normalized, stabilized, and privatized in this way, homosexuality was purged of a gender transitivity that got displaced onto a separate category of psychopathology. Despite continued conflation of homosexuality with cross-gender behaviour among these researcher-clinicians (e.g., Drummond, Bradley, Peterson-Badali, & Zucker, 2008; Rieger, Linsenmeier, Gygax, & Bailey, 2008), the formalization of GIDC in 1980 has been used to rationalize “treatments” that are committed primarily to “the prevention of transsexualism” (Zucker, Wood, Singh, & Bradley, 2012, p. 383). Given this framing of adult transsexuality as the least acceptable outcome of a gender nonconforming childhood, among numerous other concerns, many have called for the GIDC’s reform or elimination (e.g., Bartlett et al., 2000; Burke, 1996; Butler, 2004b; Corbett, 1998; Feder, 1997; Haldeman, 2000; Hill, Rozanski, Carfagnini, & Willoughby, 2005; Langer & Martin, 2004; Richardson, 1996, 1999; Sedgwick, 1991; Wilson, Griffin, & Wren, 2002).

This “gender identity disorder in childhood paradigm,” which “attributes particular features of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender ... development to the influence of ... inherent pathological factors” (Hegarty, 2009, p. 895), began it would seem inadvertently with John Money and colleagues. With their studies on intersexuality, they were the first to use the term gender to refer to “outlook, demeanor, and orientation” (Money, 1955, p. 258), whereas gender

role was differentiated as “all those things that a person says or does to disclose himself or herself as having the status of boy or man, girl or woman” (p. 254). Robert J. Stoller, in collaboration with his colleague Ralph Greenson, refined this new concept of gender, calling it gender identity, a term that came to dominate the medical literature on transsexualism – the name, at the time, for the “condition” in which men “want to be changed into women, even anatomically” (Benjamin, 1953, p. 13). Gender identity referred to one’s sense of being either male or female (Stoller, 1964; Greenson, 1964), the subjective sense of one’s sexed self, not the behaviours associated with masculinity and femininity. For Stoller (1968), a psychoanalyst, a gender identity at odds with “biological sex” resulted from damaging psychodynamic processes in early childhood. He and others depicted childhood cross-gender behaviour as a potentially malignant symptom and called for psychotherapeutic treatment before the process of cross-gender identification could be complete (see Meyerowitz, 2002). Some committed themselves to stereotypes of gender difference, urging parents to preserve such distinctions within the home: Richard Green and John Money (1960), in an early study, wrote that part of the “successful rearing of a child” (p. 167) was “orienting him, from birth, to his biologically and culturally acceptable gender role” (p. 167) and, to that end, advocated “a relationship between husband and wife exemplifying these respective roles” (p. 167). This is the time when researchers and clinicians instituted formal “gender identity clinics” to teach gender to children and their parents.

These preventative treatments and programs continued throughout the rest of the twentieth century, spearheaded by George Rekers in the 1970s, and, later, most influentially, by Kenneth J. Zucker and colleagues, at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health’s (CAMH) youth gender identity clinic, whose approach had employed a combination of behaviour modification, including aversive conditioning, as well as ecological interventions and family



system restructuring in order to emphasize the potential benefits of acting in ways that are expected of one's assigned gender (Zucker & Bradley, 1995). Also known as the "live in your skin" model of mental health treatment for gender nonconforming children, this approach assumes that, being pre-pubescent, they still have "malleable gender brains" (Ehrensaft, 2017, p. 60) and, as such, can be counseled to "accept their biological sex" (see Hird, 2003): for an assigned boy, cross-gender toys might be taken away, replaced with "gender-appropriate" ones; play with boys and identification with the father encouraged (this work is based, after all, on middle-class children who come from intact, two-heterosexual-parent families); the apparently positive aspects of masculinity discussed (e.g., being able to urinate in the standing position, engaging in rough-and-tumble play, having a penis). Those involved in the child's life who accept their "atypical" behaviours and interests would be discouraged from supporting such atypicality or removed. Clearly, traditional forms of masculinity and femininity are here reified, but critics have also raised the potential harm caused to gender nonconforming children by this model and its specific modes of intervention (e.g., Burke, 1996; Hegarty, 2009; Hill et al., 2005; Langer & Martin, 2004; Lev, 2004, 2005; Minter, 2012; Morin & Schultz, 1978; Nordyke, Baer, Etzel, & LeBlanc, 1977; Tosh, 2015; Winkler, 1977; Wolfe, 1979). Feder (1997), for example, describes them as an exercise of disciplinary power: the collaboration between clinician, family members, and school functions in panoptic fashion to keep the child under constant surveillance so that that child comes to internalize the normalizing gaze, even though this leaves them at "an enhanced risk of fostering proneness to shame, a shame-based identity and vulnerability to depression" (Wallace & Russell, 2013, p. 120; see also Roberts, Rosario, Corsliss, Koenen, & Austin, 2012). One of the justifications for interventions whose goal is "to reduce [the] child's desire to be of the other gender" (Zucker et al., 2012, p. 383) is (parents' worries about) social

ostracism – that “growing up transsexual or transgender may augur a more complicated life” (p. 391). But, as Tosh (2015) notes, to identify gender nonconforming children as requiring treatment only encourages such ostracism. Rather than attempt to alter the context of social ostracism, the ostracized child is pathologized, then intervened upon (Pyne, 2014).

Fortunately, the latest version of the *Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People* (SOC; Coleman et al., 2011), issued by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), considers treatments “aimed at trying to change a person’s gender identity and expression to become more congruent with sex assigned at birth” (p. 175) to be unethical. Research data suggests that neither psychoeducation nor therapeutic intervention can intentionally shift gender experience to “match” the body (see Drescher & Byne, 2013). Some (newer) psychological models have discarded direct behavioural modification in favour of therapeutic interventions that are said to be affirmative of children’s self-designated (vs. assigned) genders – an ideological shift in medical/psychiatric discourse from treating gender nonconforming children as disordered to viewing gender diversity as a “natural” phenomenon (see Hidalgo et al., 2013). The Dutch Protocol, or watchful waiting model, allows that children could have knowledge of their gender at a young age, but only if cross-gender identifications and affirmations persist over time should trans identity-consolidation interventions be made available to those who know their gender to be other than the one assigned to them; it is thought better to delay social transitions until puberty (see e.g., Cohen-Kettenis, Pfäfflin, 2003; Cohen-Kettenis, Owen, Kaijser, Bradley, & Zucker, 2003; Steensma & Cohen-Kettenis, 2011; Steensma, McGuire, Kreukels, Beekman, & Cohen-Kettenis, 2013), though this means that trans kids who are clear (and persistently so) about their gender could be prevented from socially transitioning for years, despite mounting evidence that such children thrive when

affirmed as their experienced gender (see Durwood, McLaughlin, & Olson, 2017; Olson, Durwood, DeMeules, & McLaughlin, 2016; Olson, Key, & Eaton, 2015). A third model, called the gender affirmative model (e.g., Ehrensaft, 2012, 2016; Hill, Menvielle, Sica, & Johnson, 2010; Lev, 2004; Malpas, 2011; Menvielle, & Tuerk, 2002; Raj, 2008; Vanderburgh, 2009), is closely aligned with the watchful waiting model, in that neither seek to prevent adult transsexuality, but differs by “allowing children to speak for themselves about their self-experienced gender identity and expressions and providing support for them to evolve into their authentic gender selves, not matter what age” (Ehrensaft, 2017, p. 62). The opportunity to live, without restriction or rejection, as one’s experienced gender is multiply beneficial (see Ehrensaft, Giammattei, Storck, Tishelman, & Keo-Meier, 2018).

Some in the field have suggested that “attitudes [toward transsexuals] among mental health professionals seem to be fairly positive [now]” (Hill & Willoughby, 2005, p. 532), whilst others (e.g., Winters, 2008) contend that it continues to lag in terms of its affirmativeness. In support of this latter contention, Ansara and Hegarty’s (2012) content analysis of articles published between 1999 and 2008 on “childhood” “gender identity” and “expression” found no change in authors’ use of language that invalidates or pathologizes children’s self-designated genders. Mental health professionals, particularly members of a network that is structured around the most prolific author in the field, Kenneth J. Zucker, were more invalidating and pathologizing (and their articles more “impactful,” in terms of citation count) than non-mental health authors. This “network,” as well as proponents of the watchful waiting model, has in recent years conducted follow-up studies with samples of gender nonconforming children (e.g., Drummond et al., 2008; Steensma, Biemond, de Boer, & Cohen-Kettenis, 2011; Steensma et al., 2013; Wallien & Cohen-Kettenis, 2008), some of whose possibly inflated results – that most

gender nonconforming children will come to identify as cis at adolescence or early adulthood (and then, apparently, stay identified as such for the rest of their lives) – are usually interpreted as evidence for these authors’ “desistance” theories and deployed by some as vindication of the ethically dubious practice of discouraging or delaying social transitions among children (Temple Newhook et al., 2018; see also Drescher & Pula, 2014; Ehrensaft et al., 2018; Ristori & Steensma, 2016; Steensma & Cohen-Kettenis, 2018; Winters et al., 2018; Zucker, 2018).<sup>5</sup>

As Temple Newhook et al. (2018) raise, that an increase in the number of trans people (“persistence”) can be interpreted “in a negative light” (p. 220) seems inconsistent with WPATH’s position that trans identity is a matter of diversity not pathology (Coleman et al., 2011). This is to say nothing of the framing of gender stability, both cis and trans, as a positive outcome: in her discursive analysis of publications evaluating outcomes of puberty suppression (and later gender confirming procedures) among (select) trans youth, Roen (2011) describes how “successful” outcomes – that is, the emergence of trans adults who the clinicians describe as heterosexual, gender conforming, and psychologically well-adjusted – are discursively and clinically produced, in part, by selecting for puberty suppression (and later gender confirmation) only those who persist (“persisters”) in their wish for such procedures; those who falter or express gender uncertainty, who change their minds throughout the course of their childhood and adolescence, who flout “heteronormative understandings about gender certainty (or persistence)” (p. 63) are labelled “desisters” and turned down for early intervention. Rather than perpetuate such black-and-white views of gender diversity and “certainty,” whereby two divergent groups of people are constructed, Roen’s point is that our treatment models ought to define success more expansively, such that “diverse possibilities for (trans)gendering/(trans)sexing” (p. 65) – Roen lists non-binary identities – are enabled, that those who such identities name are equitably

supported and treated as just as coherent and valid of subjects as those who are able to be read as convincing (certain, persistent) subjects by these clinicians.

Indeed, among all the psy constructs that address gender diversity of which I'm aware, the only one that does not stigmatize or marginalize nonconformity and instability also happens to be the only one for whom the cisgender status of the humans it names abides: "androgyny." Certain researchers in the 1970s began to challenge unidimensional models of gender difference which measured masculinity and femininity as if they were bipolar opposites on a single continuum, à la Terman and Miles' (1936) "masculinity-femininity" test of psychological differences between the "sexes," as opposed to two separate, independent dimensions (Constantinople, 1973). Men and women could "possess" both, argued Sandra L. Bem (1974), whose Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) was the first test to measure androgyny, as respondents could score high on both "masculinity" and "femininity" ("androgynous"). At a time when conversion therapies had begun targeting gender nonconforming children, androgyny among adults was thought optimal for psychological adjustment (Bem & Lewis, 1975; Bem & Lenney, 1976; Bem, Martyna, & Watson, 1976). Unlike the children, who risked growing up to be trans, the cis-status of androgynous men and women had already been established – they simply varied in the extent to which certain gender-typed attributes were believed to characterize them. Despite the obvious simplicity of an "androgyny = good, sex-typing = bad" conceptualization of gender stereotypes, a main criticism of the BSRI and other similar measures of gender identity has been that they do not specifically assess respondents' own thoughts, feelings, and knowledge regarding their membership in one of two gender categories (Tobin et al. 2010), such that research (with children and adults) now tends to directly ask participants about being men or women (see Egan & Perry, 2001). However, that a participant might not understand themselves to be a member of

their assigned “gender group,” irrespective of (a)typicality, remains unaddressed in the androgyny literature.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to the androgynous cis person, understanding oneself, as an adult, to be, at times, if not always, a gender other than the one that would be expected (“normally”) to follow from the sex one was assigned around the time of one’s birth has received sometimes diametric, frequently less benevolent, considerations. That understanding is what has been medicalized as *transgenderism* (see Tosh, 2015) by the psy disciplines – elsewhere called “transvestism” (Hirschfeld, 1910), “eonism” (Ellis, 1913), “*psychopathia transexualis*” (Cauldwell, 1949), “transsexuality” (Benjamin, 1966), “transsexualism” (APA, 1980), and “autogynephilia” (Blanchard, 1989), take your pick. That is what Stoller, Money, Green, and others had sought to avert, what proponents of the “live in your skin” model still seek to avert. Given the psy disciplines’ constitutive powers, my **first objective** was to conduct a brief genealogical sketch of the construction, interpretation, and administration of transgenderism which elucidates not so much psy’s pathologization of gender diversity, which is already well-documented in the social work, counselling and critical psychology literatures (see e.g., Tosh, 2015; Lev, 2005; Winters, 2008), but rather its maintenance of the gender binary *through* said construction, interpretation, and administration.

What I mean by genealogy is a “history of the present” (Foucault, 1977), which shows that certain persons, institutions, and disciplinary practices “gain their sense only from their location within a much wider nexus of relations of knowledge, power and the production of subjectivities” (Rabinow & Rose, 2003, p. xiv). I’ve aimed at describing the turn to non-binary identification through an analysis of the “systems of subjection” (Foucault, 1984, p. 83) that have provided the foundation of that term’s contemporary popularization among certain folx who

have produced themselves as such. Genealogy, in this case, as Malatino (2015) proposes, names an “examination of the construction of gender norms and ideals that regulate the enactment of legible and livable types of subjectivity” (p. 405). Given its creation of the subject position “transsexual” and subsequent regulation of whom may access transsexuality, my examination argues that psy has governed through “biopower” (Foucault, 1978) – all the (changing) forms of power over life<sup>7</sup> – a term that applied here refers to the historical processes that have brought TGNC people into the realm of “knowledge-power.” Transsexuality is “known” as a mental disorder (“gender dysphoria”), whose diagnostic criteria explain “the transgender experience” as a state of “being trapped in the wrong body,” which can be treated with “sex-change” procedures whose eligibility “standards” (norms) had for decades permitted only the production of gender-normative altered bodies (a naturalized version of the sexual binary), as determined by “gatekeepers” (self-appointed experts, including psychologists) who have required of trans people the internalization and repetitive behavioural manifestation of the norms of “maleness” and of “femaleness.” From all that “non-binary” emerged.

Much trans political work has had to contend with this wrong body discourse of transsexuality and “gender dysphoria.” Not all trans people medically transition to the opposite gender, contrary to medico-juridical convention, nor do they want to. Many do not change their names or documents, do not undergo hormone therapy, and do not seek to “pass” as cis. I locate “non-binary” along a decades-long succession of Foucauldian “reverse discourses” on transgenderism, of which its main successor, as I’ve noted, is “transgender.” In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978) analyzes the strategic production of sexualities and identities and proposes the concept of a reverse discourse to explain the web of relations between power, discourse, sexuality, and resistance. Knowledge about certain categories of (sexual,

gendered) “beingness” is joined together with power in and through discourse – an identifiable collection of “utterances governed by rules of construction and evaluation which determine within some thematic area what may be said, by whom, in what context, and with what effect” (Gordon, 1994, p. xvi). Discourses are also “polyvalent,” “complex,” and “unstable,” “both an instrument and effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (Foucault, 1978, p. 101). It is possible to form a reverse discourse in and through which a category that might have been used to oppress becomes imbued with new potentials for resisting domination, thus transforming a debased position. As a term that conveys “a nonpathological sense that one [can] live in a social gender not typically associated with one’s biological sex or that a single individual should be able to combine elements of different gender styles and presentations” (Stryker & Currah, 2014b, p. 5), “transgender” is a reverse discourse. I argue that “non-binary” is, too, but one for whom the people it names have sought to create their own discourse – their own terms of identification – from which to determine their own genders.

My **second objective** was to wield my own privilege as a soon-to-be psychologist to insert non-binary discourses *into* psychology, inspired as I was by those in my life who had sought intelligibility within a culture that, like psychology, offers gender as binary and siphons all gender variance to transgenderism, effectively producing a “right body” experience that presumably applies only to the cisgendered among us. The interviews were designed to open and hold space for non-binary folx to talk back to a complex of disciplines that occasioned TGNC people, in minoritizing fashion, as “a small, distinct, relatively fixed [transsexual] minority” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 1) for whom the body is wrongly gendered in relation to one’s mind, and that continues to operate largely as if non-binary gendered subjectivities do not exist. This



assumption that “all trans people are binary trans people” (Participant 2) invisibilizes the myriad non-binary identities that have been developed in recent years (and across cultures historically) in opposition to the gender binary (see also Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Bornstein & Bergman, 2010; Nestle, Wilchins, & Howell, 2002). No wonder they have had to name themselves into existence. Indeed, I found the participants were largely concerned with asserting the validity of their gender identities as non-binary, which, I was told, again and again, are routinely dismissed as “fake” (Participant 13) or “made-up” (Michel), as “not trans enough because [they] don’t have the same amount of dysphoria about [their bodies]” (Participant 15); such dismissals can come from family, friends and strangers, as well as from LGBT people, including binary-identified trans folks, as we’ll see in **Quality 5**. Pervasive identity invalidation, legitimized by the now widespread belief that exceptions to the rule of “right body” cis gender identity development develop themselves in linear, stage-like fashion, ending in a medical transition to the “other” gender, suffused the participants’ experiences of self-interpellating as non-binary-identified.

“Becoming” is the term I’ve used to describe this naming of oneself into existence, a psychosocial process of disidentification (with one’s assigned gender) and reidentification (with one’s self-designated gender) which evokes difference, contradiction and multiplicity, as opposed to teleology and cause. This is a nonlinear, dynamic view of development (see **Epistemological Framework and Becoming Non-Binary**), wherein meaning-making figures as a fluidly interactional, co-constructed experience; the identities we are perpetually forming and un-forming throughout our lives, weaving together as they do the psychic, social, and discursive domains of experience, are always embedded within complex multiply intersecting interactions and contexts. Given the dearth of models of trans transgender identity development (the limited few that exist, as I detail below, all adhere to a “coming out” script whose end comes once one

has completed a binary medical transition), I've organized the participants' narratives of becoming non-binary-identified in such a way so as to highlight the differences between the traditional notion of "development" as the linear progression of predictable stages and this model of becoming which evinces the following qualities:

Quality 1: Becoming shifts from the etiological "why" to the psychosocial "how" (as in, how to go about assembling oneself as non-binary; labels and pronouns are key)

Quality 2: Becoming eschews teleology (there is no end goal with regard to embodiment)

Quality 3: Becoming privileges gender self-determination

Quality 4: Becoming attends to intersectionality

Quality 5: Becoming foregrounds intersubjectivity

Considering gender as a uniquely personal non-binary interpretation of a binary cultural archetype necessitates reconsideration of the mainstream concepts and developmental models that have capitulated to the pathologizing teleologies of outward-flowing growth, progress, and dichotomous gendered finality. This represents what I hope for the future of the psy disciplines and gender: a paradigm shift in their practitioners' theorizing, so that they resist the temptation to minoritize or essentialize the specificity of trans and cis subjectivities-identities. Such a shift, as Goldner (2011) noted, "constitutes gender as a process rather than a thing in itself, a gerund, rather than a noun or adjective, a permanent state of becoming, rather than a finished product" (p. 165). "Non-binary" may be defiant in its ambiguity, its meanings range, I was told, but so too do the meanings of less contested terms, such as "man" and "woman" (see also Butler, 1990b, 2004b). The insights about becoming and being gendered I've gleaned from centring non-binary voices may be illuminative also of cis gender identity development, too, so what I've outlined as its qualities are not meant as distinguishing of non-binary development per se, nor do they

represent “the” account of non-binary gender identity. This hope of mine for accounts of gender that privilege the mutability, contingency, and flexibility of identity is a shift as well toward a universalizing view that views, to rephrase Sedgwick (1990), the binary “as an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of [genders]” (p. 1). We all experience anxiety, pain, and tribulation in relation to gendered norms, even those whose identities usually elude scrutiny. When is gender ever a completed developmental achievement?

## **Background**

Full disclosure: I’m cis, or “cisgender.” I don’t identify as such, like someone might identify as trans or non-binary. Cis, for me, means that my sex assigned at birth (male) and my perceived gender (man) are conventionally aligned. People read me as male and use he/him/his pronouns when referring to me, and I’m fine with that, though I don’t necessarily identify as male either and have sporadically indicated my preference for non-gender-specific pronouns. I’m also gay and queer-identified and have lived my life feeling disconnected from most other men since as early as I can remember. I’m not the kind of gay man for whom “acting straight” has ever been much of a concern, and, in fact, my queerness and its political leanings are much informed by anti-assimilationist stances regarding the bamboozling lure of sexual and gender respectability. Some have bristled at cisgender for its reference to binary and essentialist categories of people; Ansara and Hegarty (2012) avoid the term to “challenge the assumption that ‘trans people’ and cisgender or cissexual people’ constitute distinct classes of individuals” (p. 141). I would agree with their view that the refusal to treat one’s self-designated gender as legitimate, should it differ from one’s assigned gender, constitutes a societal oppression rather than evidence that one is a fundamentally different kind of person (see also Ansara & Hegarty,

2014); this delegitimization, however, constitutes an experience of gender that some of us simply do not experience – myself, on the whole, included.

In preparation for this dissertation, I spent much time interrogating my own subject position, the privileges therein, as well as my own reasons for embarking on this path (“What is queer about ‘queer’ now?”), because I was well aware of the unfortunate history of cis academics colonizing trans lives to further their own pet theories and careers (see Boellstorff et al., 2014). My readings about decolonizing transgender – the question of who benefits from our academic knowledge-production – led to my use of participatory action-inspired methods (see **Affirmative practice and participatory action**). Hale’s (2009) “Suggested Rules for Non-Transsexuals Writing about Transsexuals, Transsexuality, Transsexualism, or Trans” encourages such interrogation. As a non-transsexual, Hale suggests being aware of one’s interests (poststructuralism), one’s political agenda(s) (queer ethics), and their relation to one’s representation of TGNC people’s discourses (“non-binary” as a “queer gender”), including the overlapping conversations they may be having within multiple communities. In the spirit of such transparency – How did I come to “non-binary” from my opening question? – I outline here my thinking about queer genders as I began developing a proposal for this dissertation, as well as the shifts in my thinking as that proposal was enacted. My thinking has been steeped in Foucauldian, queer, and transgender theories of power and resistance.

**Foucault: Power and resistance.** In an early work, Michel Foucault, “patron saint of queer studies” (Rubin, 1998, p. 263), described the guiding principles of his project to document the constitutive function of power in the production of human subjectivity thusly: “I should like to know whether the subjects ... are not determined in their situation, their function, their perceptive capacity, and their practical possibilities by conditions that dominate and even

overwhelm them” (Foucault, 1970, p. xiv). From 1969 to 1980, he wrote often of the productivity of power and the constitution of subjectivity through power relations; modern societies, he demonstrated, intervene from day one to shape, train, and normalize individuals, producing “subjects” within whom are instilled certain forms of subjectivity. Individuals come to occupy “*subject* positions” (the various roles or identities existing within a discourse or an institution) only through a process, sometimes referred to as “subjectification,” in which they are *subjected* to power, both individualizing and totalizing as it is.

Of notable import to queer studies were Foucault’s repeated demonstrations of the human sciences’ exercise of power in separating, classifying, ranking, and evaluating people according to hierarchies of normality and morality precisely so as to increase opportunities for intervention, much like the psy’s production of numerous kinds of subjects who have subsequently become objects of its disciplinary gaze. Consider his comment regarding the medical categorization of homosexuality in 1870:

Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy to a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual now was a species. (Foucault, 1978, pp. 43)

The then-new attempts to be more precise (“scientific”) in categorizing human sexual behaviour required those behaviours to be scrutinized more than ever before. Homosexuality as a “species” suggests a dramatic shift at the time in the very form of subjectivity, such that we now take actions as evidence of a deep-rooted and persistent identity. It is through this connection of action to “being,” of what I do to who I am, that subjects who have identities (e.g., “homosexual”) are produced and thus susceptible to regulation and discipline; even within the

discourse of what was (and, for some, still is) considered a perverse sexuality, some actions are granted more legitimacy than others.

Despite there being “no outside” (Foucault, 1977, p. 301) to the carceral network of knowledge-power, “complications” to its reign are possible. Foucault’s final books, articles, and lectures demonstrate a shift in his interests from external power techniques to the practices through which individuals (re)create and cultivate themselves as subjects (e.g., Foucault, 1982, 1985, 1986, 1993, 1994b, 1999). The logic of reverse discourses, resistance as tactical reversal, as I’ve discussed above (see **Objectives**), represents an early sign of this shift. As both agent and instrument, object and effect, of that carceral order, we determine, to some extent, the practices that constitute us. These practices, or “technologies of the self” (Foucault, 1994e), “permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves” (p. 225). Power is not entirely an asymmetrical, agonistic set of force relations without any non-dominating techniques or apparatuses, just as resistance is not entirely reactive and can manifest as positive action on its own terms – a modification of action by action that “promote[s] new forms of subjectivity” (Foucault, 1982, p. 785). Volumes Two and Three (Foucault, 1985, 1986) of *The History of Sexuality* develop an ethical analysis of the ways an individual “chooses” to act within a field of possible actions: How do we work on ourselves, conduct ourselves, in conjunction with a “way of living”? This is a question of “ethics” (the ideas surrounding the type of person one aspires to be), not of “morality” (a code or knowledge that an individual is obliged to follow). The work we perform to attempt to transform ourselves into the ethical subjects of our own behaviour – the “care of the self,” Foucault calls this – entails “critical activity,” reflection or engagement, not the passive following of a code; we can resist

power and test the limits of subject-formation through such activity. This interpretation of resistance as the subject's becoming-autonomous within a structured set of institutions and practices through immanent critique found its contemporary corollary in Foucault's support of a queer conception of homosexual identity and politics.

**Queer studies and ethics.** During interviews with gay journals, Foucault presented “a quasi manifesto” (Rabinow, 1994, p. xxxvi) of what he viewed as the ethical task for gay men and lesbians, which was not to uncover the “truth” of same-sex desire or the “cause” of gay identity but rather “to create a new cultural life” (Foucault, 1994c, p. 163) that could “reopen affective and relational virtualities” (Foucault, 1994a, p. 138) and facilitate “polymorphic, varied, and individually modulated relationships” (p. 139). Without a program per se, he sought to move both the descriptive and prescriptive functions of political analysis away from the “juridico-discursive” language of individual rights, including recognition-and-inclusion-focused legal equality strategies, toward these new and creative social forms (see also Foucault, 1994d). This movement necessitated a slow and arduous transformation “of the self by the self” (Foucault, 1996, p. 461) in which we would err, wander, stray from the norm, analyze and problematize the historical forms that had made us *us*. Foucault's political ethic, with its awareness of the real world of power relations, reflected the basic impulses of the grassroots politics of the late 1980s from which queer theory later took its point of departure: maintaining skeptical distance from legitimate political processes whilst challenging the governmentality<sup>8</sup> inherent to liberal societies, including the hierarchies of respectability that saturate our world.

In the academy, queer studies has since developed rich explorations of the kinds of normalization specific to modern societies and of the processes by which the categories of experts can be taken up as mobilizations by the individuals to whom they are applied. Built on

ideas from politically-oriented poststructuralist philosophy, feminist criticism, gender studies, women's studies, and lesbian and gay studies, "queer theory" (as it was first called) began with critiques of the following heteronormative logic: a male is naturally and normally a masculine person who desires women, whereas a female is naturally and normally a masculine person who desires men; all other permutations of sex, gender, and sexuality are cast as abnormal, illicit, or criminal (for major early statements, see Butler, 1990b, 1993; de Lauretis, 1991; Sedgwick, 1990, 1993; Warner, 1993).

Butler (1990b) called this the "heterosexual matrix" – "that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, gender, and desires are naturalized" (p. 208). For gender to be intelligible within this matrix "there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality" (p. 208). The entire sexual field – sexed bodies, genders, and sexual desires – is regulated by this "fiction of heterosexual coherence" (p. 185), a norm masquerading as a developmental law. Butler's goal was to uncover the assumptions that "[restrict] the meaning of gender to received notions of masculinity and femininity" (p. viii). How do we loosen the hold of these received notions? Key for her was the insistence that there is no "interior 'truth'" (p. 48) to identity, including gender identity, because it results from "a temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms" (Butler, 1993, p. 10), congealing over time to produce the sense of there being an "I" who stands before this constitution. Identity is an *effect* (a product) rather than a *cause*, such that gender is "performative," – iteratively rehearsed – effectively constituting that which it is said to name, express, or reveal. Gendered identities may be traps, hardening into rigid, binarized categories of much more fluid and heterogenous possibilities, but that can be resisted: the established and



conventional connections between anatomy and desire, between certain behaviours and ascriptions of identity, are not inevitable and therefore open to “resignification.”

The movement’s overarching commitment to a transgressive anti-identity stance has since broadened, now imploring us to view the non-normative sexual field as so dispersed as to require us to galvanize our commitment to critiquing multiple social antagonisms (race, class, ability, etcetera), in addition to sexuality. Over the years, there has been a succession of movements in which queer theory’s critical project was joined and adapted by those with different constituencies in sight, including postcolonial queer studies, queer race studies, and queer affect studies, in addition to transgender studies, among others. Some of these movements’ authors began by distancing their works from what were said to be a narrower version of queer theory, advocating, instead, for a “new” queer studies whose sights would be set on all those social antagonisms and their intersections with sexuality. The opponent which this new work has battled that most interested me as I completed my Master’s thesis and began my dissertation proposal is queer liberalism.

Drawing connections between the triumph of neoliberalism and the liberal recoding of freedom as privacy, domesticity, and cosmopolitanism, Eng et al. (2005) describe queer liberalism as a gay and lesbian politics whose governing logic is constituted “around certain privileged subjects, standards of sexual conduct, and political and intellectual engagements” (p. 4). The adoption of new forms of social governance associated with neoliberalism by almost all Western states since the 1980s is of particular relevance (see Foucault, 1991). More than an economic policy, neoliberalism corrals a number of related economic, political, technical, and social trends that have all contributed to an overall upward distribution of wealth and drastically decreased life chances for marginalized people (see Harris, 2006). Since the mid-1990s, the most

visible and well-resourced LGBT rights organizations have largely supplanted the array of political, cultural, and economic issues that galvanized gay liberation groups when they first emerged from a progressive social movement context in the 1960s to form the “gay equality” branch of multi-issue neoliberalism (see Ruskola, 2005). Having embraced neoliberal state practices, this equality’s non-redistributive, rights-oriented agenda (anti-discrimination protections, marriage rights, and military inclusion) individualizes oppression and champions assimilation into, and replication of, dominant institutions (Agathangelou, Bassichis, & Spira, 2008; Duggan, 2003). Access to these institutions (citizenship, marriage, the military) is granted to those “good,” respectable, law-abiding subjects who espouse the values of “ordinary” citizens, those whose demands for equality are couched in terms “of ‘*sameness*,’ rather than ‘equality in difference’” (Richardson, 2004, p. 392). This path of visibility and single-issue politics prioritizes a Eurocentric model of liberation that offers what is ultimately a market-based sense of freedom and acceptance (Jakobsen, 2005), whilst imposing monolithic (Western) constructions of LGBT identity and community (see Hutchinson, 2000; Manalansan, 1995).

Upon interviewing young gay men for my Master’s thesis around 2012 (see Vasilovsky, 2014; Vasilovsky & Gurevich, 2017), I found that so many of them identified as “queer” and yet spoke fondly of conformity and of assimilation as a sign of “progress.” Queer, for them, did not name an oppositional identity. The term had been depoliticized to mean “gay,” but in a way that they believed was less pigeonholing. Nobody like labels these days, I was told. Some of these participants called themselves “post-gay,” because, they said, they had been liberated from identification with “gay” and gay culture by gay equality (successfully secured, in their estimation, with the legalization of same-sex marriage nationwide in 2005). Now they are themselves. Authenticity was a central concern for them, and they interviewed as empowered,

freely choosing agents whose homosexuality barely registers in their daily lives. I had been noticing, around this time, similar sentiments among certain of my similarly aged, non-heterosexually-identified acquaintances and colleagues around Toronto. Some in the (queer) academy had begun to take note of these “post-identity discourses” (Love, 2011, p. 186), interpreting them as by-products of local translations of neoliberalism. (I agreed but also blamed institutionalized individualism.<sup>9</sup>) Halberstam (2005) warned about “transgressive exceptionalism” among many young urban (White) gay men and lesbians whose sense of uniqueness leads them to castoff identity categories, “even as those same identity categories represent the activist labors of previous generations that brought us to the brink of ‘liberation’ in the first place” (p. 19).

To state “I am queer” was once rich in ambiguity yet a clear positioning in the politics of identity, an indication of affiliation under an undifferentiated sign. Is this any longer the case? Warner’s (1993) early theoretical exposition did alert us to queer’s potential utopianism, and a year later de Laurotis (1994), who had coined the term “queer theory” in 1990, was already complaining that it had “very quickly become a conceptually vacuous creature of the publishing industry” (p. 297). Now that we can marry, adopt children, serve in the military, and access a number of other concessions made at the expense of increased surveillance and self-regulation, what of Foucault’s originating calls to critical activity?

**Transgender studies and queer genders.** At this juncture in my timeline, I returned to Butler for an answer to then discover that her paradigmatic linkage of gender with the notion of trouble was one of the “theoretical moments” (Stryker, 2004) that had incited Susan Stryker’s (1994) early entry in the then-emerging cannon of transgender studies, a field that has since linked the theorizing of the embodied experience of trans people explicitly to queer critical

theory (see also Stryker & Aizura, 2013; Stryker & Whittle, 2006; Stryker & Currah, 2014b). A version of transgender studies is outlined in Stryker's (1998) introduction to the transgender issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, which attributed the growing academic interest in "transgender phenomena" in the academy at the time, in part, to "a non- or postreferential epistemology modeled by performative linguistics acts" (p. 147), according to which our ideas are not the origin of the language we speak but rather the effect of the meanings we learn and reproduce. The atom of language, the sign, is functionally split into two parts: the "signifier" (sound-image) and the "signified" (concept), brought together like the two sides of a coin. The relation between the two is arbitrary, not motivated or subject to individual will, even in cases of onomatopoeia. The sign is a convention that must be learned; each owes its meaning to linguistic opposition (how one differs from others). Our use of them, of language, contains a performative dimension. When we "cite" previously used words, we are not referring to pre-existing meanings but rather altering, if always within limits, their meaning(s). Each separate use of a word tweaks it in this or that direction in relation to a variety of pressures, including context and audience, as well as conscious or unconscious purposes. The gaps between signifiers, signifieds, and referents render the truthfulness and reliability of language "undecidable" – an undecidability that is sometimes called the crisis of referentiality and which queer and transgender theorists have sought to exploit as one means of resistance to what the two gender terms ought to signify.

Butler's theory of gender performativity, that identity is an effect, not a cause, is predicated on just such a post-referential epistemology. For her, *nothing* is natural. Even anatomical differences can be experienced only through the categories and expectations set out by our culture's signifying order. Both "gender" and "sex" are citational repetitions, because sex

is “always already gender” (Butler, 1990b, p. 9). Cultural discourses converge in a prevailing, though never fully homogenous, understandings of what “male”/“man” and “female”/“woman” signify. Our individual actions “cite” these meanings as we feel our way into these roles, slowly establishing *how* we will come to occupy them. Power, of course, functions pervasively through these meanings, yet, as I’ve noted, opportunities for resignification remain immanent. Those whose writings have coalesced to form transgender studies stress that the signifier “gender” does *not* always refer to the signified “sex” in the way that is assumed by the heterosexual matrix. This discontinuity between gender signifiers and their signifieds is what “‘transgender phenomena’ emerge from and bear witness to” (Stryker, 1998, p. 147). We are encouraged to read transgender by Stryker and others as “a conceptualization of queerness based on the understandings of people who contest naturalized heteronormativity” (p. 149). As a category without a stable referent acquiring its meaning from the logic of its opposition to a norm, the “transgender” of transgender studies glimpses and devises new ways of relating to oneself and others without specifying how these “ways” ought to take shape nor the shape they ought to take. Transgender studies expands Butler’s work to investigate transgender phenomena as its proper “object” of study, including “the very practices of power/knowledge over gender-variant bodies that construct transgender people as deviant” (Stryker & Currah, 2014b, p. 4), whilst drawing on other contestations of normative knowledge that emerged over the course of twentieth century to aid its investigations (for historical, methodological and political overlaps, as well as tensions, between queer and transgender studies, see Love, 2014).

“Transgender” now tends to imply an assemblage of those who resist prevailing gendered expectations by presenting and living genders that were not assigned to them at birth or in ways that may not be readily intelligible within our institutionalized, compulsory gender order. Those

of you who reviewed my dissertation proposal might now notice similarities to the definition of “queer genders” I offered there: I’d written that they pressure a rift between the signifier “gender” and the signified “sex” and that their terms of self-identification – the “queer” in genderqueer was my conspicuous example – connote intent to subvert by revealing the signs (expression) of gender (identity) as vulnerable to appropriation, reiteration, and re-citation. At time, my belief was that I’d likely located an answer to my opening question: “queer” now could be found in the assembly of genders that announce themselves as deliberate deviations from regulatory norms, converting the abjection and exclusion of non-sanctioned subjectivities-identities into political agency. If the forces of oppression aim at invisibility, then, *of course*, the strategy of resistance must be to come out and make oneself visible, no? How else could the original queer “hope for a coalition of...minorities that will transcend the simple categories of identity [and] counter and dissipate the violence imposed by restrictive bodily norms” (Butler, 1990b, p. xxvii) be fulfilled? That was certainly my sense of my own gender nonconformity and “independence” (Ansara & Hegarty, 2013), so wrapped up had they been with my above-mentioned anti-assimilationist stance. Surely, the participants would also champion certain gender expressions for their queerly transgressive value?

Yet, that sense of mine was not precisely the participants’ experience, I soon found out at my first interview for this dissertation. Some identified as “queer” (see **Participants**), but mainly as an orientation or description of sexual desire, like “gay” or “pansexual,” not as a political ethic, and most drew no connection in the way that I’d theorized and proposed between non-binary self-identification and queerness. Though my proposal notes that the concerted efforts that I’d suggested are required to actualize queer genders “need not presuppose critical reason and self-reflexive consciousness,” I’ve come to view my “old” view of queer genders as

presupposing some degree of intentionality that, as I embarked on the interviews, I immediately noticed was not as enthusiastically shared as I'd imagined it would be by the participants. Many (there were notable, vocal exceptions) said little about coalition-building, about denaturalizing, proliferating and unfixing identities, or about revealing the ontological possibilities that are currently restricted by foundationalist models of identity which assume it to be simply *there*, fixed and final. I'd endorsed (and expected that most of the participants would, too) what is known as the "transgender/queer" perspective on gender variance (see Elliot, 2009), sometimes called the "Transgender Model" or the "beyond the binary" model of gendered subjectivity (Bettcher, 2013, 2014b). Unlike the wrong body model, this perspective celebrates what it takes to be the more transgressive effects of openly embracing gender variance, such as "embodying an ambiguous or at least unstable gender identity, refusing to 'pass' as a woman or a man, and confounding any ability to be read as gay or straight" (Elliot, 2009, p. 13). But, much like that model, this one did not sufficiently accommodate the participants' accounts.

One of my standard questions was to ask: "Do you understand yourself as resisting the gender binary?" To my (initial) surprise, most responses were ambivalent, typically akin to: "I don't think of myself as resisting, just living" (Suki). Some outright said "no." (Some outright said "yes.") They might "feel" "beyond," or without gender (agender), or "fluid," "on the spectrum" (Participant 21) between "man" and "woman," sliding back-and-forth, or a combination of the two, "a little of this a lot of that" (Participant 8), "sometimes more X than Y, sometimes more Y than X" (Peter), "within a matrix" (Participant 13), or any other number of the spatio-temporal metaphors I heard during the interviews – *yet*, they said, they were never beyond because our culture remains binary. They understand themselves to be non-binary, but, unfortunately, that binary culture of ours is populated with folks who have never heard of "non-

binary,” or who have but actively dismiss it, invalidate it, discriminate against it, who read others as cisgender regardless of any perceived “ambiguity” or “instability.” Being “beyond” was described to me as aspirational, not a reality, as a sense of one’s self that is rarely recognized by others, and the efforts toward that end – recognition – were not just to inculcate “transgressive” gender expression. Most spoke of their non-binariness not as that which they *express* but rather as that which they *are*. They would be content with expressions that might read to most of us as relatively gender conforming, if perhaps a bit femme or butch, and that was how these participants presented at their interviews. Their expressions coterminously “feel right to [their] own experience, like it doesn’t have to this ... ‘genderqueer’ look, not that there’s even *a* look like that” (Participant 8) *and* leave them vulnerable to misgendering: “Because I prefer a more masculine appearance and clothes people [strangers, acquaintances] think I’m a lesbian or tomboy and I don’t get “‘non-binary”” (Participant 15). Less conforming expressions do not necessarily always better reflect one’s sense of gendered self; sometimes they are sought because they might lower the odds of being read as cisgender, which was also a stated motivation for gender confirming procedures by those who had pursued, or were considering, hormone therapy and chest surgery.

What struck me as central to the participants’ talk was not (“transgressive”) visibility, *per se*; that strategy of resistance of the transgender/queer perspective was no guarantee of recognition, and certainly of little value to those who preferred less identifiably transgressive gender expressions. Many lamented the futility of recognition-via-visibility: “You can’t tell if someone’s non-binary just by looking at them” (Participant 15) was a common refrain: “I think expression and identity lining up is a rather outdated idea.” Might there be some other way to express non-binary identification, as opposed to through some “queer” rearrangement of the



signifiers of masculinity and femininity that most do not even read as non-binary? And there was: disclosure. Telling people, “I’m non-binary.” Telling people, in the majority of cases, “my pronouns are ‘they/them.’” What *was* central to the participants talk were their struggles to have their gender self-designations be recognized and treated as valid, regardless of their gender expressions. The germane concepts of “gender self-determination” (see **Quality 3**) and of “pervasive identity invalidation” and “microaggressions” (see **Quality 5**), among others, were consequently incorporated into the description of “becoming” non-binary-identified that I ultimately landed on upon completion of the interviews; they are explicated throughout and take precedence over others, such as “resistance” or “transgression.”

Though rejection of “wrong body” understandings was said to have spurred the majority of the participants’ non-binary identifications, the transgender/queer perspective – often treated in the literature as the wrong body model’s opposite – was not itself uniformly espoused and, as such, could not be the framework from which I would interpret their talk. In notes I took during that first interview (when I realized the beliefs I’d held from my sense of my own gender nonconformity and independence would not be echoed back to me) I’d written, “work with the ambivalence [regarding “resistance”].” So, I took a third approach while interviewing the remaining participants, which Bettcher (2013) has termed the “multiple-meaning position,” “an account that accommodates trans people who see themselves as situated in a binary category while avoiding the pathologization and naturalization of gender identity” (p. 234). Bettcher provides this account as an alternative due to the problems with the existing models (“wrong body” naturalizes sex and gender differences; “transgender/queer” invalidates the self-identities of binary trans people), arguing that instead of starting with the mainstream or dominant meanings and usages of “man” and “woman,” among other related gender terms, we ought to

take equally seriously their subcultural meanings and usages within trans communities. “Trans woman,” for example, does not simply refer to contestable instances of “woman,” nor are trans women contestable types of women; they are women, full stop. Bettcher’s approach enables trans people to avoid accommodating themselves to the dominant meanings and usages of gender terms, and what I’ve taken from it is that talk about trans people by cis and/or queer people does not always or often reflect how they talk about themselves. Rather than retrofit the participants’ experiences into an existing model, I’ve sought with my analysis to cleave to *their* own embodied knowings, including the ways they talked about said models, contradicting them, supplementing them, evoking their resonant truths and representational limits.

This is why, over the course of writing, defending, and carrying out my dissertation proposal, I dropped my need to answer my opening question and instead subsequently prioritized what became the guiding question of the interviews: What’s it like to live as “non-binary” in a thoroughly binary world? As opposed to substantiating the elaborate theory of queer genders I’d originally proposed, I’ve concerned myself with privileging the accounts the participants offered of themselves and their world, their visions of their pasts and futures, their embodied, relational, intersectional histories and organizations, their political struggles, and ultimately the ways they’d prefer to see themselves represented.

Stryker (2004) has since written that the hope she had sustained in the mid-1990s for queer theory to offer a radically progressive, even revolutionary, model for understanding gender and sexuality was never fully realized:

While queer studies remains the most hospitable place to undertake transgender work, all too often *queer* remains a code word for “gay” or “lesbian,” and all too often transgender phenomena are misapprehended through a lens that privileges sexual orientation and

sexual identity as the primary means of differing from heteronormativity. Most disturbingly, “transgender” increasingly functions as the site in which to contain all gender trouble, thereby helping secure both homosexuality and heterosexuality as stable and normative categories of personhood. This has damaging, isolative political corollaries. It is the same developmental logic that transformed an antiassimilationist “queer” politics into a more palatable LGBT civil rights movement, with T reduced to merely another (easily detached) genre of sexual identity rather than perceived, like race or class, as something that cuts across existing sexualities, revealing in often unexpected ways the means through which all identities achieve their specificities. (pp. 214)

I consider Stryker’s disappointment with queer as a sign that she held (holds?) out hope that its subjectless critique might endure. If it makes transgender the all-encompassing point of resistance to heteronormativity, the “symbol par excellence for flexibility” (Halberstam, 2005, p. 76-77), the ultimate “queer trope” (Prosser, 1998), then it has not. As Halberstam (1998) observed, “fluidity and flexibility are [not] always and everywhere desirable” (p. 290). To position (certain) trans people as (already) beyond the binary oppositions of gendered discourse is to obscure the operations of that binary, still very much in place. Not all trans people are problematically positioned with regard to the binary nor are they unified by a politics of visibly positioning themselves as such (Bettcher, 2014b). Trans is too complex a state of embodiment to be reduced to either a “bad literalization” or a “good deliteralization” of gender (Prosser, 1998). Furthermore, lots of non-trans-identified people struggle with gender, some of whom propound transgender/queer ethical work through non-heteronormative cis gender identities (see Overall, 2013). Rather than construing genders as either totally determined by prevailing norms or wholly escaping them, I’ve sought to demonstrate that our identifications and identities build and

occupy multiple, countless, unprecedented relations to masculinity and femininity. “Non-binary” can undo gender in one sense and move its subjects more deeply into it in another; its paradoxical density offers disruptive neither/nor and both/and alternatives, creating (a welcome, I’d say) category crisis in our oversimplified either/or taxonomy. The hostility that non-binary folx elicit for troubling this hegemonic understanding of gender as a pure opposition may be a burden unique to them, yet the disruptive (political, personal, legal, ethical) potential indexed by self-designating one’s gender is not: if we expand the theoretical space for (gender) development, taking the individual as the concatenation of multiple states of genderedness, in various stages of assembly and editing, not as an unchanging continuity of one’s core self, then we can see that gender has always been queer in a way, certainly unstable, even for those of us who have never questioned their standing as “man” or “woman.”

## **Method**

### **Epistemological Framework**

This dissertation’s transdisciplinary epistemological framework, drawing variously from queer theory and transgender studies, as outlined above, as well as psychosocial studies and relational psychoanalysis, as outlined below, functions as an eclectic methodological “tool box.” I’ve taken a cue from Foucault (1970), who suggested approaching discourse “at different levels and with different methods” (p. xv), because it “is so complex a reality” (p. xv), and made use of a range of conceptual tools to organize the accounts of non-binary becoming I gathered throughout the interviews. My framework follows other recent experimentations with methodological pluralism (see Gurevich, Vasilovsky, Brown-Bowers, & Cosma, 2015). I’ve chosen psychosocial studies and relational psychoanalytic theories of gender for their resistance to foundationalist person-centered understandings of the modern self. Polarization between

psychology and behavioural sciences (individual processes of identity formation) *and* sociology and cultural studies (social and cultural configurations of identity and their relevance to various communities and social institutions) has been an all-too-familiar feature of twentieth-century thought (see Johnson, 2015).

Since the 1800s, psychologists have tended to promote the view that (gender) identity has its origins in biological processes underpinned alternately by drives, hormones, and, most recently, genes (see Rose & Abi-Rached, 2013). Evolutionary and psychobiological perspectives on gender development were popularized around the turn of this millennium (see Geary & Bjorklund, 2000; Gottlieb, Wahlsten, & Lickliter, 1998), and there has been considerable interest in the genetic factors that are believed to control biological differentiation. The research of Dick Swaab and colleagues (e.g., Kruijver et al., 2000; Swaab & Hofman, 1995; Zhou, Hofman, Gooren, & Swaab, 1995), which has argued that such identities can be traced to the central nucleus of the bed nucleus of the *stria terminalis*, is but one example of this individualizing tendency. In contrast, historians and sociologists implicate the social field as the defining force shaping the meanings given to (gender) identity and (gendered) experience. The various proponents of scientific realism or objectivism and of social constructivism have for some time now sustained debates within most, if not all, of these disciplines regarding the nature of scientific knowledge, though both of these ostensibly adversarial positions, following what have tended to be their standard formulations, are nevertheless linked by their common subscription to representationalism, as defined in the **Introduction** above (see also Rouse, 1996). Barad (2003) advises that they differ only “on the question of referent, whether scientific knowledge represents things in the world as they really are (i.e., ‘Nature’) or ‘objects’ that are the product of social activities (i.e., ‘Culture’)” (p. 806). Especially within (mainstream) psychology,

invocations of culture – rebranded as “individual differences” – merely cloak a biological foundationalism that wavers only slightly from the overtly deterministic, naturalizing interpretations of Swaab and colleagues. This is likewise true of the mainstream’s traditional models of gender identity development (see **Reconceptualizing Gender Identity Development**), wherein gender takes the form of “clothing” (e.g., cultural artefacts, personality, behaviour) thrown upon the “coatrack” (body) of “sex” (see Nicholson, 1994). Even the ostensibly more constructionist theorizations predicate gender’s formation on limits imposed by the individual psyche/body: Money’s notion of gender role socialization, for example, sees the child’s parents (again, one mother and one father is assumed) exacting their influence upon, and in keeping with, an already cognitively fixed “core gender identity” (which is said to develop in congruence with one’s assigned sex), just as the “live in your skin” model’s behavioural interventions can facilitate the acceptance of a sex-congruent gender identity only if one’s brain is still malleable (i.e., pre-pubertal). This sort of “weak” social constructionism, or “closet essentialism” as Kitzinger (1995) has called it, whereby the physiological self remains the site of identity formation (despite the constructionist’s claim that biology is not determinative of character), is clearly incompatible with the post-referential epistemology with which both performativity theory and transgender studies have been engaged.

Unlike the coatrack view of self-identity, the body, here, is understood not as the foundational signifier of identity but rather, like identity, as produced as a seemingly fixed and permanently bounded entity through a process of materialization that is stabilized over time (see Butler, 1993). Butler’s temporal account of materialization, far from advocating linguistic monism, addresses how (and which) “real flesh and blood” bodies come to matter; it has since advanced further elaborations on the material dimensions of regulatory practices and material

limits of (gendered) agency (see Barad, 2007), such that, in my reading, the complex issue of materiality is *not* collapsed to one of discourse. Bodies are not simply formed from words, nor are identities; the constitution of gendered identities is inherently corporeal, laying the groundwork for a “theory of subjectivity [that considers] such embodied performances in the context of power not only for gender, but also for privilege more generally” (Teo, 2017, p. 285). Johnson (2007), for example, in her exploration of how transsexual men and women talk about shifts in self-perceptions and embodiment, uses the term “embodied subjectivity” to “avoid dualistic constructions of a relationship between the ‘physical body’ and a ‘sense of self’” (p. 55). Embodiment, or the “contingent accomplishment through which the histories of our identities become invested in our corporeal space” (Stryker, 2008b, p. 153-154), figures subjectivity as material-discursive, and, as such, moves us out of a “vs.” mode of thinking (Salamon & Corbett, 2011) with its need to determine a single origin (material *or* discursive) of the self.

This framework follows larger shifts in our understanding of identity formation and self-relationality, at least among certain critical psychologists, from essentialist to discursive and constructivist approaches and now to power-infused processes of embodied subjectification:

This move ... has been supported by the critical psychological concept of subjectification or, rather, embodied subjectification ... On the one hand, this work investigates different representations of subjectivity within current cultural and media production. On the other hand, it explores how these representations become embodied through relational and situated practices of the subjects. [Embodiment] designates all these techniques which situate the individual body in discourse. That is how one performs her position in discourse through her body, that is through particular movements, gestures, body

modifications, habits of flesh, ways to talk and body accessories. The central focus of embodied subjectification is how discourse is realized by each one of us through our bodies. (Papadopoulos, 2008, pp. 151)

This definition is indebted to Foucauldian theories of subjectification (see **Foucault: Power and resistance**) and Foucault's later interest in the practices through which individuals (re)create and cultivate themselves as subjects. What is balanced here is an appreciation of the ambiguities and ambivalences of power as it operates on, through, and in the subject *and* as the subject operates on it: we emerge through the operations of power but stand out over and against it too, such that becoming, as I use the term, names an active construction of being (see **Becoming Non-Binary**), whereby "the specific slice of matter that is human embodiment ... is not dialectically opposed to culture" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 35). The interviews and my analysis attempted to map this place wherein power, and the social more generally, meets the gaze of its own creation, wherein our self-identifications meet the conditions of their intelligibility, thereby collapsing those abovementioned distinctions between "objects of observation" (TGNC people, the participants) and the "agencies of observation" (the psy disciplines, the gender binary's myriad functionaries, myself). This place of meeting is figured as that space between the binaries of self/other, materiality/discursivity, subjectivity/identity and psyche/social, such that the embodied, subjective experience (of non-binariness) is inter-implicated with longstanding (e.g., man, woman, transsexual, transgender) and emerging (e.g., non-binary, genderqueer, asexual, genderfluid) meanings and practices, and others' (doctors and psychologists, friends and family members, strangers) attributions and, usually, misreadings of one's gender, all of which are reworked in the process. Becoming and being gendered, as such, invoke processes of autopoiesis or self-styling whose analyses need not be bound to intrasubjective (i.e., internal and personal



psychological processes) considerations; the societal embeddedness of subjectivity, which Teo (2017) has called “socio-subjectivity,” looms large here, and this framework establishes an accounting for their intersubjective (relational, dialogic, unfortunately rarely empathic) bridging. As Shotwell and Sangrey (2009) note:

This relationality is constantly in process; it begins with what a person chooses, but that choice itself is never separate from the multiple, intersecting networks that constitute self-formations. While labeling and being identified by others is for the most part a judgement that takes place in a particular moment, a slice of time, self-identification is essentially a work-in-progress, a narrative that in its telling constitutes a self. (pp. 71)

I name myself, but I am named by others, too, and disjunctions certainly exist between the two, as documented throughout this dissertation: who each of us becomes is sedimented out of all the (material-discursive) practices and technologies (of gender) we have a role in materializing, though our gendered realities are never just the arbitrary assembly of our choosing.

My method has sought to evoke and analyze, as such, both the embodied “first-personness” of gender and the conditioning of that consciousness by our families and friends, by strangers, by our society and culture, by our current time and place. From this non-dualistic, non-essential view of selves as dynamic non-unitary entities whose subjectivities unfold through the immanence of multi-directional relationality, I attend to the unpredictable, sometimes incoherent forms identification can take, forms whose cohered incoherence have provided a basis for certain social action initiatives, such as mobilizing non-binary social recognition. Both psychosocial studies and relational psychoanalysis provide a means to describe *how* these forms might “take” across a variety of registers between which gendered subjects live suspended: psychological, social, symbolic, political. Separating these registers results in a set of false and impossible

distinctions, perpetuating ill-founded and outmoded presuppositions regarding gender development (Corbett, 2008). The psyche-soma-cultural field comes together in the fact of gender like a Mobius strip (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008), a topological puzzle, a flat ribbon twisted once and then attached end to end so that inside becomes outside and outside inside: psyche is social and social psyche. Grosz (1994) proposed we think of the body – brain, muscles, sex organs, hormones, and more – as one of the strip’s sides, and culture and experience as its other. We move from body to psyche to culture and back without ever leaving their seamless entanglement. This visual metaphor is key to certain strands of psychosocial studies and relational psychoanalysis and has helped me to imagine genders for whom binaries have been destabilized and future nomadic paths set “in process” (see also Braidotti, 1994). We may also consider whether (gendered) subjectivity, with its manifold singularity, stretches the logic of this metaphor insofar as the kind of knowledge of oneself, of one’s own enactment and articulation of a fluxional position in the nexus of the social structure of power – in fact, knowledge of such knowledge – that non-binary-identification suggests relates only obliquely or metonymically, if at all, to existing, and imposed, binary modes of labelling and describing gender.

**Psychosocial studies.** The term “psychosocial” is widely used in health-related studies to refer to an interaction between psychological and social determinants of well-being. In this context, research is focused on levels of analysis – the “bio,” “psycho,” and “social” of “bio-psycho-social” – and their relative influence (Hollway, 2006a). In contrast, my use of psychosocial refers to a smaller field of study meant to rethink the polarization between psychology and historicism, or the “inner” and the “outer” forces thought responsible for forming persons (Johnson, 2015).<sup>10</sup> Hollway (2011) connects the beginnings of psychosocial studies to early Foucauldian-inspired critical social psychology which critiqued the dominant

psychological traditions' conventional locating of psychic reality "inside the mind." In developing alternative accounts of individual-society dualism, these critiques reflected the "turn to language" in social science and the "discursive turn" (a version of the same trend) in social psychology at the time.

Psychosocial researchers have suggested that this trend wound up inverting the balance of influence in favour of language as the leading force in the constitution of subjectivity (for an early example of this critique, see Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984). Discursive psychologists had made a convincing case for language's constitutive role but "needed to do more to examine the person as yet a further site where meaning gets organized, displaying specific and recurring devices, procedures, and modes of practice" (Wetherell, 2003, p. 114). Psychosocial writings (e.g., Burkitt, 1998, 2008; Frosh & Emerson, 2005; Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2000, 2003; Hollway, 2006b), influenced variously by phenomenological, psychoanalytic, and Bourdieusian paradigms, among others, maintained that certain poststructuralist approaches in Anglophone non-mainstream psychology had neglected the affective, embodied, and intersubjective aspects of identity-formation; the subject was cast as a "discourse-user" whose identities are self-identical, tied to subject positions, and emerge from their deployment of the existing interpretive repertoires. How might affect, embodiment, or intersubjectivity contribute to the formation of selves, the agency of subjectivity, and all its contradictions? Psychosocial engagements with subjectivity look to ascertain how individuals come to occupy a particular (gender) identity (or identities), whereas discursive and poststructuralist approaches are associated with analyses of the ideological and normative processes through such identities come to be available for occupation.

My analysis of that “how” of the articulation of self, both the enunciative practices of the individuals and their (inter)subjective (re)constructions of available and self-made identificatory terms and meanings, invokes, at various point, psychoanalytic theory. Others have shored up the unconscious as a key concept for psychosocial studies, because “unconscious ideas,” neither “‘in’ [nor] ‘outside of’ the subject” (Frosh, 2010a, p. 194), crosscut the interior-exterior divide. Psychoanalytically inspired psychosocial frameworks are not unified in their approach to these “ideas”: there has been debate about the relative merits of Freudian, Kleinian, and Lacanian approaches (see e.g., Frosh, 2008; Hollway, 2008), as well as whether the field might be better called “psycho-social.” For some, the hyphen signals distinctions between “inner” and “outer” that psychoanalysis is well-suited to differentiate, whilst others have warned that such distinctions envision both realities “as infiltrated by ‘the’ unconscious, which in turn is understood as residing in the ‘inner world’” (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008, p. 354). For the hyphen-averse, in place of “the unconscious,” “psychic reality” is preferred, because “it figures something that is never totally ‘internal.’” Psychic reality is what the subject *lives in*; this replaces an abstract opposition of the ‘outer’ as against the ‘inner’ with a conceptualization of the ‘psychic’ as that which stands for both’ (p. 354). Frosh and Baraitser (2008) have likewise used the Mobius strip metaphor to advance psychic reality as “a folding space” (p. 354), neither in nor out, which is the approach I’ve taken with my invocation of psychoanalysis.

**Relational psychoanalysis.** Take Gherovici’s (2011) reiteration of an observation first made in 1974 by Person and Ovesey: “In both subtle and brutal ways, psychoanalysis has a history of coercive heteronormatization and pathologization of non-normative sexualities and genders” (p. 3). Gherovici’s larger point is that, as a theory and practice of interpretation directed toward making sense of the inscription in language, discourse and social relationships of

otherwise unconscious drives and identifications, “psychoanalysis offers exciting – and underdeveloped – potentials for [offering] insight into the viability of a transgender sense of self and [can] help to ameliorate individual psychic suffering” (Stryker & Currah, 2017, p. 323-324). If only it were to divest itself of a hostile representation of trans subjectivity and gender variance as pathological that had been based on selective reinterpretations, often reductive distortions, of Freudian and Lacanian texts. Despite the field’s justifiably contested history, some psychoanalytic thinkers have already initiated this divestment – a re-assemblage of core concepts, supported by decades of critiques by trans writers, which Cavanagh (2017) calls in the introduction to an issue of *TSQ* dedicated to psychoanalysis “transpsychoanalytics.” Prosser (1998) and Salamon (2004) were among the first transgender studies scholars to apply Freud’s writings on the bodily ego to trans embodiments of sex. Several have turned to Lacan’s theory of sexualization and concept of the *sinthome* (a subject’s unique manner of coming to identify with its psychological symptoms and thereby gaining the capacity to enjoy its unconscious life) to investigate sexuality, subjectivity, and desire in relation to transsexuality (e.g., Carlson, 2010; Cavanagh, 2016; Dean, 2000; Elliot, 2001; Gherovici, 2017; Gozlan, 2014; Salamon, 2010).<sup>11</sup> Hansbury (2017) details a century’s worth of transphobic countertransferences in psychoanalytic writings, as well as the recent work that has been done, particularly among feminist and relational analysts, to work through their defenses so as to better “mentalize” their trans analysands: that is, to recognize them as subjects in their own right, not just as receptacles of others’ gender anxieties.

I’d chosen relational psychoanalysis over other psychoanalytic schools of thought in part because it is already epistemologically primed to trouble binaries (for the seminal papers of this tradition, see Mitchell & Aron, 1999). In addition to social constructivism and contemporary hermeneutics, feminist poststructuralism, Merton Gill’s reworking of transference, and

intersubjectivity, nonlinear dynamic systems, chaos and queer theories, among others, Mitchell and Harris (2004) identify C. S. Peirce's semiotic theory of meaning, which advanced a triadic relation between self, "objects,"<sup>12</sup> and an interaction between the two, as an inaugurating influence. It is not instinctual drives but rather dynamic configurations among the "intrapsychic" and the "interpersonal," sometimes called the "relational matrix" (see Mitchell, 1988), among other representations of thirdness, including intersubjectivity (see Stolorow, Atwood, & Ross, 1978), that have been the crux of this tradition: "Relational theorists tend...to share a view in which both reality and fantasy, both outer world and inner world, both the interpersonal and the intrapsychic, play immensely important and interactive roles in human life" (Ghent, 1992, p. xviii). Human lives are "softly assembled": development is chaotic and discontinuous, kaleidoscopic and moment-to-moment, as psychic reality "emerge[s] from relations, not from design" (Thelen & Smith, 1994, p. xix) or some teleological, hardwired, preordained program, cohering as the subjective experience of "me-ness," the illusion of being a unitary, cohesive individual that belies multiple selves whose states shift based on interpersonal, institutional, and discursive contexts (see e.g., Bromberg, 1998; Davies, 1996; Slavin, 1996).

And then, of course, there are its theories of gender, which, dispossessed of Freudian or object relational convention (see Person & Ovesey, 1983), advance a "decentered gender paradigm" (Goldner, 1991) which has sought to transcend the principal demarcation distinguishing psychoanalytic gender theories that root gender in the discovery of sexual (genital) difference (Freudian) from those that privilege the early, active primacy of the mother in shaping the child's subjectivity through processes of attachment and identification with her, implicating gender in mechanisms of separation-individuation from her (object relational). Desire and attachment or identification are rendered mutually determining rather than linear and

thus not only oppositional but also congruent, interpenetrating and oscillating, such that the focus of this decentred paradigm is not gender or its development per se, so much as its rigid and concrete deployment within the relational-body-mind-social matrix, including the psychic and intersubjective work it is being deployed to do (see Corbett, 2008). Having roundly taken up the queer call to subvert mainstream (psy) interpretations of sex, gender and desire, as well as the standard binaries and boundaries therein (e.g., Dimen, 1991; Harris, 1991), relational theories offer gender as a cultural trope available to us, one that can actually be deployed by the subject in the service of one's own aims. Of course, gender continues to act on (against) us, too, yet there remains an under-the-radar tension, always already present, between the pressures of conformity and compliance with a system of norms and the individual's "reassembly" (e.g., Harris, 2000, 2009; Kulish, 2000) of them, of those "symbolic resources" each family, culture, and historical period "offers" (see also Chodorow, 1994; Goldner, 2003; Layton, 1998) – hair, clothes, attitude, stance, gait, morphology (Golder, 2011a), even our terms of gendered identification, both extant and self-invented.

Though this view of gender as culturally mandated but individually crafted has been applied to gender nonconformity, particularly among boys (e.g., Corbett, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2009), relational writings have just begun to theorize trans subjectivities (see Goldner, 2011b), and I was unable to locate any such accounts of non-binary identification.

## **Procedure**

**Participants.** The inclusion criteria were as inclusive as possible: to participate, one was required to self-identify as "non-binary" or with a term one understood to fall under the non-binary umbrella and to speak conversational English more or less fluently – that was it. I was curious to know how non-binary self-identification might be disparately interpreted, if it is at all,

and also realized given a number of other categories of difference, so it made little sense to exclude prospective participants on the basis of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, level of education, and so on. If anything, the greater their diversity, the richer the results would be. Furthermore, my framing of non-binary self-identification through the notion of “becoming” that I’d been considering with my proposal was not age-restricted, so neither should be the inclusion criteria. From my perspective, “non-binary” is not a Millennial property, even though it does tend to be distinguished as a progressively popular mode of self-identification among teens and twentysomethings who consider themselves to be fluidly or multiply gendered, without gender, and more (Harrison et al. 2012); those from other generations have felt similarly about gender.

A total of 24 participants were recruited (see **Recruitment**) and participated in the first of two interviews. Twenty-two participated in the second round of interviewing, as two were unable to be reached via email following their first interviews for scheduling of this second interview. Demographic information was obtained at the beginning of the first interview. Given the abovementioned questionable validity of surveys of trans people that use forced-choice options to solicit demographic information, participants provided their own responses to soliciting questions, such as, “How do you describe your sexual identity?,” which are reproduced here, verbatim, for each participant, in the following format: age; gender identity; pronouns; sexual identity; cultural background; and highest level of education. This way, every participant quote – there are many, interspersed throughout – does not require what I’ve found to be visually cumbersome demographic qualifiers; whenever you read a quote, you can simply refer to this section for a sense of that participant’s demographic make-up, if you so desire. All quotes are accompanied by a participant number (e.g., “Participant 1”), corresponding to the seriated Arabic numeral below, or else a pseudonym of that participant’s choosing (also listed below). Other



information was obtained, none of which now seems pertinent to this dissertation's results (e.g., living arrangement, religious affiliation), hence my choice to exclude that information; there would also have been the risk of participant identification had some of it (e.g., occupation, discipline of study) been included.

1. Sukie: 23; genderfluid; he/him, she/her, they/them (preferred); queer; Chinese; completing Bachelor's
2. Twenty-six; neutrois, transgender; they/them; pansexual; Chinese-Canadian; completing Bachelor's
3. Nineteen; non-binary; they/them; asexual, pan-romantic; European (White); competing Bachelor's
4. Twenty-eight; non-binary, androgynous; they/them; queer; Mediterranean, White European (Jewish); some undergraduate
5. Thirty-three; non-binary; they/them; asexual; English-Irish, Romanian-Ukrainian; Bachelor's degree, completing college degree
6. Eighteen; non-binary, masculine-leaning; he/him; pansexual; Irish; Bachelor's
7. Ray Feinberg: 26; non-binary; they/them; gay; White Anglo-Saxon; Bachelor's
8. Twenty-four; agender; they/them; queer, pan-romantic, asexual; Filipino; completing graphic design degree
9. Thirty; genderqueer; they/them; pansexual; Scottish, WASP [White Anglo-Saxon Protestant]; Master's
10. Eighteen; non-binary, nonconforming; they/them; no response; Indian, South Asian; completing Bachelor's
11. Thirty; non-binary; they/them; queer; White Canadian; Master's
12. Michel: 26; genderqueer; he/him; demisexual; Chinese; Bachelor's
13. Thirty-two; genderqueer; they/them, xe/xem; pansexual; Irish; Bachelor's
14. Twenty-two; agender; they/them; pansexual; Vietnamese-American; Bachelor's
15. Eighteen; non-binary; they/them; queer, pansexual; Chinese; completing Bachelor's
16. Kira: 27; genderqueer trans woman; they/them; asexual, aromantic; White Canadian, French-Canadian; completing Doctor of Philosophy
17. Eli: 27; non-binary; they/them; queer, pansexual; Hispanic (El Salvador); post-graduate degree
18. Twenty; agender; they/them, she/her; asexual; Canadian with Scandinavian, German ancestry; some high school
19. Twenty; demiboy, trans-masculine; they/them, he/him; pansexual, ace [asexual] spectrum; Swiss, Polish, Trinidadian; completing college degree
20. R.E.: 23; non-binary; they/them; asexual; White; Bachelor's
21. Twenty-five; androgyne, post-gender; they/them; queer; Polish Jew; Bachelor's
22. Peter: 32; non-binary; they/them, he/him (preferred); hetero-flexible; Dutch (Holland), English; college degree
23. Twenty-four; non-binary; they/them; queer; Lantinx (Brazil); Bachelor's
24. Twenty; non-binary, genderfluid; they/them (preferred), she/her; queer; Peruvian; completing college degree

This sample was young (most under 30 years of age) and relatively well educated. Just under half of the participants were persons of colour (45.8%). All but two lived in Toronto or the Greater Toronto Area. These demographics mirror those of other large-scale surveys of TGNC people (e.g., Harrison et al., 2012). Most identified as non-binary with they/them pronouns, though 12 listed more than one gender identity or some qualification to non-binary, as well as more than one set of pronouns, which I discuss in my analysis (see **Quality 1**). Many identified either as on an “asexual spectrum,” including as “asexual,” “ace” or “demisexual,” terms with which an increasing number of queer youth are identifying (Beemyn, 2015), or as “pansexual,” indicating attractions to individuals of more than one gender. “Bisexual,” which names attractions to both men and women, was viewed by these participants as unnecessarily binary, given that they are attracted to not just men or women but also to non-binary-identified individuals themselves (see also Kuper et al., 2012). Some participants considered bisexuals to be attracted to different aspects of gender, whereas they are attracted to people regardless of gender.

**Recruitment.** Participants were recruited through a systematic, non-probabilistic theoretical sampling strategy, and recruitment ended as I began to hear repetitions in the participants’ talk, including certain interpretive repertoires (“no goal,” **Quality 2**; “intersectionality,” **Quality 4**) and discourses (gender self-determination, **Quality 3**). Of course, the day-to-day manifestation of such repertoires and discourses differed for each participant; however, my approach here was more exploratory, to produce a broad-strokes overview of (non-binary) becoming (rather than a series of case studies or a nomothetic model of non-binary gender identity development), so 24 seemed both a necessary and sufficient figure given my aims. The three main sources of recruitment were as follows: (1) flyer advertisements, posted

around the Ryerson University and University of Toronto campuses, and Toronto's Gay Village (Church and Wellesley) and its Queer West Village (Kensington Market, West Queen West, Ossington Avenue, Dundas West, Parkdale, and Roncesvalles), in the 519 (an LGBT community centre), the Sherbourne Health Centre (a community healthcare centre that offers trans healthcare and counselling services) and the waiting room at CAMH's adult Gender Identity Clinic; (2) online advertisements, posted to the Sexuality Hub: Integrating Feminist Theory (SHiFT) Laboratory's Facebook page, Craig's List, Kijiji, and Tumblr; and (3) snowball sampling, from among my family, friends, acquaintances, colleagues, and peers. The participants were told they could solicit participation from eligible individuals within their various social circles. My social circles skew queer and academic, so my hope was that the broader sampling strategy would reach those outside this perimeter. To that end, I contacted organizations that do work within the margins or at the intersections between identities, such as Black Lives Matter (Toronto) and allied university organizations, including the Ryerson Students' Union's (RSU) Centre for Women and Trans People and The Centre for Women and Trans People at the University of Toronto, whose past events have included "Beyond the Binary Social," a "meetup" for genderqueer and non-binary folx. Other contacted organizations included: RyePRIDE, an Equity Service Group of the RSU, and The Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies at the University of Toronto. These organizations were provided with copies of the flyers and online advertisements, both of which contained a brief description of this study, incentives to participate, inclusion criteria, and contact information.

Fifteen of the participants found out about the study from an online advertisement; seven from a flyer advertisement; and two from word of mouth. All of the online advertisements had been viewed on social media, the majority on Facebook (but not the SHiFT Lab's page), which

means none of them had been posted by me specifically, though I cannot say whether they were posted by folks within my social circles or by one of the abovementioned organizations. I also cannot say how many degrees of separation there were between myself and any of those who had posted an online advertisement that ended up recruiting one (or more) of the participants.

During the recruitment period, prospective participants contacted me via email, at which point I determined, via telephone recruitment script (Appendix A), whether they met inclusion criteria. They were then provided with a fuller description of my study (potential risks/discomforts and benefits, confidentiality, incentives to participate, and the voluntary nature of participation), and finally scheduled for the first of two interviews. Everyone was interviewed in a private room at Ryerson University's Psychology Research & Training Clinic. Before beginning the first interview, I asked participants to carefully read and sign a consent form (Appendix B). Two participants participated via Skype and had their own Skype-specific consent form to complete. On average, the first interviews lasted about between one-and-a-half to two hours, the second interviews about 20 to 45 minutes. The first interviews were conducted from December 2016 to March 2017, and the second interviews from January 2017 to April 2017. Both sets of interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed by volunteer and paid research assistants (RA), as well as one professional transcriber, using orthographic, not Jeffersonian, convention. For ease of reading, most of my interruptions and short interjections (e.g., "Yes," "Oh," "OK," "Tell me more") were eliminated from the quotes I present throughout this dissertation, though some of my longer, more substantive statements, especially those that prompted further elaboration from the participants, remain included. The transcriptions were completed around Fall 2017. In order to ensure their accuracy, each transcript next underwent a

two-step fidelity test: the RAs first checked and amended errors in transcripts that they had not transcribed by listening to the corresponding audio-recording, and then I did the same.

**Interviews.** Unlike the group discussion, focus group, or joint narrative procedures, individual semi-structured interviews were most appropriate for collecting the verbal data I sought for this dissertation: each participant's "(de)subjugated knowledges" (see Stryker, 2006) about the gender binary, "resistance," and non-binary subjectivity and identity, as well as accounts of their own journeys toward identifying as such and of the psychic realities their identities named. My approach to constructing the interview schedules and to interviewing found inspiration in the Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI; Hollway & Jefferson, 1997, 2000, 2009). The FANI method elicits narratives in a nondirective way, avoiding the traditional qualitative interview schedule's standard question-and-answer format, its "whys" and presumption of a rational, un-defended respondent, so as to probe the absences (possible avoidances) in a narrative, as much as what is said, to work with inconsistencies and contradictions, and to pursue associations between ideas, especially those of palpable affective resonance. Content is sought, too, but not content alone, nor is it simply taken at face value. The goal here is to remain "experience-near," "[reaching] beyond and below the text" (Hollway, 2009, p. 462) to locate participants' voices, "in the particularities of [their] settings, past, present and anticipated future" (p. 461), as they make meaning of their lives by attempting to verbalize the ineffable – all of which the researcher then attempts to represent "in its dynamic, multifaceted, complex and conflictual wholeness" (p. 461). No small matter, indeed.

As I began interviewing the participants, some aspects of the FANI method proved tough to employ, such that my procedure differed thusly: as these were research-oriented interviews, not analytic sessions (wherein the analysand is seen multiple times per week, sometimes for

years), I found myself unable to formulate individually-specific analytically-orientated interpretations of each participant; it follows that no such interpretations were, or could have been, communicated to the participants during their interviews. Certainly, the interviews were designed and implemented so as to encourage free association, but a certain understandable self-consciousness, given the circumstances of our (first) meeting, prevented participants from always saying whatever came to mind without conscious editing; in such circumstances, a psychoanalyst would assist through interpretation to create greater freedom of association – again, as researcher, not analyst, I could not. I did, however, attempt to be as non-directive as possible, as I describe below, maintaining a posture of curiosity, modelling acceptance of complexity, contradiction and affective expression, and opening space for them to make their own interpretations about themselves. My attunement to affect, my listening to absences in narratives, directed me toward *topics* of import to the participants, which I’ve chosen to highlight throughout my analysis (see **Analysis**), as I found myself hesitant (and ultimately unwilling), in this role of researcher, to attribute anxiety to the participants, as Hollway does to her “defended” interviewees, nor to draw conclusions *in vivo* regarding participants’ mental lives from such affective expressions and absences (cf. Frosh & Baraitser, 2008). (Hollway has described having her interviews and interpretations aided by several “observers,” trained in psychoanalytically-informed observation, who observe interviewees monthly for as long as one year whilst participating in a weekly observation seminar to process their experiences [see Hollway, 2011]. Such a research team, with its joint meetings and workshops, would have been impossible to establish with the institutional supports and funding available for this dissertation.) My use of relational psychoanalysis, therefore, throughout my analysis, as exemplified by **Quality 1** and **Quality 5**, sketches an outline of the flows of desire and identification without the nuance a case

study-style approach wherein one might expect a more thoroughgoing interpretation of an individual's intrasubjective experience of gender. Despite these modifications (and limitations) to the FANI method, I've done my best to ensure "the embodied experience of the speaking subject" (Stryker, 2006, p. 12) – the participants' psychic realities, the kind of knowledge they have of it and of their relationships to the subjectifying discourses and institutions that act upon and through them – subtends any other more "objective" form of knowing. This why I view Hollway's approach as aligned with Bettcher's (2013) multiple-meaning position: though I cannot but use my own subjectivity as an instrument of knowing, I'd taken pains to resist imposing an expert perspective (i.e., wrong body, transgender/queer) whilst interviewing, and, later, analyzing.

My interview schedules were designed with these methods in mind. Both Interview Schedules 1 and 2 contained predetermined open-ended questions, some of which were theoretically-informed, meant to function as open-ended conversational prompts, opening space to delve deeply into personal and social matters. As facilitator, catalyst, and, at times, co-creator, I began with "what" questions (the interview schedules' non-italicized, un-bracketed questions) and followed-up with questions that incorporated the participants' ordering and phrasing. A version of the italicized, bracketed prompts was read whenever a participant faltered, usually to those for whom eliciting narratives was no facile accomplishment (e.g., more laconic participants, participants who might have believed certain of their stories lacked interest, relevance, and/or value). The interviews, in general, flowed: though I sought to address all outlined thematic sections, I didn't always do so in order and chose instead to trail each participant down this or that path, occasionally straying to explore the absences in narrative through which themes seemed secreted and the topics about which wellsprings of emotion

flowed (tears were not uncommon). To convey the “alive” quality of the interviews long after they had been conducted, I left space in both schedules for experience-near “field notes,” which included the sundry dynamics of each interview, my reactions and reveries, the approximate timeframe (as noted on the digital recorder) of moments I believed were moments of intersubjective recognition, of moments or conversational chunks during which participants seemed at ease, or uneasy, anything I believed would place myself imaginatively back into an interview once I was set to analyze its transcript. To be clear, these notes were not meant to capture any countertransference reactions on my part that might inform my analysis (some psychoanalytically-oriented psychosocial researchers assert to have grounded their interpretive claims through an analysis of the “countertransference”). I agree with Frosh and Baraitser (2008) that it may be problematic to expect this kind of reaction – that is, the unconscious reaction of the analyst to the patient derived from earlier situations in the life of the analyst, displaced onto the patient – to appear under research conditions just as it would *in the context of the clinical situation*. These notes, as such, were meant as reflexive reflections: the assessment of my role in constructing the versions of (the participants’) experience that emerged throughout the interviews, narratives that did not necessarily harbour “truths” about the participants that could be said to be separable from the practices that gave rise to them.

During the consent process, I spoke off the record about myself: my research as a critical psychologist-in-training, as well as my hopes for this dissertation and its participatory action intent. Some had questions about my own gender identities, and I provided answers not unlike my disclosure at the beginning of the **Background** section above. My transparency helped to further our rapport: with uncertainties assuaged, with respect for their views conveyed, the participants seemed more willing than they would have been otherwise to talk about themselves,



to address matters that might arouse anxiety, shame, and possibly other negative emotions. Then, the first interview (Appendix C) began: the 11 demographic questions were followed by two general, interconnected areas of interest: “Becoming Non-Binary” and “The Gender Binary and Resistance.” At the end of this interview, participants were scheduled for their second interview, anytime at least one month after the date of their first interview, a gap that would permit reflection as well as time for the creation of an “artefact,” which was to be the centrepiece of this dissertation’s participatory action component.<sup>13</sup> I introduced the artefact as a way “to show to an audience what ‘non-binary’ is to you,” and then briefly described my intentions (see **Affirmative practice and participatory action**). I explained that it could be a found object, or something they created, so long as it was non-verbal; with their consent, it would be photographed by me at their second interview so that the photographs could be displayed at an art show at a later date. Everyone but the two participants who could not be reached for their second interview chose to participate in this arts-based component.

The purpose of the second interview (Appendix D) was threefold: (1) to provide an opportunity for participants to add anything they may have missed during their first interview or to address any matter that, upon further reflection, struck them as necessary to address; (2) to assess what has changed since the first interview; and (3) to retrieve, obtain descriptions of, and photograph the participants’ artefacts. After a brief check-in, these interviews began with me asking, “So, has anything changed (about gender) since the last time we spoke?” (Their answers are presented in the **Conclusions** section.) In such (research) contexts, the “narratives we tell about ourselves feed forward to canalize future recollection” (Diamond, 2006, p. 480). The story I told you then might shape the story I tell you later or any future story I might tell myself. If there had been any revision to a story, a shift in self-understanding, to what extent, if any, did the

first interview serve as a catalyst? Aside from Lisa Diamond's studies of sexual fluidity among women, I'm unaware of any precedents for this sort of examination of the qualitative research process and narrative reconstruction, particularly the impact, for participants, of participating. Next, participants presented their artefacts, which I photographed, and provided verbal or brief (500 words or less) written descriptions, the latter of which would be displayed with the accompanying photograph at any future art show. As is the case with most exhibited art, the descriptions were to provide context, securing (however tangentially) the images to the meanings they were meant to convey. Finally, we discussed possibilities for data dissemination.

As compensation for the first interview, the participants' names were entered in a draw for one cash prize of \$50.00; as a graduated incentive, their names were entered in a second draw for one of two cash prizes of \$100.00, should they participate in a second interview (regardless of whether they brought an artefact).

## **Analysis**

The transcripts were analyzed via modified Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) procedure, in keeping with other psychosocial-oriented analyses that have integrated psychoanalytic theory as an additional resource for interpreting textual material (e.g., Frosh, 2010b; Frosh & Emerson, 2005; Gough, 2004; Hollway & Jefferson, 1997, 2000, 2005; O'Neill, 2013; Parker, 1997). I say "modified," because I've drawn on relational theories of gender and subject formation in order to explicate participant quotes and flesh out my theory of becoming non-binary, whereas a strict discourse analysis would have stuck strictly to an analysis of discourse, the participants' interpretive repertoires, their taken-up subject positions, and so on. The genealogical sketch and outline of becoming are based on the interviews alone, and field notes, not the artefacts; however, the participants' descriptions of the artefacts, and the portions

of their interviews wherein they describe their selection process and what the artefacts meant to them were folded into the results presented below. Unlike fine-grained forms of discourse analysis, particularly those influenced by ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, FDA connects talk with broader patterns of collective sense-making and understanding, as the meanings and functions of discourse, its links with social relations and the exercise of power, are of primary concern (see Parker, 2013). Relational analytic theory was incorporated as one heuristic, among others, for addressing speakers' (participants') "choices" regarding which (gendered) subject positions they would come to inhabit, or not, as well as how those inhabitations might or might not persist over time and across space (see Frosh et al., 2000, 2003). I went about this modified analysis with the view that we are not only positioned in discourse as a result of social forces, such as the ideological pressure "take up" the masculine or feminine positions to which we were assigned at birth, but also cathected to them, their provisional, sometimes conflicting "uptake" betraying "a complex and chaotic open nonlinear system ... wherein identifications stimulate feedback loops, forming patterns" (Corbett, 2008, p. 846) through which our "taken up" positions solidify (cf. Hollway, 1989, 2006a, 2006b; Hollway & Jefferson, 1997, 2000, 2005). Certainly, they can be taken down, too. I've interpreted these motivational processes as relational (not simply internal), as suffusing the language of everyday life, spoken by embodied subjects whose psyche-soma-cultural fields are flush with constraints and opportunities; (inter)subjective dynamics need not be deterministically linked to structures ostensibly laid down in childhood.

The analysis was abductive: that is, inductive in the sense that I'd aimed to produce an alternative account to "development," drawing initially from relational theories and transgender studies, but also deductive as I cleaved to the participants' meanings, understandings, histories,

affects, et cetera, in order to flesh out my critique and account of becoming and to direct me toward additional theoretical works that helped to further explicate their talk. It was an iterative process: I started while reviewing the transcripts for the two-step fidelity test, inspecting them for the subjugated knowledges, discourses, reverse or otherwise, and non-hegemonic narratives embedded within, all of which I took stock of as I then read, once again, every transcript, listened to their audio-recordings, and reviewed my field notes. Hearing each participant's voice *de novo*, the layers of meaning conveyed in tone, pace, emphasis, flow, rhythm, et cetera, brought me back as best I knew how to what I felt then about what had been generated within the interviews, including what I'd believed would require accounting for later – all that ought to be included throughout the present document. Next, I met with the senior RAs who had completed to bulk of the transcribing on a bi-weekly to monthly basis for nearly one year to further refine my analysis. Early on, we formed a coding scheme with which we began to pull and organize participant quotes and conversational chunks of varying length via NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software package designed for such purposes. Memos were created to assist with organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing various excerpts within our coding categories, as was a concept map to visually represent certain quotes and their relationship to the qualities of becoming as they began to emerge, in part, from the data, sometimes confirming my preexisting beliefs about becoming (e.g., that there would be no end goal in mind with regard to embodiment; **Quality 2**), but also nudging our analysis toward expected terrain (e.g., that recognition and validation would take precedence over “resistance” or “transgression.”). Throughout, I also consulted in-person on several occasions with a relational psychoanalyst to process my own experiences of the interviews (drawn from memory, as well as my notes). This further reflection on my positionality, including the “investments” therein, contained my

emotional responses to a number of the participants' stories so that what had been educed could be purposely and productively connected to the research materials. My insights from these sessions have been folded into my analysis (most notably, this includes my use of Jessica Benjamin's writings on intersubjectivity throughout **Quality 5**).

Given my stated objective of inserting non-binary discourses *into* psychology, I'd approached my analysis as a "re-narration" of the medico-scientific master plan for how genders ought to develop. Unlike the "right body" model of cis development, which pathologizes TGNC people, or the "wrong body" model of trans development, which invisibilizes non-binary folx, I've sought to organize participants' accounts in such a way as to provide a non-binarizing alternative (becoming). The participants were well aware of my objectives. We had discussed them over the phone, during the telephone recruitment phase, as well as in-person, during the preamble to the first interviews. For several prospective participants, these objectives, in part, impelled their participation, as they had been engaged, already, in some version of re-narration throughout their day-to-day lives. This "way of working with human participants that instigates a constant re-working of the knowledge bases that we come with" (Baraitser, 2008, p. 426) meant that I've contested psy's (gender) orthodoxy by embracing both "insider" and "outsider" views and readings of the research materials (see Johnson, 2015). Included as the qualities of this non-binary alternative are the consciously, often vociferously articulated interpretive repertoires ("no goal," **Quality 2**; "intersectionality," **Quality 4**) and discourses (gender self-determination, **Quality 3**), in addition to the meaning I've made of certain absences in the participants' narratives, such as the lack of speculation as to the "origins" of one's non-binariness (**Quality 1**), and other notable matters, some of emotional import to them (pervasive identity invalidation, **Quality 5**), and some of which they seemed less aware of but nonetheless animated much of our

conversations, such as their use of the term “dissonance,” not “dysphoria,” when describing the distress associated with others perceiving them to be genders other than the ones they experience themselves as.

**Affirmative practice and participatory action.** Trans writers have long offered inspiring challenges to proscriptive medico-scientific constructions of trans experience. Only belatedly did a select few psychologists begin to respond to the disparity between, on the one hand, their discipline’s theories regarding such a bedrock concept as gender and, on the other, TGNC people’s own understandings of themselves. With one of the earliest such responses, Parlee (1996) detailed the mainstream’s misrepresentations of TGNC people and encouraged, instead, listening to the perspectives and moral claims of transgender activists who “have found it necessary to move beyond ... scientific discourses ... in order to take into account the empirical variety of actual persons’ embodied subjectivities” (p. 633). Despite the bleak history of pathologization introduced above (as well as the one of binary-maintenance I sketch below), or, perhaps, because of it, more and more practitioners seem to be heeding Parlee’s call to trans-affirmative practice. The American Psychological Association’s (2015) recent *Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People* defines such practice as “the provision of care that is respectful, aware, and supportive of the identities and life experiences of TGNC people” (p. 832). That entails reckoning with psychology’s past: the legacy of its own narratives of transgenderism has been one of colonization and disempowerment, wherein the psychologist operates as (self-appointed) “expert,” their theories and classifications ostensibly more objective, more accurate, certainly more authoritative, than any trans lived experience or gender self-designation could ever be.

To be affirmative is to recognize this positioning of TGNC people for the ethical and political decision it is, and then to do something about it. Representational change is crucial, such as the shift in research to the resilience of TGNC people (e.g., Breslow et al., 2015; Pflum, Testa, Balsam, Goldblum, & Bongar, 2015; Matsuno & Israel, 2018; Singh, 2013; Singh, Hays, & Watson, 2011; Singh & McKleroy, 2011), in addition to the negative effects of stigma, prejudice, discrimination and violence on health and well-being (see Hendricks & Testa, 2012), but so is the politics of representation. Who gets to do the representing? And: Ought we not shift our approach from “conducting research on” to “conducting research with” (see dickey et al., 2016)? Participatory action research (PAR) is widely viewed among affirmative practitioners as well suited to facilitating such a shift toward rooting activist scholarship to community-based social justice efforts. With its aim to create positive, transformative, and sustainable change together with, for, and in typically vulnerable communities, PAR (see Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998; Lewin, 1946) provides a flexible research framework “to equitably involve community members, researchers, and other stakeholders in the research process” (Collins et al., 2018, p. 885) so that the community benefits from the research endeavour. Such praxis has been explored with trans participants (e.g., Bradford, Xavier, Hendricks, Rives, & Honnold, 2007; Kenagy, 2005), resulting in the accessible dissemination to relevant stakeholders of vital information that might have been neglected otherwise.

I sought to follow existing recommendations for PAR studies with TGNC people and communities (see Singh et al., 2013), much of which is already addressed above (e.g., clearly articulating a theory on gender and determining how this theory informs methodological choices, reflecting on researcher positionality related to transgender concerns, conducting a current transgender literature review informed by both peer-reviewed sources and other non-academic

sources of information). However, given my current level of training and the institutional supports and funding afforded to me, as well as Research and Ethics Board restrictions, not all of what is recommended could be implemented – namely, participant collaboration throughout the *entire* research process, from developing research questions and selecting methods to conducting interviews and interpreting results – which is why I’m calling my methods PAR-inspired. With that said, advocacy and social change were always aspirations. My intention had been to produce results that could counteract the very real, material harm clinical psychology has wrought, so I invited collaboration where I could: with the dissemination of this study’s results. Following the second interviews, consent was obtained from participants who wished to participate in such knowledge transfer and exchange (KTE) activities following my defense of this dissertation, including, but not limited to, reviewing study results (e.g., to provide feedback, rescind quotes prior to any publication), co-presenting at community conferences, co-writing non-academic documents (e.g., blog post, fact sheet, report), suggesting modes of dissemination for said documents, and using their real names within results (i.e., to accompany quotes, as opposed to a participant number or pseudonym), during any presentation, and/or on any non-academic document (Appendix E). Three of the participants have already confirmed their intention to collaborate on a fact sheet; following my defense, I’ll email the remaining participants who consented to such contact regarding possible dissemination opportunities. Suggested sites for dissemination, at this preliminary stage, include the clinics and doctors’ offices known to administer hormone therapy, the various sites at which surgery readiness assessments are conducted, including CAMH, and LGBT community centres, such as the 519, which some claimed still seem to operate under the presumption of binary trans experience.



The central KTE activity, of course, was the creation of the artefact. Again, there are precedents for arts-based methods within psychology (see Chamberlain, McGuigan, Anstiss, & Marshall, 2018), many of which, such as photovoice, for example, are grounded in PAR-style ethics (see Wang & Burris, 1997). These methods involve “the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies” (McNiff, 2008, p. 29), but the participant, not the researcher, is the artist, using the artistic process to examine their own experiences, sometimes in pursuit of social justice and emancipatory outcomes (see Finley, 2018). In addition to the text-based results I present below, having the participants create artefacts offered a second way to experiment with representing experiences that are difficult-to-represent (which I believe is true for all gendered subjectivities), yet with this predominantly non-verbal (reflexive) process they would be “speaking” about themselves, for themselves, with perhaps less mediation from myself. These artefacts are not to be viewed as somehow closer or truer to non-binary experience for being (perhaps) less mediated than the verbal materials which dominate this dissertation. The experiential knowledges represented through the artefacts are likewise local, situated and thus partial, one of many possibilities that happened to come into view as the participants selected (with some sense they would be trafficking in academic knowledge-production) their objects for our (and others’) viewing. I’m not searching here for a “full” and total standpoint; like Haraway (1998), I believe we are not immediately present to ourselves (nor are we to others, myself and mainstream researchers of transgenderism included). This arts-based approach largely differs in leaving the interpretation of research findings to the reader or consumer of the research/art, as

opposed to the researcher; it may also prove more accessible to a non-academic (wider) audience (see below).

The participants' artefacts and accompanying descriptions are presented here unabridged and without explication (Appendix F), which is how they will be displayed at any future art show. The reader is invited to view their artefacts and read their accompanying descriptions. Personally, I notice several key overlaps with all five of the qualities of becoming presented throughout this dissertation; in many cases, I've glimpsed reflexive flows among both the confessional or autobiographical embrace of subjectivity, contingency and connection *and* the insistence upon historicized, strategic and politicized standpoints (see Adams & Holman Jones, 2011). I view my role here, principally, as that of "curator" of the participants' artefacts, not their co-creator. This entire document, excluding Appendix F, of course, may be viewed by its readers as a curatorial statement. I'll wield my own privilege, again, to submit applications for exhibition of these artefacts, drawing upon my own resources and connections as a former art student and current graduate student who has some experience preparing the necessary application materials. My applications for exhibition will present my role as such; I have done so with an already-submitted application (see below), wherein a much-condensed version of this dissertation's political aims functioned as the curatorial statement, contextualizing images that are intended to communicate, in what I hope is a more accessible, less academic or arcane manner, the participants' experiential knowledges to *as wide an audience as possible*. The art show is just one avenue for such an accessible, far(ther)-reaching presentation of the photographs of the artefacts; one benefit of this method is that these images can be presented virtually, too, wherever, and on whichever platforms, the consenting participants deem most appropriate, relevant, and potentially empowering. Other on-going photography projects featuring TGNC

people have been picked-up by numerous online news media outlets and shared through social media; we could take advantage of the potential virality inherent in these platforms.

Another benefit is that we may further cultivate empathy, challenging and provoking audiences to engage (in person or online) with a complex and contentious “social issue” (see **Quality 5**); perhaps viewers of these images might be shaped and changed in some way, as “art can shape and change subjectivities or, at least, has the potential to lead to new experiences” (Teo, 2017, p. 287). Freeman (2012), for example, has argued that aesthetic experiences (of art and nature, for example) “move us, take us out of ourselves” (p. 198); such movement, from an ego- and an ex-centric perspective, engages “that quality of responsively respectful consciousness that can allow the otherness of the Other, whatever it may be, to emerge” (p. 198). For a group of folx whose self-understandings are routinely dismissed following hierarchical and positivist orderings of what can count as knowledge, I’m optimistic about the photographs’ ability to instigate among its viewers an attending to another’s point of view, such that that Other might come into view as a subject in their own right, independent of the viewer’s view (of gender, of TGNC people). Might those views that have contributed to the dismissal of non-binary folx be revised as attention to the Other’s self-understandings is instigated? Might the distance between (binary) “I” – that is, “the sovereign subject, the Cartesian *cogito*, seeking to represent the world qua object, thing, *It*” (Freeman, 2000, p. 76) – and (non-binary) “you” (object, thing, *It*) be narrowed, just as I’ve sought to blur the subject-object split with my style of presenting this dissertation’s results? And, might these revisions evince an ethical dimension, producing some responsibility *for* the Other?

In treating these artefacts not only as a “showing” to an audience of what “non-binary means for the participants, but also as a bearing of witness to the possibilities wrought from that

showing, I've drawn from Johnson and Martínez Guzmán's (2012) use of photo-production within a PAR framework to "[transform] dominant forms of representation [of LGBT lives] that have emerged from a history of psychological and medical pathology" (p. 405). Johnson (2015) has elsewhere written that they chose this method, in part, for the transformative possibilities its resultant photographic exhibition could offer through the affective realm, as "aesthetic projects allow for connection through the act of witnessing (Radley, 2009) via the increased capacity of images to affect people, or participatory wit(h)nessing (Ettinger, 2006)" (p. 168). Hemmings (2012) coined the term "affective solidarity" to name the modes of engagement between participant and public such "witnessing" would facilitate, a move from individual experience to collective capacity that "draws on a [broad] range of affects – rage, frustration and the desire for connection [without rooting] these in identity or other group characteristics" (p. 148). This notion that "the core of transformation" (p. 157) are those moments of affective resonance from which "shifts" arise in our judgement of what is acceptable, of what about our conditions of possibility and value ought to be changed, is sometimes called "affective activism" (see Allison, 2009). Political transformation of this sort, as Johnson notes, requires common identification among artist and audience (see also Brown & Stenner, 2001; Stephenson, 2003, 2004; Stephenson & Kippax, 2006), because "it opens us up to the possibility of finding new forms of relation across identity differences, while reimagining how we might be represented" (Johnson, 2015, p. 171). Might that be the case for these artefacts? At the art show, I'll leave a comments box to solicit such feedback from the public. Given that we are all subject to micro- and macro-processes of gender norming (Shotwell & Sangrey, 2009), might cis and binary trans viewers see aspects of themselves and their experiences in these images? Do you?

I submitted, last summer, an application for a group exhibition at the Ryerson Image Centre, which their programming committee ultimately did not select for the Student Gallery's now-current season. My plan is to re-apply to Ryerson Artspace, a student and faculty run gallery space, once this dissertation is defended. Should that application also be unsuccessful, I'll contact those who consented to participating in dissemination activities in order to solicit ideas about alternative exhibition spaces. Glad Day Bookshop, the world's oldest surviving LGBTQ bookstore, which often hosts comparable events, is one such viable possibility. Through avenues of dissemination separate from the usual academic ones, the ethical tasks introduced here extend forward in time past the defense of this dissertation and other "official" markers of its completion (e.g., publication in peer-reviewed journal).

### **The Psy Disciplines and "Trans": A (Brief) Genealogy**

The psy disciplines' pathologization of gender diversity is already well documented in the social work, counselling and critical psychology literatures (see e.g., Tosh, 2015; Lev, 2005; Winters, 2008). Most have focused on depathologization and diagnostic reform: "gender dysphoria" (APA, 2013), née "gender identity disorder" (APA, 1994, 2000), remains listed as a mental disorder in current (fifth) edition of the *DSM*. That label, coined by Fisk (1973) three decades prior to its unveiling in the *DSM-5*, had not previously referred to a mental disorder, and for those TGNC people who still use "gender dysphoria" to describe their experiences of gender and embodiment, typically prior to undergoing a physical transition, it names "*a persistent, chronic distress with one's physical sex characteristics or their associated social roles*" (Winters, 2005, p. 82). The conflation of this distress with disorder is rightly viewed by reform advocates as not only pathologizing but also stigmatizing. Missing here is the distress one might experience as a result of conforming to binary gender norms, an absence that exposes the

assumption of the diagnosis' authors that said norms are normal and unproblematic.

Unfortunately, treatment, affordable access to hormones and surgery, is predicated on opening oneself up to such stigmatization. In Ontario, for example, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care requires a "gender dysphoria" diagnosis to approve insurance coverage of most gender confirming procedures. Also conflated are those distressed by gender dysphoria with those seeking gender confirmation, such that the diagnostic criteria "does not allow for the existence of healthy, functional transsexuals and transgender people who are able to seek medical and surgical treatments for their own actualization without being labelled as mentally ill" (Lev, 2004, p. 42). Ought not the diagnosis be removed or else reformed?<sup>14</sup> (This analysis is tied to those contexts in which the *DSM* is used, as the eleventh revision of the *International Classification of Diseases [ICD]*, which will come into effect on January 1, 2022, moves the diagnosis of "gender incongruence" out of mental disorders and into sexual health conditions. The World Health Organization [2018], which publishes the *ICD*, explained their rationale for the move thusly: "while evidence is now clear that it is not a mental disorder, and indeed classifying it in this can cause enormous stigma for people who are transgender, there remain significant health care needs that can best be met if the condition is coded under the *ICD*." Approximately 27 countries use *ICD* for reimbursement and resource allocation; with regard to transition-related healthcare, Canada is not one of them. For an overview of key issues, see Eisfeld [2014].)

As opposed to depathologization and diagnostic reform, my focus here is the psy disciplines' maintenance of the gender binary through their construction, interpretation, and administration of transgenderism, a critique one does not encounter as routinely in the abovementioned literature (cf. Latham, 2017b, 2019; Roen, 2001; Sullivan, 2008). Such binary-

maintenance is plainly evident in the work of those mainstream researcher-clinicians for whom certain (persistently) gender nonconforming children are mentally disordered; indeed, the preventative therapies (some would say “gender-reparative,” a nod to “reparative” or “conversion” therapies, whose interventions are meant to change one’s sexual orientation from homosexual or bisexual to heterosexual) are predicated on socializing boys into traditional, masculine boyhoods and girls into traditional, feminine girlhoods. Those who have grown up to be TGNC adults may likewise find themselves enmeshed within psy’s “gatekeeping” apparatus (see Speer & Parsons, 2006), particularly if they were to pursue a medical transition, as psychiatrists and other allied professions control access to a range of treatment options, including gender confirming procedures. These mental health professionals have not only constructed diagnoses, for adults and for children, whose symptoms track a templated life course that has been treated as “the trans experience,” but they have also appointed themselves as most expert at assessing who is “truly” trans – that is, patients who fit the template and have come to “urgently request” surgery to become the “other” gender, as such requests are interpreted as a symptom of their “condition” (Benjamin, 1966). Anyone else is just a cross-dresser (or, “transvestic fetishist,” as this other diagnosis is termed) or otherwise afflicted by any number of the differential diagnoses listed in the *DSM-5* (e.g., “body dysmorphic disorder,” “schizophrenia” and other psychotic disorders).

Latham (2019) has shown that, though this apparatus has been reformed over the years since it first took shape in the mid-twentieth century, it continues largely to administer the lives of TGNC people based on “wrong body” assumptions about transsexuality: that it is a disjuncture between mind and body; hating the wrong genitals (see also Davy, 2015); painful and debilitating; and treatable with surgical and hormonal body modifications. Years of reiterating

this specific trans ontology has turned these constitutive assumptions axiomatic, such that transsexuality is routinely interpreted the same everywhere, as an independent, definite “disorder,” capable of being “discovered”; the trajectory of available treatments, which may not be suitable or appropriate for some, effectively forecloses other iterations of what trans could be.

In a seminal essay, “Mutilating Gender,” legal activist and theorist Dean Spade (2006) examines the relationship between gender normativity and technologies of bodily alteration (previously sex-change surgery or, later, sex reassignment surgery; now “gender confirmation” is preferred). Though he is critical of the medical discourse, practices, and institutions that undermine trans people’s access to gender confirming procedures, Spade avoids the usual acrimony between service-seekers and service-providers that has portrayed the former, for example, as: “sexual deviants” who have succumbed to “an alluring world of artificial vaginas and penises rather than ... self-understanding and sexual politics” (Billings & Urban, 1982, p. 276); as “dupes” of a medical discourse that is alleged to have created them, reproducing its gender stereotypes (Hausman, 1995); or as liars, conning well-meaning professionals into saying “yes” to their requests for surgery (see e.g., Fisk, 1973; Kubie & Mackie, 1968; Roth, 1973; Stoller, 1973). Rather, he highlights the regimes of normalization that inform both sides of what Stryker and Whittle (2006) refer to as power-imbalanced, asymmetrical negotiations over bodily modifications. Making explicit use of Foucault’s notion of power as productive and exercised rather than repressive and possessed, as well as his view of governance and discipline as a mesh of power relations that increasingly insinuate themselves, in capillary fashion, into ever-more intimate aspects of life, Spade (2006) elucidates “how the creation of the subject position ‘transsexual’ by the medical establishment restricts individuals seeking body alteration and promotes the creation of norm-abiding gendered subjects” (p. 316). Certain social forces say



“no” expressly to prop up a naturalized version of the binary but saying “yes” can also sustain standard forms of gender and embodiment.

Below, I expand and update Spade’s arguments to reflect the changes to the diagnosis of “gender dysphoria” in the *DSM-5* (see also Lev, 2013), whilst demonstrating, as Latham (2019) notes, that “the ‘early glimmers’ of what transsexuality is ... *continue to constitute*” (p. 16) today’s psy-based knowledges and to inform the disciplines’ contemporary practices. Spade’s essay drew on his own experience of the disciplinary power exercised by gatekeepers (he had sought chest surgery), whereas I’ve drawn on my own knowledge – both as a student-researcher of gender and psychology and as a former custodian of gender confirmation – of the history of my discipline’s gatekeeping present. From 2013 to 2014, I completed a Clinical Psychology practicum at CAMH’s adult Gender Identity Clinic in Toronto, which was the sole assessment site for insurance-funded gender confirming surgeries in the province of Ontario from 2008 until 2016; thereafter, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care introduced regulation that expanded assessment access for such surgeries in Ontario. Here, I exercised that disciplinary power myself, conducting assessments to determine who was eligible and ready, who was mentally disordered in the required manner, while I witnessed the internal machinations (read: case conferences) of an apparatus that had permitted the production of gender-normative altered bodies, as those who expressed resistance to a dichotomized view of gender were screened out or, at times, treated with suspicion.

### **The Psy Disciplines’ Trans**

What is called in the historical literature on transsexualism “cross-gender identification,” that sense of being other than the “sex” to which one was born, and the desire to live as a different gender, has been documented in earlier centuries and across cultures, varying widely in

its expression, acceptance, and representation (see Bullough, 1975; Feinberg, 1996; Towle & Morgan, 2001). Numerous terms have been applied to those who defied gender norms, though the specifics of each individual case, such as how their subjects would have chosen to identify or describe themselves, are near but impossible to know (Tosh, 2015). Around the sixteenth century, stable, long-term public transgression, particularly gender nonconforming femininity, became a public problem warranting management (Bullough & Bullough, 1993). As with the history of sexuality (Foucault, 1978), this history of gender variance was not characterized by repression so much as by an “incitement to speak” (p. 18) about it, to accumulate detailed knowledge of it, to identify and classify it, and to seek out its origins. What followed was a proliferation of cross-gender identifications being put into discourse by the early twentieth century, producing knowledge, categories, and identities that would manage and regulate said identification and its behavioural manifestations.

By the late nineteenth century, a handful of sexologists had published case studies of cross-gender identification, which was subsumed under the broader rubric of “inversion” and associated primarily with homosexuality (see Drescher, 2010; Halperin, 2000), but it was not until the 1910s that “transvestism” and “eonism” were parsed by sexologists Magnus Hirschfeld and Havelock Ellis, respectively, as independent categories, each subsuming both cross-gender identification and cross-dressing. For Ellis (1913), anatomical predispositions and hormonal influences were the biological underpinnings of eonism. Hirschfeld, an early outspoken advocate for sexual minorities in Germany, played a central role in this diagnostic bifurcation: his book *Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross-Dress* (1910) distinguishes “transvestites” from homosexuals (and from “androgynes” and “hermaphrodites”) as a distinct type of sexual “intermediary,” which he thought of as natural variations with inborn, organic bases, and, hence,

as unchosen, uncontrollable and defensible, a harbinger of today's "arguments from immutability" (see Halley, 1994).<sup>15</sup> Around this time, homosexuality increasingly referred to same-sex object choice, as opposed to gender "inversion," such that transvestism came to refer to cross-dressing only. But transsexualism, defined in part by the request for surgical sex-change, did not appear as a medical category until the late 1940s and early 1950s, when doctors David O. Cauldwell and Harry Benjamin first coined and publicized the term transsexual.

This invention of transsexuality is typically attributed to what were then recent advances in medical technology (e.g., Hausman, 1995), especially new plastic surgery techniques and the invention of synthetic hormones, but, as Meyerowitz (2002) notes, the earliest transsexual surgeries were performed prior to these advances, in Germany, consequent to the vocal campaign for sexual emancipation of Hirschfeld and others that had worked "to remove the legal and medical obstacles to sexual and gender variance, and to enable homosexuals, crossdressers, and those who hoped to change their sex to live their lives as they chose" (p. 21). Furthermore, the prevailing etiological theories of the early twentieth century posited a universal mixed-sex condition, not unlike the "one-sex model" of human anatomy that had been popular in Europe prior to the eighteenth century (see Laqueur, 1990), according to which all women possessed male features and all men female features. This theory of universal bisexuality directly challenged the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century vision of binary sex (the "two-sex model"), and, with this novel theory, a few doctors began to administer hormones to, and perform surgeries on, patients who sought to move toward the opposite end of a perceived continuum. By the end of the 1950s, however, the two-sex model of males and females as distinct and immutable opposites was re-instantiated by yet a new theory: gender identity.

As transsexualism became its own sexological category throughout the mid-twentieth century, under its auspice fell some of the “inverts” that had been excluded by the narrower definitions of homosexuality and transvestism, including those who were described as men with female bodies and women with male bodies. Such descriptions – by doctors and by patients themselves – evoked the influential notion of “a female soul in a male body,” first formulated in the 1860s by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, a German lawyer and pioneer of the modern gay rights movement, for whom the sex of the soul or psyche (psychological sex), as opposed to the sex of the body (biological sex), explained his own erotic desires for men (see Hekma, 1996). Among others, including Benjamin, Cauldwell (1950) drew on Ulrichs’ two kinds of sex to identify individuals who were “physically of one sex and apparently psychologically of the opposite sex” (cover copy), a “condition” for which he blamed the combination of a biological predisposition and a dysfunctional childhood environment (Cauldwell, 1949). Throughout the 1940s, doctors and scientists adopted this concept of a deeply-rooted sense of “psychological sex” (later, “gender role orientation” and “gender identity”), which was thought less malleable than the body. Debates arose regarding the nature of this immutable gender identity: Did it result from genes or hormones, from psychodynamic processes, or from social learning? Answers presented divergent implications for what cross-gender identification and transsexualism could be said to be: A physical disorder for which sex-change was the logical intervention, or a mental illness, which psychotherapy in childhood could prevent (let alone a benign variation, requiring no treatment)?

Benjamin, an endocrinologist and notable champion of surgery who determined much of the modern medical approach to trans healthcare, looked to the body to account for transsexualism: “the soma, that is to say the genetic and/or endocrine constitution ... has to

provide a ‘fertile soil’” (Benjamin, 1953, p. 13). He first espoused the theory of bisexuality: the “full” “transsexualist,” unlike milder cases (transvestism), was of the “somato-psychic” type, for which Benjamin (1954) assumed “a still greater degree of constitutional femininity, perhaps due to a chromosomal sex disturbance” (p. 229). The seed of this differentiation among cases/types was sowed with Benjamin’s magnum opus, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (1966), in which he advanced a classification system of “sex and gender role disorientation and indecision” called the “Sex Orientation Scale” (SOS), the various aspects of which mainstream researchers, to this day, continue to elaborate with enduring classificatory zeal (see Lev, 2005). The SOS describes three groups of “neonatal males”: the first group contains three types (Types I to III) of transvestites (“pseudo,” “fetishistic,” and “true”), the second a “wavering,” “undecided” sort of intermediate “nonsurgical” transsexual (Type IV), and the third two types (Types V and VI) of “true” transsexuals, of differing intensity (moderate versus high), both of whom are distinguished by a “gender ‘feeling’” that Benjamin lists as “trapped in male body.” As was noted by long-term colleagues of his, “Benjamin did not consider anyone a ‘true’ or genuine transsexual who did not want to consider sex reassignment surgery – who did not want to ‘change their genitalia’ in order to have the total body appearance of the opposite and preferred gender” (Schaefer & Wheeler, 1995, p. 86). By the time of his book’s publication, Benjamin had already adopted the term psychological sex, incorporating the two-sex model of immutable gender identity, such that our modern view of trans people as being trapped in the wrong body was then established, available for subsequent codification in the *DSM* (see also Meyerowitz, 2002; Sullivan, 2008).

Though the *DSM* does not use the language of true/genuine transsexualism, its various trans diagnoses throughout the years have evinced this view of the transsexual as characterized by “gender disharmony” (Benjamin, 1966, p. 47) between the sense of self and the visible body.

The first edition of the *DSM* (APA, 1952) had included “transvestism” as a diagnosis under the “sexual deviation section,” a reflection of the then-ongoing association of cross-dressing with sexual deviance. As a taxonomic revolution took hold, sorting out a multitude of sexual and gender variations, psychiatry solidified the separation of diagnoses related to sexuality (“transvestic fetishism”) and to gender identity (“transsexualism” and GIDC) by the 1980s with the *DSM-III* (APA, 1980). In 1994, the APA combined two diagnoses (“transsexualism” and “gender identity disorder of adolescence or adulthood, nontranssexual type”) into “gender identity disorder” (GID) with separate codes for children and for adolescents and adults. GID was renamed “gender dysphoria” in the *DSM-5* (APA, 2013). “Transvestic fetishism” became “transvestic disorder,” which is still applied almost exclusively to AMAB individuals who are believed to be male-identified, attracted to women, and uninterested in transitioning, as if there are no male transvestites who identify as bisexual or gay, or trans women who identify as bisexual or lesbian, or trans women who choose to live full-time as women without undergoing sex reassignment, or transvestites who eventually come to identify as transsexual and undergo sex reassignment (for analyses of the centrality of heteronormative assumptions about sexuality within the gatekeeping system, see Latham, 2019; Whitehead & Thomas, 2013).

Over the years, the psychiatric construction of these trans diagnoses have been modified (see Beek, Cohen-Kettenis, & Kreukels, 2016), from a disordered desire to be a different gender – that is, a disordered gender identity – to, now, a dysphoric “incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender” (APA, 2013, p. 452). Much of the reform of the *DSM-IV* version of the diagnosis, GID, must be attributed to depathologization efforts (see Tosh, 2015), which sought, in part, to “[place] the onus of diagnosis on distress and dysphoria rather than gender nonconformity” (Lev, 2013, p. 292), yet the language of “gender dysphoria,”

as deployed in the *DSM-5*, nevertheless still locates “disorder”/distress in the mind (see Garner, 2014b), such that the distress one might experience as a result of social stigma or pervasive identity invalidation hazards being individualized as symptomatic (Tosh, 2015).<sup>16</sup> What has also remained stable is this one binary-maintaining master narrative of trans gender development that these criteria, despite their modifications, have kept bolstered atop a hierarchy of true transsexuality (see also Rankin & Beemyn, 2012): in childhood, you might have cross-dressed, preferred “the toys, games, or activities stereotypically used or engaged in by the other gender” (APA, 2013, p. 452), avoided rough-and-tumble play (“natal boys” only!) disliked your sexual anatomy, and/or “[desired] to be of the other gender” (p. 452); post-puberty, chances are you would have “[desired] to be rid of [your] primary and/or secondary sex characteristics” (p. 454) and “to acquire [those] of the other gender” (p. 454). There are few other options in the psy literature, unless, of course, you are a “secondary” (Person & Ovesey, 1974) or “autogynephilic” (Blanchard, 1989) transsexual woman, because in that case you would have discovered your female gender identity much later in life.<sup>17</sup> Otherwise, the “development and course” of transgenderism ought to mirror that of the *DSM*’s “diagnostic features” subsection: any wrongness – of genital materiality in relation to an inner experience of gender, between that experience, its expression, and others’ expectations or perceptions – is noticed early on by which time one has already been set on a linear, stage-like path toward the end goal of righting that wrongness (see Bockting & Coleman, 2007; Devor, 2004; Gagné, Tewksbury, & McGaughey, 1997). The body (materiality) and the mind (subjectivity) are envisioned not as entwined, not as reciprocally dependent on each other’s interpretative forces to make meaning, but rather in dualistic fashion as static and separable entities. The former, sexed either male or female, “traps” the latter, gendered “incongruently” (read: oppositely), (re)producing numerous structuring

disjunctive dichotomies whose effects include, among others: (a) aligning materiality reality (authenticity) with sex and immateriality (unreality, potentially, or, worse, pretense, deception or error) with gender (identity or expression), denying first-person authority to the experience of trans gender identity (see Bettcher, 2009); (b) marking TGNC people as self-divided and self-estranged, as if cis people could not experience their sense of their gender as non-identical to the confines of their skin or to the contours of their body as perceived by others; (c) negating the sociocultural and discursive situatedness of embodiment, trans or cis; and, most pertinent to my critique; (d) essentializing the gender binary, equalizing non-male as female and non-female as male, and ultimately reifying as the frame for understanding gender this exclusionary interpretation as either only one or the “other” (see also Sullivan, 2008).

In fairness, the *DSM-5* does now, with this version, include the following concession to the possibility of non-binary identification:

Some adults may have a strong desire to be of a different gender and treated as such, and they may have an inner certainty to [sic] feel and respond as the experienced gender without seeking medical treatment to alter body characteristics. They may find other ways to resolve the incongruence between experienced/expressed and assigned gender by partially living in the desired role or by adopting a gender role neither conventionally male nor conventionally female. (APA, 2013, pp. 454)

This concession, however, is slipped in at the end of the “diagnostic features” subsection, whilst the reformists’ hoped for “[shift in focus] away from binary gender categories” (Lev, 2013, p. 292) makes but an equivocal appearance within diagnostic criteria. (The working group tasked with revising GID for the *DSM-5* was chaired by a researcher-clinician best known to reformists for his preventative treatment of gender nonconforming children.) For example, one may endorse



a “strong conviction that one has the typical feelings and reactions of the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one’s assigned gender)” (APA, 2013, p. 452). That phrasing is the only way that non-binary genders appear. As Tosh (2015) notes, “the other gender,” as well as related terms, such as “cross-gender,” which appears more frequently than the bracketed “or some alternative gender different from one’s assigned gender,” positions gender as dichotomized, which is reinforced by the use of the definite article “the” before “other gender,” whose specificity denotes an established veracity, whereas the indefinite descriptor, “some,” delegitimizes the possibility of non-binary “alternatives” as novel, vague, or indeterminate. These alternatives are subsumed as a symptom of “gender dysphoria,” as the offered subject positions are limited to four: female expressed gender with female assigned gender; male expressed gender with male assigned gender; female expressed gender with male assigned gender; and male expressed gender with female assigned gender.

To be sure, there are those who have taken up the two incongruent positions listed above, those for whom the wrong body discourse of transsexuality and “gender dysphoria” rings undeniably true, just as were those, in Benjamin’s time, who had described their own experience of gender as a deeply rooted, longstanding, and irrepressible “desire to be of the other gender” (APA, 2013, p. 452). They told their doctors as much, as they urged them to enter uncharted territories of medical treatment (sex-change), as well as the public (figured as non-trans), through media interviews and popular autobiographies (think: Christine Jorgensen), among other avenues (see Meyerowitz, 2002). Though (non-pathologizing) subcultural self-descriptions were already in circulation among in-group members, the vernacular of medicine and psychology was the dominant language that had become available to “the” culture then, on account of the hallowed station of science in the West, set as it was against the backdrop of humanism and twentieth-

century liberal individualism, with their calls to remake oneself in pursuit of “self-actualization,” to lay claim to one’s own sense of authenticity, including one’s self-knowledge about whether one should or could live and count as the other gender (Stryker, 2008a). In practice, however, there were limits to self-expression and self-transformation, despite the opportunities psy’s invention of all these terms of gendered beingness seemed to foretell. The fact of the matter is that there have been also innumerable folx for whom the offered positions proved insufficient, those who would have been dismissed by their doctors had they not spoken of a “true” or “inner” or “trapped” self, those whose autobiographies might not have been published or sold had they strayed from the familiar and accessible metaphors (“trapped in the wrong body”) and life-plots of cross-gender identification – a sense of difference in childhood, manifested as a growing alienation from one’s body, a sense that it was itself a mistake.

Once their construction of TGNC people (as mentally disordered) had been established, the psy disciplines’ practitioners, should they be so inclined, were then free to appoint themselves as the ones who would be doing the diagnosing and treating these (disordered) people. As a burgeoning body of research on transsexualism exploded in the 1960s, the theory of psychological sex/gender identity, then *en vogue*, supported two opposing programs of treatment: psychotherapy (preferably, in childhood, as a preventative measure) or surgery (in adulthood). Psychoanalysts, like Stoller, supported psychotherapeutic treatment, as they believed psychological sex resulted from psychodynamic processes; others considered it conditioned, imprinted, or learned. Benjamin, and likeminded others, however, disagreed: they turned to the explanatory power of biology, hypothesizing that psychological sex was less malleable than the body. Therefore, treat the body, not the mind: change the sex of the body, as they had done in Germany. But, as psychiatry and psychology rose to new levels of prominence and cultural

authority within the West after World War II (see Hale, 1995), environmental, not biological, explanations of mental conditions were increasingly favoured. Cauldwell (1949), for example, characterized transsexuality as a mental illness for which surgical intervention was akin to mutilation. In their attempt to argue the merits of sex-change, some doctors and researchers began publishing follow-up reports on postoperative transsexuals to determine their “adjustment” and “satisfaction,” much of which now addresses regret, or, more accurately, the general lack thereof (e.g., Krege, Bex, Lümmer, & Rübber, 2001; Lawrence, 2003; Pfäfflin, 1993; Rehman, Lazer, Benet, Schaefer, & Melman, 1999; Smith, Van Goozen, Kuiper, & Cohen-Kettenis, 2005). Their aim was to pacify naysayers – certain psychiatrists and psychologists, the public, which seemed hostile to the notion, as well as those surgeons who believed such interventions violated their Hippocratic Oath – and, indeed, initial results were promising (Benjamin, 1966), in large part because they would come to rely on a circumspect clinical approach largely focused on facilitating physical changes from male to female or female to male as completely as possible by identifying appropriate candidates for what would be known as sex reassignment (e.g., Green & Fleming, 1990; Hastings, 1974). With mounting data, more doctors and researchers began to endorse it; Benjamin, of course, already had, and his profiles of true transsexualism – Types V and V on his Sex Orientation Scale – set the standard for who would be deemed appropriate. Transsexuals had hoped to decide that appropriateness for themselves, but they needed the consent and cooperation of doctors who sought to limit access to hormones and surgery only to those true transsexuals who would successfully blend into society as “normal” women and men following their surgeries.

By the 1970s, these doctors had established a gatekeeping system that included a whole host of new gender clinics, the first of which was spearheaded by John Money at Johns Hopkins

Hospital (notorious for rejecting almost all applicants), as well as various foundations, such as Benjamin's own, later called the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (HBIGDA), now WPATH, all of which accorded a certain professional legitimacy to sex reassignment surgery as the criteria for surgery began to emerge (see Siotos et al., 2019). Said criteria, unfortunately, particularly at this time, more often reflected these doctors' and researchers' own biases: that the binarization of gender was in no way constricting, and that gender variance was not benign. The immediate impact of the new research on transsexuality and sex reassignment was to reinforce traditional norms of gender, as focus had by now shifted away from the theory of universal bisexuality to the two-sex model. Benjamin (1966), for example, defined a "successful" "result" of surgery for male-to-female transsexuals as "outward appearance and the impression of the total personality" (p. 110) of (heterosexual) cis women; those who were larger and balding, with heavy beards, appeared less qualified (see also Pauly, 1968, 1969); they were considered "dubious candidate[s]" (Schaefer & Wheeler, 1995, p. 89). Some doctors required their patients to undergo training in conventional gender stereotypes, a precursor to the SOC's "real-life test," as it was called, a one- or two-year period during which applicants would live "full-time" as their self-designated gender. As one example, the screening process at Stanford University's Gender Reorientation Program, as it was then called, included a "rehabilitation" period with workshops on appropriate grooming. The doctors' expectation, as Meyerowitz's (2002) history of transsexuality in the United States extensively documented, was for their patients to live their postoperative lives as heterosexual and, better still, marry; those who would not did not qualify for treatment as readily (see also Bolin, 1988; Namaste, 2000; Wilchins, 1997). So, not only was passing (as cis) a prerequisite, applicants were also to exhibit "gender-appropriate" (e.g., Meyer & Reter, 1979) sexual orientation (heterosexual) and gender

expression (masculinity for men, femininity for women), as the clinics – there were at least 15 such programs by the end of the 1970s – meant to turn out well-adjusted, upwardly mobile, conventionally attractive, heterosexual graduates. Many of the reasons for rejection, such as sexual orientation, marital status, occupational choice and projected appearance in the new gender role, were superfluous to the stated aim of alleviating gender dysphoria (see Fleming, Steinman, & Bocknek, 1980), a sort of practice that is documented to have been operating in many such clinics around the world as recently as the mid-1990s (Peterson & Dickey, 1995).

Though both TGNC men and women have been subject to these oppositional ideals, the women were often faced an additional standard that required them to be sexually desirable in their identified gender. As told to Kessler and McKenna (1978):

A clinician during a panel session on transsexualism at the 1974 meeting of the American Psychological Association said that he was more convinced of the femaleness of a male-to-female transsexual if she was particularly beautiful and was capable of evoking in him those feelings that beautiful women generally do. Another clinician told us that he uses his own sexual interest as a criterion for deciding whether a transsexual is really the gender she/he claims. (pp. 118)

This sexualization sometimes superseded other eligibility criteria. Take one gatekeeper's admission: "In both sexes, the individuals chosen for operation were selected because they were credible in their impersonation or, in the case of some males, had won sexual acceptance in the female role despite minor incongruous features" (Randell, 1969, p. 378). Of course, not all gatekeepers relied on their own attraction to determine who would be permitted to transition, but most did consider sexual desirability. From Bailey (2003): "There is no way to say this as sensitively as I would prefer, so I will just go ahead. Most homosexual transsexuals

[heterosexual trans women] are much better looking than most autogynephilic transsexuals” (p. 180). As Serano (2007) has documented, “attractive” crops up throughout the case studies on TGNC women, usually to describe those who were considered successful in their transitions. Bolin (1988) interviewed a trans woman who explained thusly: “Shrinks have the idea that to be a transsexual you must be a traditionally feminine woman: skirts, stockings, the whole nine yards” (p. 107). According to another: “You must conform to a doctor’s idea of a woman, not necessarily yours” (p. 108). The women Namaste (2000) interviewed shared similar experiences; one, who was initially denied hormones because she had attended an assessment not appearing femininely enough, recounted:

I just went back, and this time I did all my kohl [makeup], inside and outside my eyes, [wore] my little fake fur jacket and my tight black pants. And she said, “You’ve come a long way since I saw you first. And now I am convinced that you’re transsexual.” It was like three weeks later! (pp. 163-164).

Though they required these women to meet a more rigid standard of femininity than cis women in order to be considered female, some gatekeepers would then disparage this “exaggeration” of femininity (see Money & Brennan, 1969; Money & Primrose, 1969), as if the regulatory mechanisms they had put into place – their standards, their norms – did not require of its subjects the expression, if not internalization, of said standards and norms.

This was how the psy disciplines governed here: through a version of disciplinary power, exercised by their gatekeepers as they secured normalization through surveillance, disseminating a pattern of oppositional norms, coercing their repetition, ensuring that they would be embedded throughout their patients’ daily lives. Spade (2006) has suggested that one of the consequences of being subject to these authentication procedures was (and continues to be) the strategic

recitation of psy's narrative of transgenderism (see also Spade, 2003). One needed to prove one was not just a homosexual or transvestite by appealing to a specific, elaborate, and ideologically formed conception of the psychological experience of gender dysphoria and of the transition process. As early as the 1960s, certain applicants knew what to censor ("gender-ambiguity"), how to coordinate their autobiographies with the wrong body model, and how to present themselves at their appointments with their would-be caregivers (see e.g., Stone, 1991). Otherwise, they could be punished for telling the truth (Denny, 2004). Prosser (1998) has argued that it is in part this tendency among "some clinicians to approach the transsexual as a suspect text...that may provoke transsexuals to 'falsify' histories in the first place" (p. 111). Insofar as authentication was meant to screen out potential "deceivers," a double bind was established for some: either lie to the clinician or tell the truth and be relegated to the domain of gender fraudulence (Bettcher, 2014b). A few years later, as psy took note (e.g., Fisk, 1973; Kubie & Mackie, 1968), many researcher-clinicians spoke and wrote derisively of those applicants who had been carefully prepared for what amounted to auditions for surgery. Rather than question the legitimacy of their archetype of transsexuality or reconsider the oppositional norms that had compelled adherence to said archetype, they labelled their patients as "unreliable historian[s] ... inclined to distort" (Pauly, 1965, p. 175), as "burdensome" and "deceptive" "liars" (e.g., Knorr, Wolf, & Meyer, 1969; Stoller, 1973) who had "conned" their doctors into believing them (Roth, 1973), tainting in the process "the label 'transsexual' [so that it covered] a 'multitude of sins'" (Meyer, 1973, p. 35).

These comments frame themselves as benevolent, as having been taken advantage of, though the authentication procedures they had created at the various university research and treatment programs throughout the 1960s were tailored for the most part to enhance the public

image of these gender identity clinics (Fisk, 1974). Accepting only those who best fit their archetype, those who would not sue should they regret undergoing surgery (Money, 1972), amounted to a sort of impression management they hoped might dispel any concerns they were institutionalizing risky, irreversible procedures at the behest of disturbed homosexuals or transvestites. Yet, even acceptance did not guarantee one would be permitted to transition: many TGNC people underwent extensive, sometimes indefinite, not to mention expensive, periods of psychotherapy designed as much to assess whether they were truly transsexual as to prepare them for an eventual transition; those who were permitted could be required to continue therapy following any surgery (see Green & Money, 1969). Though different criteria were devised at each clinic, several key elements united them, such as this sort of psychotherapy and the assessments therein, as well as requiring patients to live as the “other” gender (real-life test), and to take the appropriate hormones, for a number of months or years before undergoing surgery (see also Baker & Green, 1970; Edgerton, Knorr, & Callison, 1970; Wolf, Knorr, Hoopes, & Meyer, 1968). These guidelines for treatment became professional standards with the release of HBGDA’s first SOC in 1979. Each new edition has followed the same basic outline, though they have evolved somewhat, more so since the late-1990s, which coincided with WPATH’s announcement in early September 1997 that it had for the first time elected trans people to its board of directors (Stryker, 1998). Version seven (Coleman et al., 2011), the current edition, has incorporated changes suggested by TGNC people themselves so that, for example, patients are no longer required to begin their real-life test prior to initiating hormone therapy. That requirement unnecessarily exposed patients to discrimination, harassment and potential violence, because few can pass as their self-designated gender without hormones (Lev, 2004; Namaste, 2000; Serano, 2007). A preoperative, 12-month experience of living in an “identity-congruent



gender role,” what they called “Gender Role Experience” during my time at CAMH, remains a criterion for metoidioplasty and phalloplasty (FTM patients) and for vaginoplasty (MTF patients). If you want the genitals of the other sex, so the logic goes, then you best present as that sex’s gender: a phallus can only signify “man,” a vulva “woman.” Which would be “congruent” with a non-binary gender role?

Though certain evaluative procedures have been replaced by broader and more inclusive eligibility requirements, what we have nonetheless been left with is the institutionalization of a dependent, sometimes suspicious and hostile, relationship between (trans) patient and clinician, whilst cis folks remain, as they always have been, free to alter their bodies in similarly irreversible (gender confirming/conforming) ways (e.g., cosmetic surgery, gynecomastia surgery) without a mental health diagnosis (see Garner, 2014b; Latham, 2013, 2017a) – yes, the SOC still require “well-documented” evidence of “persistent gender dysphoria” for all transition-related surgeries (but not for hormone therapy). Furthermore, the so-called liberalization of WPATH has not meant that psy’s binary-maintaining administration of trans people has suddenly ended. Other advocacy-based models and affirmative guidelines have been developed since (e.g., APA, 2015; Lev, 2004; Raj, 2002; Singh & dickey, 2017), some of whose authors have explicitly stated they make no attempt to identify the true transsexual (e.g., Bockting & Coleman, 1992). These models encourage gender specialists to shift from a gatekeeping model of assessment to a psychotherapeutic relationship that supports each client’s unique narrative and gender trajectory. The second edition of the Sherbourne Health Centre’s guidelines and protocols for hormone therapy addresses the needs of non-binary patients (LGBT Health Program, 2015), but I could find only one on clinical practice specifically with non-binary clients (Matsuno, in press). These are encouraging signs, of course, but I believe we find ourselves just now trundling

out of that tenacious lag between the making of a progressive recommendation and its deliberate, sustained, systemic enactment.

At CAMH, whose adult Gender Identity Clinic has been around for decades, an institutional “memory” of sorts felt palpable to me, in my interactions with patients and with colleagues, a memory of those years when the gatekeeping practices had taken a more openly coercive form; that sense that one had been coerced into attending their appointments with me/us remained. This clinic was the place you had to go to if you were thinking about physically transitioning, up until March 1, 2016, when the Ministry expanded access to referrals for gender confirming surgery by allowing qualified providers throughout Ontario to assess. As of this writing, the CAMH website lists the adult clinic’s waiting period as eight to nine months; prior to March 1, 2016, it was...longer. When I started, I was told to expect hostile patients, like those who had been mandated to attend psychotherapy; rapport would be tough to establish. Trans and queer friends of mine were doubtful my reformist plan to apply trans-affirmative interventions – Empower the client! Don’t assume pronouns based on appearance! Use gender-neutral language! Recognize the impact of binary systems on the development of psychological symptoms! – would force any lasting change at such a notorious site. To an extent, these friends’ doubts were prescient: my interactions with patients were largely limited to assessments to establish: (1) diagnosability (of “gender dysphoria”) and (2) readiness (for surgery) – Machiavellian endeavours that I came to understand were also a means to an end for patients: We would meet with them to get what we needed (established diagnosability and readiness) and so too would they (insurance-funded surgery). My demeanour, I hope, had the effect of rendering these interactions less disagreeable, though upon reflection now I suspect that that may have been the only effect it had.

We, the assessors, in my view, were all ultimately cogs in the gatekeeping wheel with our heads down, ensuring its smooth operation. We conducted our assessments, and if we heard what we needed to hear from the patients, then we filed our paperwork, and that was that. We met every week at case conference pretty well only to discuss our assessments and recommendations for surgery. Most of our “initial assessments,” as they were called, were to establish the diagnosis for surgery (both breast/chest and genital), though some were scheduled for hormone approval. If diagnosed appropriately (i.e., with no other significant mental health concerns), then they would be scheduled for a surgery approval appointment, during which their readiness would be assessed. WPATH required two referrals for genital surgery, so case conferences were a time for the two assessors to compare notes, not just to examine the purported validity of a possible diagnosis or to develop a better-focused snapshot of the patient, but also to reveal any inconsistencies in the narratives of gender they told to each of these assessors, any embellishments, any malingering of dysphoria. If they did not tell the typical, unwavering story, replete with the various cross-gender preferences in childhood, coupled with later aversion of one’s secondary sex characteristics, then we’d be suspicious. The trans women who came out later in life evoked especial consternation: Were these folks dysphoric (truly transsexual) or “transvestic fetishists” or “autogynephilic”? Other kinds of patients of note included those who sought unusual (read: nonconforming) combinations of gender confirming procedures, such as breast/chest surgery without hormones or orchiectomy without vaginoplasty, as well as trans women who presented too femininely. That nonconforming confirmation was of note demonstrates its inconceivability in this setting, yet a too binary-conforming presentation suggested pretense, even possible deception. Is this how they really present day-to-day? Or, is this part of the ploy, their showing me what they believe I need to see? Even the surgery

approval appointments seemed designed less to aid the patient's mental readiness for surgery or to facilitate their postoperative aftercare preparations than to confirm their eligibility – that they could consent for treatment (necessary, of course), but also that they had verifiably completed, if necessary, their Gender Role Experience, and that their aftercare plan was already, and truly, in place. These were usually patients of few resources, and yet we did relatively little if they were found to be ineligible due to insufficient preparation aside from scheduling them for a “follow-up appointment” (not a second surgery approval appointment) to assess whether they had begun to pick themselves up by their bootstraps.

What we did not talk about at case conference was our gatekeeper status, nor any of our disciplines' history detailed above. Everyone was cis, an unremarked-upon staff composition. The majority were gay- or lesbian-identified, some queer-identified (me, anyway), all White and with professional degrees. Our relative positions of privilege within the LGBT initialism, again, lingered unexamined; instead, stances of pity were taken that in this context appeared to me as passive handwringing about the state of “them” (the “T”), presumably in comparison with the state of “us,” without much said or done in the way of destabilizing the hierarchies that had established this us-and-them dynamic, nor any appreciable avowal of us as a microcosm of what Spade (2004) incisively dubbed the “LGB-fake-T” (p. 53) to highlight the exclusions and marginalizations that are produced when “LGBT” is taken to represent a cohesive collection of identities and political interests. These days, at the clinic, I've been told, staff is more involved in advocacy work, by which I believe they mean consulting with community professionals in regard to completing a surgery approval assessment. Among the clinic's advertised services are now both individual and group-based support and treatment, a change from my tenure there, when opportunities for individual (only) treatment were rare (I saw a total of two such clients).

So, the ceiling was low in terms of how affirming I could be within this system a mere three years ago: no sustainable ways, for example, to share my familiarity with the minority stress framework for case conceptualization with TGNC clients (Hendricks & Testa, 2012), to help clients externalize internalized stigma (see Austin & Craig, 2015; Perez-Brumer, Hatzenbuehler, Oldenburg, & Bockting, 2015) or to navigate disclosure of trans-identification (see James et al., 2016; McLemore, 2015; Testa, Habarth, Peta, Balsam, & Bockting, 2015), to promote family acceptance (Coolhart & Shipman, 2017; Giammattei, 2015), to provide gender diversity trainings in other settings (Matsuno, in press; Matsuno & Budge, 2017), to establish gender-inclusive restrooms within CAMH and other clinical agencies (see Beemyn, Curtis, David, & Tubbs, 2005; Herman, 2013), or to advocate for change, say, to the gatekeeping system itself.

I've since wondered what to make of the fact that none of the patients we saw were non-binary-identified. Had we met with some, but they knew better than to disclose said identifications? A recent survey of trans Ontarians had, after all, found that 27% of AFAB respondents and 14% of AMAB participants identified as non-binary (Scheim & Bauer, 2015). Would most assessors take heed of the new-to-the-*DSM-5* bracketed intimation that patients could be “convicted” that they are, or “desire to be of” or “treated as,” “some alternative gender”? Or, had these prospective patients known in advance to avoid CAMH? (If hormones were what they were seeking, Sherbourne Health Centre and other sites would have been available to them then.) Indeed, the Canadian Trans Youth Health Survey – a national survey of 839 respondents, 41% of whom identified as non-binary – found that non-binary youth were significantly less likely than binary-identified youth to seek hormone therapy yet were more likely to report experiencing barriers to access if and when it was sought, including encounters with primary care providers who dismissed their experiences rather than “[view] their genders as

valid” (Clark, Veale, Townsend, Frohard-Dourlent, & Saewyc, 2018, p. 164). The participants I interviewed who had sought gender-conforming procedures had done so through primary healthcare providers who they believed were trans-affirming (i.e., less inclined to adjudicate among sought-after forms of embodiment) and more focused on informed consent, which is in keeping with current standards of care that advocate an informed consent model (e.g., Coleman et al., 2011; Ducheny, Hendricks, & Keo-Meier, 2017; Hembree et al., 2017). They could discuss different dosages of hormones, for example, rather than “assuming [they’re] wanting to feminize or masculinize *as much as possible*” (Ray Feinberg). The notion that each TGNC person has a unique relationship to their body seems intuitive but can be an oddly foreign one to healthcare providers, most of whom have not received adequate training (Matsuno, in press). Non-binary folx are diverse in terms of their desires for gender confirming procedures (see Kuper et al., 2012); though fewer initiate hormones or undergo surgery, as compared with binary trans people, approximately one-third seek one or more gender confirming procedure (James et al., 2016; Puckett, Cleary, Rossman, Mustanski, & Newcomb, 2018). Participant 2, for example, said they had undergone feminizing hormones in order to “balance [themselves] out”:

I just wanted to get rid a lot of the masculine aspects of me. And get to this center point of some sort—again “neutrois” to me is just the middle. It’s just a word to describe the middle. I could have just said neutral to you. To me, it’s not that different.

The hope for hormone therapy was never, for any of the participants, to appear as cis-passing as the other gender. Some emphatically spoke out against such an expectation. The only one who said they passed since beginning masculinizing hormones, Participant 19, explained that “being viewed as valid as a guy and having everybody treat [them] that way all the time,” based on certain visual markers of “maleness” (e.g., facial hair), had “let [them] be more just, like, androgynous ... and not need to identify with manhood so much anymore,” which was their

stated hope for hormone therapy. As I describe below, many of those who had pursued hormone therapy hoped that with a more androgynous body, they might be misgendered less often as cis in accordance with their sex assigned at birth. Of course, there were other, additional motivations. Some, for example, had been considering chest surgery for health-related reasons:

Ray Feinberg: I have been considering top surgery, just because— like a big reason for that is, partly personal comfort, but also the long-term health effects of chest binding. 'Cause I do get pains in my ribs and my back between my shoulders blades especially if it's been a long day. And over a long period of time it will have serious health effects.

That was true for Participant 19, too, though they also spoke of defying others' perceptions of their assigned gender, others' ascriptions of "certain attributes to male versus female bodies," which masculinizing hormones had already begun to afford them:

I'm scheduled for top surgery and ... it's gonna change the amount of, like, different clothing options that I can wear, like, I can't really wear tight shirts 'cause, um, binding is just too much, it's sort of painful and I can't really, like, breathe ... so I'll be able to wear tighter shirts and more feminine shirts, while, like, I wanna have enough sort of, like, stereotypical physical cues to lead people to believe that I'm a boy, so that I can do whatever I want with my clothing and my hair and nobody will question it, they'll just be like "Oh, you're just some sort of feminine guy" and I'm like, "Okay, that's fine," like, I don't necessarily want them to think that I'm cis, like, I don't like the idea of people thinking that I'm cis but the idea of people thinking that I'm trans and inferring that I was assigned female is sort of also not good for, I guess, safety reasons.

This safety concern is addressed elsewhere; relevant to our purposes here is how little their account maps onto the psy's proposed motivations for chest surgery, to alleviate dysphoria associated with one's breast tissue, and instead turns outward to cite intersubjective dynamics, such as the management of others' gender attributions, which, in this case, ought not be mistaken as a wish to pass as cis. Others, too, provided similarly externalized motivations for surgery. Between their first and second interviews, Participant 4 had undergone what they described as a "partial double mastectomy." Prior to their surgery, they spoke excitedly of their hopes for their postoperative life:

I'm having like um, top surgery. And uh, I'm really— like, “Oh my God! ... Um, but and I almost feel like a sense of like uh sheepishness about how fucking psyched I am about it! Whatever, your body is your body no matter what and no matter what it is, it's good! But like, I'm just like, “Oh my God, this is going to open so many doors for me!” There's so many ways of like, particularly I think maybe the sheepishness comes from like a self-consciousness about um, preoccupation with appearance? Uh, but I'm like, this is going to change how I'm able to present in different ways. It'll be easier to buy and immediately fit without altering certain clothes. It'll mean also that I won't have to wear um I mean not that I have to now, but I choose to wear a binder, every day. Um, and that is an extremely poor choice for somebody who has a degenerative spinal disease [laughter] Um, but it's also like one that I've been like, “Welp! This is my survival and I'm taking matters into my own hands!” Uh, um so I think like yeah, I'm so close to this really exciting liberating thing that I think is going to really change a lot.

Their only anticipatory concern pertained not to surgical risks or their aftercare plan but rather to potential interpersonal ramifications. As they explained:

As somebody who is like, um like— I think generally assigned female at birth masculine people have like a fuck ton of like desirability currency in queer communities and in many ways I'm at the top of the privilege ladder and I'm like, “I am freaking out!” [laughter] And, like it must be a whole different horror show if like you don't have these um, these privileges? But I do spend like a lot of time thinking about this and the closer that I move, um towards not being immediately identifiable as like a girl-person, um I'm like (.) I don't know how it's going to work!

Participant 4's concern about losing their “desirability currency” following their chest surgery – “of like having this like feeling of like freakishness and like, “Will I still be desirable?” – that “real [mixed] bag of emotions” is what in my estimation, and in other affirmative clinicians' (e.g. Lev, 2004; Singh & dickey, 2017), we ought to be prioritizing during surgery approval appointments, not whether a patient has memorized a sufficient number of surgical risks or supplied us with convincing-enough Gender Role Experience documentation.

As it stands, barriers to non-binary gender-affirming medical have yet to be adequately dismantled, given that the major one is this gatekeeping system and its assumption that all TGNC people want to “completely” transition to the other gender and desire a gender expression that “aligns” with that gender (Chang, Singh, Rossman, 2017). Though this narrative fits for



many trans people, non-binary folx may not consider gender confirming procedures *transition-* related due to the implication of binary change (Matsuno & Budge, 2017). For several of the participants, the term “transition” did not resonate:

Participant 9: Transition doesn’t really feel like it’s a word that makes a lot of sense for me. Um, I’m not – I don’t feel like I’m – I mean I’m starting a like hormonal adjustment of some sort just now, but I don’t feel like that’s – that is just another aspect of what I’m doing to build the gender presentation that I want.

...

Participant 14: If you’re born male, then maybe you want to, uh, you want to transition and, uh, be female, but for other people, for me ... there’s something in-between that. So I’m not sure it [“transition”] relates to me at all.

Others had chosen to complicate the term:

Participant 2: See, transitioning whether it’s for a gender non-conforming or a trans person, you know, there’s different kinds. Medically, there’s socially, um, even within medically, transitioning for me there’s a physical transition and a cognitive transition.

With little room made for non-binary folx, medical interventions that could significantly decrease psychological distress for those who do experience body-related dysphoria are limited (Matsuno, in press), to say nothing of the distressed caused by misgendering, as Participant 19 addressed above. Of those who had some experience with gatekeepers, their remembrances were, in most cases, either neutral (e.g., those who had found primary healthcare providers willing to prescribe hormones) or, as in Kira’s case, negative:

Kira: Um, the medical system was really shitty, and I didn’t get the help because they kind of lied to me about– I don’t know, they were doing some gatekeeping, honestly. And, in particular, they told me that I had to come out before I could receive HRT. And, um, they told me that I had to get diagnosed with dysphoria before – by a psychiatrist before I could receive HRT as well.

Alex: I’m sorry that happened to you. Was it in “Province”?

Kira: Yeah, it was in “Province” in “2010s.” ... And anyway, when I had found out that I was not going to receive medical assistance unless I came out, and in particular, I was told by my doctor that I would have to come out to people in my life whom would be

considered close enough, I guess, or enough people, I don't even know what the criteria were. Basically, I'd have to come out to my family and my friends and my partner at that time ... The issue was then I like, I needed this so badly that I had, like basically I forced myself to accept the fact that I had to come out, because if I didn't, I would not receive medical assistance.

Participant 9 had had the rare "positive experience":

I came to her [primary healthcare provider] with that and said, "So I'm interested in this one, this one, this one, these are the effects I'm looking for, I'm trying to avoid this, I'm worried about this," and I walked out of it with a prescription. So, um, she trusts me, and I trust her, so it works really well.

This attunement to the patient's unique needs was said to be an exception to the rule. Participant 15 described "the process to get hormone replacement therapy" as "grueling, and awful, and takes months, and it's absolutely terrible." Ray Feinberg, who had been considering chest surgery, said their "most intimidating thought" about it was not the surgery itself ("So, in terms of like knowledge and preparedness I feel like, I'm pretty good on that aspect") but rather about "navigating healthcare": "I think the thing that I'm most nervous about ... is the doctor I have to talk to and convince that I'm trans enough to warrant coverage, you know?" They called this the "catch-22" of trans healthcare: "You have to convince someone that you fit the criteria for this mental illness, so that you can get treatment." Ray's problem with that? "I'm not mentally ill," they said. "You know, it's just who I am, and I just want something that will make my life a little more pleasant and comfortable. You know?" They knew they would have to be "strategic" with their assessor, and "that's the other problem right, that [they didn't] want to have to exaggerate who [they are] ... in order to have something that [they] know will improve [their] life." If they were truthful, they wondered, what percentage of qualified assessors in Ontario would diagnose them with "gender dysphoria," the lynchpin of psy's approval?

Based on all the narratives I heard of becoming non-binary-identified, a number of the diagnostic criteria might not be considered "endorsed": the *DSM-5* (APA, 2013) says "pervasive

cross-gender behaviors” usually “onset” between two and four years of age, around the time that preschool age children begin expressing desires to be the other gender; in rarer cases, they will label themselves as a member of the other gender and/or “express discomfort with their sexual anatomy or will state they the desire to have a sexual anatomy corresponding to the experienced gender (‘anatomic dysphoria’)” (p. 455). As these children approach puberty, such expressions of anatomic dysphoria become pronounced. The expectation is for these “behaviors,” “desires,” and “expressions of discomfort” to persist – if any should waver (the mainstream literature calls this desistance), then one’s status as gender dysphoric would be called into question (see Temple Newhook et al., 2018). Of course, TGNC people frequently report “feeling gender different from a young age” (Rankin & Beemyn, 2012, p. 3), as well as “seeking to present as a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth” (p. 3), which was also the case for the participants I interviewed, though not necessarily that they always knew they were the “other” gender:

Participant 4: When I was really little, like what did I feel about my gender? And like um, it’s like really changed. Like there was a time where it felt like really nebulous and there was like, there was a time where I was like, when I identified as a girl like very, very strongly, and like, very happily. And that changed too, *within* my childhood.

...

Participant 13: Um, I feel like the people when I talk about my identity always want to know about whether I knew this when I was a young child or ... like, that’s a thing that like, you know, if someone has a narrative around that that’s cool for them. But I feel like people always look at that as though that’s going to legitimize the reality of those experiences. Um, and for me yeah even as a child I found myself just kind of like doing me ... And at that point I thought that I was a boy because that was the only option I had. Um, and then I started getting told that I was like messing up at boyhood ... But then I looked at my friends who identified as girls and girlhood and there were things that I really liked going on in there but, again, it wasn’t the thing.

...

Participant 14: I remember in preschool, being, um, really confused because I couldn’t understand why [people] were separated down, like, male and female lines, it really bothered me, I really didn’t– because I didn’t identify, um, with other girls and that was

really, uh, troubling because I'm technically allowed to associate with, um, boys, I didn't feel like a boy, but I didn't feel like a girl.

...

Eli: I was in first grade and for some reason I didn't got along with the group of girls because they were like, "Oh I like this," and I'm like, "I don't," but I was trying to fit with them but then I had huge fight with somebody and I'm like, "You know what fuck it, if I don't like it why am I forcing myself?" And then I started playing with boys and they were very cool and very chill and like they wouldn't force me to be in certain ways and in that moment for me it made more sense let's say to like grabbing things that boys are supposed to and grabbing things that girls are supposed to do and mixing everything in me like and I was just grabbing everything at the same time.

...

Kira: So, what I mean to say is that once I realized I was indeed a woman and had been, I realized too though that my gender was not in strict conformity with the expectations that were placed upon womanhood, and part of that, I think, was a consequence of the fact that I'm not cis. And I think my genderqueerness ultimately can't be disentangled from the fact that I can't live— have [not] lived a cis life. ... But on the other hand, I also have some sense of masculinity if we want to use that term. However, the masculinity which I, like, accept or embody is not the same, um, as what is expected of men. And, that was like, uh the problem that when I grew up, uh, the type of masculinity which was being inculcated in me was not one that I recognized or that, like, I felt.

These and a number of other participants had wavered in terms of their identifications: as a "girl" but not continuously (Participant 4); not as a "boy" but not with "girlhood," entirely, either (Participant 13); as neither (Participant 14); as a combination of the two (Eli); and so on. Participant 21 "hadn't started feeling this way [non-binary] until adulthood." Or, as Kira highlights, identifications may be with non-cis forms of masculinity and femininity. Learning about (binary) trans identities, which most of the participants had by adolescence via the Internet, was not experienced as an "'Aha!'" kind of moment where everything that they have been feeling finally falls into place" (Devor, 2004, p. 52), a moment of immediate "crystallization of feelings" the literature says is typical of a trans adolescence (see **Trans Gender Identity Development**). I believe that at CAMH it would have seemed unusual for a

patient's felt sense of gender difference to vacillate between or among maleness and femaleness or between or among them and (some alternative gender). The stability of any endorsed symptom (e.g., "A strong desire to be of the other gender") was interpreted as indicative of its authenticity: that person truly desires to be of the other gender. Gender certainty is thusly produced, as fluidity, changeability, and uncertainty are obscured (see also Roen, 2011). Also indicative: that one's "strong" "desires" and "convictions" regarding their "experienced gender" are expressed through various cross-gender practices (i.e., presenting as the other gender). The diagnostic criteria, in fact, refer to gender identity and gender expression as "experienced/expressed gender," such that there may be no incongruence between the two, stitched together by that oblique slanting line, as if there were agreed-upon (truer?) ways for women and men to express their respective gender identities. But, as I demonstrate in **Quality 1**, the participants' gender expressions did not usually signify their gender identities: What, anyway, would an assessor consider to be a non-binary expression of gender?

Furthermore, many of the participants were unsure whether gender dysphoria – not the mental disorder, per se, but its conventional and colloquial denotation as "*a persistent, chronic distress with one's physical sex characteristics*" (Winters, 2005, p. 82) – applied to them. Though primary and secondary sex characteristics remain the cornerstone underpinning the diagnosis (see also Davy, 2015), some questioned anatomic dysphoria's status as a necessary condition of TGNC experience, thereby troubling the diagnostic criteria's continued emphasis on the body: "There are people that are fine with their genitals, though, and, like, *are* trans or non-binary" (Participant 8). Several advised that there exist those who identify as the other gender but do not desire any transition-related surgeries, as well as those who pass yet continue to experience some degree of gender dysphoria. To be sure, some of the participants did use the

term to describe their own experiences: Michel, for example, was considering a mastectomy to alleviate “[his] dysphoria,” but he also acknowledged that “everyone else that [he knows] that is non-binary ... were mostly okay with their bodies but not as much with like, the way people treated them.” However, the majority, including those who endorsed “being mildly dysphoric [anatomic dysphoria]” (Participant 15), were emphatic that their bodies did not (and ought not) invalidate their subjectivities-identities:

Participant 15: I was never dysphoric to the extent of wanting to alter my physical body to be more androgynous. I like to express myself in clothing and makeup, and— which makeup isn’t gendered either [sigh] uh, I don’t know. Um, yeah so, clothing, and makeup, and accessories. I like expressing myself through body language, speech, through art ... that is the way that I like to express my identity, and there was definitely a lot of pressure initially to appear more androgynous, and to have my physical body look a certain way. Especially considering that I also do not necessarily think my identity aligns with the way my physical body looks.

They said they had been told by folks that if they wished to be read less as cis, then they ought to consider hormones or surgery:

People who want to help they’re like, “Oh, why don’t you go get surgery, like you don’t look androgynous or queer enough, you know, you don’t fit this categorization.” But it’s an insane privilege to be able to go through that [gatekeeping process], and it takes a lot of mental and physical strength, and it definitely takes a support system [which] I genuinely don’t have from the people around me. Um, it was really upsetting, and it still is rather upsetting, but, um, I just don’t express my gender that way.

An inadequate support system presented as a barrier, but Participant 15 also sought to express their non-binariness however they wished, “misreadings be damned.” Eli had had “many conversations about starting hormones” so that strangers would “stop misgendering [them]” but felt “conflicted” about such a motivation for hormone therapy:

Shouldn’t, like if let’s say the conversation that I have if you were going to go into hormones or not it was for me it’s complicated because if I’m saying that gender is not my skin then changing my skin what would be the purpose of me changing my body in a definite way? It’s hard for me to modify my body I was like, “You don’t have to— you don’t need to if you say that you don’t identify with— like into the roles that society tries to put [on you],” because for me gender comes more as a social construct and as an

experience too because it's also an experience like if I say– like everything that I talk about with gender is something that I feel that I experience that how I deal with people it's more an experience than the body I have.

The participants' talk displaced dysphoria from its conventional positioning: it does not simply rest within their bodies, emanating from their genitals, or body hair (or lack thereof), or any other sexed marker of maleness or femaleness, but rather hovers over their interactions with the world, impinging upon them whenever they are misread based on their body's appearance. This repositioning of dysphoria, as an intersubjective, not an individualized, experience, came with a name: dissonance. Though the *DSM-5* now refers to “gender dysphoria” as “the distress that may accompany the incongruence between one’s experience or expressed gender and one’s assigned gender” (APA, 2013, p. 451), in practice, I found it was taken to mean the distress that accompanies the incongruence between the gender of the mind (psychological sex, gender identity) and the sex of the body (biological sex). (It’s up to the assessor’s discretion.) This latter form of distress – anatomic dysphoria – is why, the clinicians presumed, a given patient has sought gender confirmation: to reassign one’s body in order to be congruent with one’s mind. For the participants, however, “the discrepancy between experienced gender and physical sex characteristics” (p. 454) was not what primarily or only motivated their pursuit or consideration of hormones and/or top surgery, so much as the *dissonance* between the genders they experience themselves as and the genders others perceive them to be, which some described as “dysphoric” and all had found to be more distressing and impairing than psy’s dysphoria (see also **Quality 5**):

Participant 3: I have a lot of dysphoria about my body where just because I do have more feminine features um, and I am seen as a girl, it definitely makes me very uncomfortable however I know some people who identify as non-binary and look very masculine and they’re fine with that and I know some people who are non-binary and um look very feminine and for them that’s what they like looking like and that’s totally valid.

...

Participant 8: I feel like the fact that I have a curvier body makes it harder for me to be viewed as agender and not as a [cis] girl or lesbian and, like, that's a big struggle that I have constantly is a lot of, not in the same sense as [binary] trans people— but some type of body dysphoria in the sense that because I have curves and because I have, like my body fat kind of distributes to AFAB that people don't see me as not in either category. ... I think hormones might make a difference. I've considered it but because I want children, I don't, I'm not going to do it until maybe afterwards. There's some things I want and then some things I don't want, which, like, I'm a part of a group on Facebook and I found out that I'm not the only one that wants that. So, a lot of people that are non-binary do wish they had a hormone light version.

...

Participant 10: When I'm in public like I've noticed um like, like if I get clothes or something like that, okay on ["Street"] there's this shop I was in there a few days ago, and I was asking for things in my size and the person working there was like, "Hey, you don't belong in this section, I think this is what you're looking for," so took me to like the other side of the store so I think they could be perceiving me as, you know, someone who is female and needs to purchase the clothes that are directed towards that group (.) And like that is like kind of somewhat upsetting yeah, that dissonance it kind of brings up feelings of like— I feel uncomfortable in my body and like for a long period in my life I didn't like having breasts or just kind of having a feminine figure so when people kind of like put— share their thoughts on me or how they perceive me it's very hurtful and kind of brings up like body dysmorphia [anatomic dysphoria] or just feelings just very upset about who I am.

...

Kira: I don't even like the term dysphoria honestly. Sometimes, I use the term dissonance instead. But, mm, like the dissonance I feel also affects my overall psychological state. So, if I'm feeling like bad generally, my dissonance is usually higher or else I find if I feel dissonance, I generally feel worse, perhaps [it's] bi-causal.

...

Participant 21: I think for some people it can be really agonizing to be misgendered. And I can see how someone who feels okay with their body looking as something that might be construed as something else by another person— I don't know how to word that properly— but feels really strongly about their pronouns might experience a lot of dysphoria, because, like, they're, you just want to be able to exist and have people see you. But people will make assumptions, unless you're in a very special environment.



Hormones could “ease” the dissonance between experienced and perceived genders; they were not necessarily intended to alleviate the discrepancy between one’s body and self-image, as the wrong body model would have us believe:

Participant 14: As far as expression, I’ve been trying to go slowly towards a more mixed gender expression which is hard because, when you’re born a certain way and it’s been—and you don’t transition from an early age, you just exude whatever you’re born as and it’s really, really hard not to want to go, like, full throttle in the other direction but that seems the only way to get to the middle. But I also don’t want to exclude what I was born as because that’s what everyone else sees.

As several explained, their bodies tend to be read as the sex they were assigned at birth, and their gender expressions rarely index non-binary identification: normative expressions are misread as cis identification whilst gender transgressive ones are dismissed as artifice. As Sukie said: “I don’t feel a problem with me, but someone said, like the problem is with society, and in particular the way my gender is assumed by others and when corrected outright dismissed.” This misrecognition – and sometimes intentional misgendering, in accordance with one’s (assumed) sex – was one of the main stated reasons why the linguistic assertion of one’s gender identity (pronouns) had taken such precedence for the participants should they seek visibility (and possibly recognition) as non-binary in any given context (see **Quality 1**).

Yet, the option of altering their bodies, with hormones, the most considered option, was met by ambivalence by several, such as those participants I’ve quoted above, who said their embodiments ought not invalidate their identities. Participant 21, likewise, had not sought any gender confirming procedures, because they “don’t need to necessarily physically change parts of [themselves] drastically to feel aligned with [their] identity.” Not an easy decision; Participant 5 said they had been “working toward” “radical acceptance” of their body:

You can’t change your bone structure. So (.) it is what it is so I’ll just take it. Whatever, it’s fine. Like um, I also live with disability, so it’s kind of in the same category of like, well, this is the hand I got. So, let’s live with that, with this body I have. Like, yay,

radical acceptance ... It's a work in progress ... Part of it is that I'm never going to look like what I want to look like. And like, just living with that. And then, part of it is like accepting that as a result of that, the world will see me in a particular way.

Others continued to fantasize about altering their bodies through hormones or surgery. These participants expressed worries not only about dysphoria's pathologizing implications, but also that they might be denied diagnosis (access) should they seek an OHIP-funded gender conformation procedure to ease the dissonance of being "seen in a particular way" (Suki) and tell their assessor this truth about the intersubjective location of their dysphoria/dissonance. Michel, for example, was certain they would not be prescribed hormones as a genderqueer-identified individual who experienced dissonance as most dysphoric:

Like hormones. It's not accessible. They will not prescribe it to you unless you are fully transgender. So, there's sort of this frustration of not like, an accessibility, I guess? ... Because my other friends who are genderqueer who did go through these things, they had to lie and say they were transgender in order to get access to these hormones. ... I don't think that's right. So that's sort of why I was like, if I participated [in this study] to help put it out there a little bit, maybe that'll— then people will recognize genderqueer is a real thing and it's not just some made up— 'cause I've had people say that.

Among those whose were more seriously considering initiating hormone therapy for the above-stated reason, some said they had held back due to their not unfounded fear of rejection by gatekeepers: "Would they help me even if I don't tell them what they want to hear?" (Ray Feinberg). They very well might not. Remember, the only truly dysphoric incongruence to be found within the diagnostic criteria is between one's "experienced/expressed gender" and one's "assigned gender," the latter of which is defined as one's "initial assignment as male or female" (p. 451) at birth ("natal gender"). Doctors base such (in most cases, binary) assignments on their reading of the infant's external genitalia, and it is this material notion of sex that is signified for most researcher-clinicians by the term assigned gender (hence the historical focus on anatomic dysphoria; see Sullivan, 2008). Though the APA (2013) does acknowledge that, "To varying

degrees, adults with gender dysphoria ... feel uncomfortable being regarded by others, or functioning in society, as members of their assigned *sex* [emphasis added]” (p. 454), it is an open question whether the average assessor/diagnostician would consider as dysphoric the discomfort one experiences when (mis)regarded as identifying with one’s assigned sex/assigned gender (you see how interchangeable sex and gender are here), given that the “assigned” here refers to a (past) assignment of sex (at birth) and not to others’ (current) attributions of gender identity. Again, it’s up to the assessor’s discretion. The *DSM* continues to locate disorder/distress within the individual, such that the distress one might experience as a result of social stigma or pervasive identity invalidation hazards being individualized as symptomatic, as I’ve written above; however, if a prospective patient were to explicitly relocate said distress in the context of a diagnostic assessment, then it would seem more likely to me that the dissonance to which the participants referred would not be found to meet criteria for dysphoria and instead might even be dismissed as an effect of transphobia – that is, of one’s treatment by others (e.g., misgendering). As Bockting, Knudson, and Goldberg (2006) advise: “Distress relating to others’ transphobia is not GD [gender dysphoria]; if it is so severe that the transphobia of others is negatively affecting quality of life, a diagnosis of Adjustment Disorder may be appropriate” (p. 43). This is where Spade’s (2003) proposal of a “strategic use of the medical model of transsexuality” (p. 30) might be put to use, because, as Butler (2001) noted, someone who comes to their assessment with non-essentialist views of gender and dysphoria “will have a more difficult time convincing psychiatrists and doctors” (p. 632) to approve them for gender confirmation. Even today, would it be worth the risk to not recite psy’s narrative?

The psychiatric taxonomies have always been an imperfect fit for certain TGNC people: those who seek hormones without surgery, or surgery without hormones, or nonnormative

combinations or ordering of surgeries; those who seek both male and female primary and/or secondary sex characteristics; those who seek hormones and/or surgeries to masculinize or feminize their bodies but continue to identify with their assigned gender; those who seek such procedures without identifying as trans, or because they experience dysphoria more so when misgendered than when looking at or imagining their bodies; those who do not feel “trapped in the wrong body,” or have not felt that way all their life, those for whom the wrong body model does not represent a deep, formative fact about their identity, those who might not perform their target gender for the rest of their life, or not wholly and in culturally standard ways, those for whom doing so might not be an unambiguously positive experience, or might not represent a dispositional or involuntary desire to be that target gender (What about an intellectual or voluntary desire?) – essentially, all those for whom terms like neotranssexuality, posttranssexual, and transgender were coined.

I’d add non-binary to this list of imperfect fits.

### **Trans Reverse Discourses**

With my genealogical sketch, I’ve sought to avoid the pat (mis)characterization of certain constructionist-leaning histories of transgenderism that reduces transsexual subjectivity to “the demand for sex change” (Hausman, 1995, p. 26), as if that were “the most important indicator of transsexual subjectivity” (p. 3). The trans people who had sought “sex-change,” however, were not invented by their doctor’s discourses unilaterally, like tabula rasa, passively awaiting the scalpel’s inscription. That some as early as the 1960s had been telling their doctors what they suspected those assessors wanted to hear before approving gender confirmation suggests a critical reflection on the subjectivities they were invited to take up that enabled them to strategically redeploy psy’s narrative of transsexuality nearly from the get-go. To suggest

otherwise, say, that they were taken in by the ruse of this narrative, that they had indiscriminately followed their doctors as chaperones toward a pre-scripted, binary-based ideal of re-embodiment, misses that critical reflection through which they could “get free” (Foucault, 1985) from the disciplines’ subjectifying power/knowledge nexus and instead “experiment with subjectivity” (see Heyes, 2007). That is what “made” them (not the demand for surgery): they understood the medical and social histories they reported to their doctors were necessary fictions into which they fit their experiences so that they could to be recognized as transsexual (see Salamon, 2010, p. 84-87); but they were not just victims of “false consciousness,” nor all necessarily invested in the gender binary (cf. Billings & Urban, 1982; Garber, 1992; Griggs, 1998; Raymond, 1979), and some were in actuality motivated to seek such recognition by “a norm-resistant, politicized, and feminist desire for body alteration” (Spade, 2006, p. 319). That desire’s eventual fulfillment – the self-determination of gender expression, the occupation of ambiguous, self-designated gender positions – required, especially in those years, in the assessor’s office, the recitation of those fictions of investment in dichotomous gender categories. As Golder (2011) put it: “Working the *DSM* is a critical skill for trans persons seeking surgery” (p. 164).

Applying Foucault’s late-life revisions of some of his assumptions regarding the construction of the subject within such nexuses of power/knowledge helps us to recognize that TGNC people’s relation to the psy disciplines had, from the inception of trans diagnoses, exhibited a critical distance from which they saw the potential for their encounters with the discipline’s practitioners to “promote new forms of subjectivity” (Foucault, 1982, p. 785), forms that these practitioners would not have imagined or authorized. The technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which individuals act upon themselves; though their actions are structured thusly, these *same* individuals can yet harness

these *same* processes in order to constitute themselves, turning themselves into subjects of their own making (Foucault, 1994e). Stryker (1994), who has long been concerned with this relation between transsexual agency and the conservative and normalizing motivations of medical science, explained that it has always been possible to adhere to, even invest in, the processes of sex reassignment approval without complicity in the sort of binary-maintenance the diagnostic and eligibility criteria had effected. Those criteria may have been established to “contain and colonise the radical threat posed by a particular transgender strategy of resistance to the coerciveness of gender: physical alteration of the genitals” (p. 244), but there was never any guarantee of “the compliance of subjects thus embodied with the agenda that resulted in a transsexual means of embodiment” (p. 242). Though TGNC people had little say in the diagnoses’ construction and subsequent administration, they nevertheless saw possibilities for reversal within these force relations. Some had already begun to reappropriate “transsexual” by the mid- to late-twentieth century, just as homosexuality-as-reverse discourse had represented for Foucault around that time an opportunity for “new relational and affective potentialities, not in virtue of qualities intrinsic to the homosexual, but because the position of the homosexual ‘off-center,’ somehow, together with the diagonal lines which the homosexual can draw through the social fabric, makes it possible to bring to light these potentialities” (Foucault, as quoted in Halperin, 1995, p. 67).

Foucault’s legacy has been defined by interpretations of that influential passage from Volume One of *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault, 1978) in which he calls “homosexual” an historical invention, spurred by the will to know the “truth of sex.” In that volume’s “Method” section, Foucault writes: “Where there is power [to invent homosexuality and subject it to social control], there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position

of exteriority to power” (p. 95). He describes this inherent possibility of resistance as locatable within tactical reversal, or in the reappropriation of local conflicts which, according to the rule of “double-conditioning,” can have effects beyond the merely local. The disciplinary practices that culminated in homosexuality’s scientific study also facilitated the creation of its reverse discourses: “homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified” (p. 101). This homosexuality could exert its own kind of forces, its own practices and knowledge, despite its sociocultural placement and the contingencies of the power game that homosexuals had no choice but to continue playing. Stryker (1998) has since written of her search in the early 1990s for a language to express a “new kind of transsexual” (p. 152), akin to Foucault’s resistant homosexual, one that could challenge the received wisdom of sex and gender (e.g., that someone with a penis-scrotum could not be a woman, or someone with a vulva could not be a man):

Naming myself *transsexual* was ... a provisional and instrumentally useful move. It rankled, but I insisted upon it, for being interpellated under the sign of that particular name was for me, at that moment in time, the access key to the regulated technologies I sought. “I name myself a transsexual because I have to,” I told myself, “but the word will mean something different when I get through using it. I will be a new kind of transsexual.” (pp. 151-152)

Stryker saw transsexuality as “a medico-scientific, juridico-legal, psychotherapeutic apparatus for generating and sustaining the desired reality effects of [her] gender identifications through the manipulation of bodily surface” (p. 151). This “willingness to engage with the apparatus for one’s own purposes” (p. 151) had also been called neotranssexuality by Stryker, who later found

common ground with yet another term that had been coined to name those transsexuals who sought to “generate a true, effective and representational counter-discourse” (Stone, 1991, p. 230): posttranssexualism.

Sandy Stone’s (1991) “posttranssexual manifesto,” the protean text from which contemporary transgender studies emerged, was foundational to assembling such a “counter-discourse” of new trans narratives and archives, clearing the way for subject positions from which it could be possible to speak (politically) as a (post)transsexual. Stone explicitly addressed the literary genres of transsexual biography and autobiography, arguing that (cis) others had “ventriloquized” their ideas about gender through certain “transsexual mouthpieces” (Stryker & Whittle, 2006, p. 221) whose writings had often uncritically reproduced discourses of gender that were ultimately unhelpful for understanding the complex specificity of trans embodiment and experience. Through her own writing, Stone (1991) resisted the effacement and invalidation of said specificity. The label posttranssexual is reserved for those who deconstruct “the old binary discourses of gender” (p. 296), which Stone favoured, by “[seizing] upon the textual violence inscribed in the transsexual body and [turning] it into a reconstructive force” (p. 295). Though Stone’s “post-,” unlike Stryker’s “neo-,” might suggest a repudiation of genital surgery, Stone found in transsexuality “the potential to map the refigured body onto conventional gender discourse and thereby disrupt it, to take advantage of the dissonances created by such a juxtaposition” (p. 296), but, like Stryker, she did not specify the shape(s) of that refigured body or the nature of the dissonances and juxtapositions she wanted that body to take advantage of. What Stone encouraged were new forms of self-expression from transsexuals, however they physically configured their embodiment, that could reveal the deep and powerful ways we all construct a sense of self in reference to our particular form of embodiment. Her hope was for a



new body of intellectual work, grounded in nascent practices of selfhood, to take root and flourish, giving fresh expression to “entire spectra of desire” (p. 296) that had hitherto been unexpressed.

In the manifesto’s wake, a gradual but steady body of this sort of work by TGNC people did take shape. Feinberg (1992) soon after offered “transgender” as the identificatory term of Stone’s theorized posttranssexualism, linking “the drive to inhabit this newly envisioned space to a broader struggle for social justice” (Stryker, 2004, p. 212). In the 1970s, that term and its variants, such as “transgenderal” and “transgenderist,” had referred most often to “biological males” who lived socially as women without ever undergoing sex reassignment (see Ekins & King, 2006), whereas Feinberg’s referred to a “pangender” movement of oppressed minorities, including transsexuals, all of whom zie called to make common revolutionary cause with one another in the name of social justice. The activism of that time had begun to seek such justice, in part, by emphasizing depathologization: for some of those who questioned the reign of experts and wished instead to centre certain other concerns confronting TGNC people (transsexuals in prison, various laws, exploitation at gender identity clinics, extortion and persecution by police), identifying as “transexual” (with one “s”) was meant to mark a departure from the medical model of transsexualism which had relegated them to the disempowered position of patient (Meyerowitz, 2002). (Of course, others did so without identifying as transexual.) Though some of the earliest recorded uses by TGNC people of variants of transgender in opposition to medical, psychiatric or sexological labeling (as either transvestite or transsexual) date back to the 1960s (Williams, 2012), it was not until the 1990s that the term found broader usage, in medical, pop-culture and trans community sources alike, as

an umbrella term for a wide variety of bodily effects that disrupt or denaturalize heteronormatively constructed linkages between an individual's anatomy at birth, a nonconsensually assigned gender category, psychical identifications with sexed images and/or gendered subject positions, and the performance of specifically gendered social, sexual, or kinship functions. (Stryker, 1998, pp. 149)

In her response to Stone's call for posttranssexual theorizing, Stryker (1994) advanced "transgender phenomena" as well suited to contesting established and conventional connections between embodiment, behaviour, identity, and desire. Transsexuality, then, names as "culturally and historically specific transgender practice/identity through which a transgendered subject enters into a relationship with medical, psychotherapeutic, and juridical institutions in order to gain access to certain hormonal and surgical technologies for enacting and embodying itself" (p. 251-252). Though transsexual now strikes some as too restrictive of a category, given the encounters with psy the term connotes, many who identify as such, or with other binary-based terms (e.g., trans man, trans woman, female-to-male, male-to-female, FTM, MTF), continue to do political work under the transgender umbrella. Transsexual identification is not inherently conformist, and to avoid perpetuating a conformist/subversive dichotomy that would divide TGNC people into those who transgress the binary and those who represent an allegedly dated form of gender essentialism, the convention now is to refer to this umbrella as "trans" and to the people it names as TGNC. Without a suffix, it resists premature foreclosure (Stryker et al., 2008).

The coinage, uptake, and diffusion of "transgender" was an organic, grass-roots process of "resistance to medicalization, to pathologization, and to the many mechanisms whereby the administrative state and its associated medico-legal-psychiatric institutions sought to contain and

delimit the socially disruptive potentials of sex/gender atypicality, incongruence, and nonnormativity” (Stryker & Currah, 2014b, p. 5). According to Denny (2004), the 1990s witnessed a shift away from the model of TGNC experience that had held sway since the mid-century, as exemplified by the works of Benjamin, Green, Money and others, toward one that promoted the political, legal, and social acceptance of gender diverse people on their own terms. This conjuring of a transgender umbrella to include transsexuals ran counter to the claim they were produced solely within medical discourse, and with that came a proliferation of narratives of TGNC experience that, unlike the early reappropriations of “transsexual,” were not exactly, or only, reactive (against the medical model), but rather represented “something more than the mere elaboration of certain already-established discourses on transgenderism” (Stryker, 1998, p. 148). This something more has been in excess of established discursive positionings, of the names/diagnoses that exemplify the political aims of a cultural regime that had produced certain gender realities for its own (changing, historically-specific) needs (Wilchins, 1997); such is the power of culture, acting through language, to name and establish as undeniable fact the perception of said realities (of oppositional gender, including its inequitable apportioning of privileges). The (political) work that began under “transgender” has sought to seize control of language as one means of disrupting that regime, bringing to us this proliferation of narratives and critical reflections disarticulated from the categories and vocabularies of TGNC people’s social disqualification: “This knowledge, [having emerged] from a diverse, self-aware community’s reflections on its own personal/political praxis in relation to dominant social institutions and ideologies, is strikingly different from psychological theories of gendered embodiment” (Parlee, 1996, p. 633). Indeed, transgender studies had set out to account for the

shifting, consolidating, opening-up-again meanings-in-use of the terms and self-descriptions that flow from the ruptures of “man” and “woman.”

Stryker (1998) had listed FTM, MTF, eonist, invert, androgyne, butch, femme, Nellie, queen, third sex, hermaphrodite, tomboy, sissy, drag king, female impersonator, she-male, he-she, boy-dyke, girlfag, transsexual, transvestite, transgender, cross-dresser – but the available neologisms continue to flow. As yet another, “non-binary” enacts and materializes new social ontologies or possibilities for becoming and being gendered, offering a sense of emancipation from a pathologizing, binary-maintaining past. That is why the majority of the participants I interviewed had turned to it as their primary term or umbrella of identification. Only four of them identified themselves as trans, in addition to non-binary or an allied term, whereas the rest either did not or at least expressed uncertainty regarding their own inclusion under the trans umbrella, because trans for them continued to evoke the gender binary and desire for physical transition:

Sukie: Yeah, now I would [identify as trans] but that wasn't always the case. I think that's kind of been something I wrestled with. Because it's, for me it's, if genderfluid goes in to non-binary and non-binary can or can't go under trans then which umbrella am I falling under? And then I start questioning the use of labels, but then I also see the relevance of them.

...

Participant 13: I end up in a lot of trans communities, but I've never really felt particularly, I wouldn't really say catered to, but they don't accommodate for that as much. It's kind of frustrating sometimes because your gender isn't really, well, being genderqueer or trans is not really being taken as seriously if you're not going to um, hormones, if you're not doing the surgery, or anything like that. But, see to me that's still catering to the binary too, to an extent. Well um, yeah especially this sort of dominant trans narrative of you know like being trapped in the wrong body (.) before I figured out that I was genderqueer, I did identify as trans for a while because I thought that you know, you're either cisgender or you're transgender, there's really nothing in-between.

...

Michel: I get lumped in with people who identify as transgender, and I don't really think transgender works with me because the term trans means across something and I don't really feel like I'm across anything. That's not what genderqueer is for me.

...

Participant 19: Well, to me [trans-masculine] means that I was assigned female at birth and that I, um, sort of, not identifying with femaleness anymore and more towards man-maleness, man-ness, kind of- not all the way so it's not, like, completely trans man ... I don't use, uh, like, trans man so much because it seems more binary and it's more, um, like, I just really don't like being associated with the idea of, like, full manhood.

Though non-binary folx tend to be classified as trans in most large-scale surveys (e.g., James et al., 2016), that term's dominant connotation of binary trans identification has meant that some do not identify as such (Bauer, Braimoh, Scheim, & Dharma, 2017; Matsuno, in press). Beemyn (2015), who conducted a national study of more than 200 non-binary college students in the United States, came to the conclusion that we are "at a time when ... a growing number of mostly younger queer individuals are identifying beyond or outside of ... transgender because they see that label as binary or unable to speak to the multiplicities of their lives" (p. 359-360). The transgender/trans umbrella and its aggregative imaginary has enabled disparate sexual- and gender-nonconforming people to coalesce for individual and political identification (as well as to harness social power), but its "flexible" sorting practices (Valentine, 2007), as Davidson (2007) explains, sometimes obscure the specific intersections of classed, raced, geographic, and cultural dimensions of personhood, such that differences among TGNC are "elided in public consciousness by the category transgender and the notion of a unified umbrella implied within it" (p. 61). Inherent to such all-encompassing classificatory practices is this potential to produce exclusions and erasures, hence the participants' tendency to prioritize non-binary as the name for their exceeding of the bounds of the psy disciplines' technologies of domination and power. It remains to be seen whether the same will happen with the category non-binary.

Contemporary iterations of non-binary trans identities have exploded the terms of TGNC identification radically since 1990s. In 2008, the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force launched a nationwide study of anti-transgender discrimination in the United States (Grant et al., 2011). A series of initial, qualifying questions were asked, including Question 3 (Q3), “What is your primary gender identity today?” Thirteen percent of respondents did not identify with the three response options (i.e., male/man; female/woman; part time as one gender, part time as another), and 860 of those respondents listed identities unavailable as options in Q3, such as genderqueer or some variation thereof (e.g., pangender, third gender, hybrid), genderqueer within specific cultural traditions (e.g., Two-Spirit, Mahuwahine, Aggressive) or their own unique genders (e.g., twidget, birl, OtherWise), which speaks to the increasingly elaborate identificatory nuances among TGNC people. As Harrison et al. (2012) reported, those whose gender identities were not listed in Q3 were younger, less likely to be White, and more likely to identify with genderqueer, often following with additional descriptors (e.g., genderqueer/genderfluid, genderqueer woman, genderqueer lesbian, genderqueer trannyfag), or some conceptually aligned term (i.e., both/either/neither/in-between/non-binary; androgynous, blended; non-gendered, gender is a performance, gender does not exist; fluid; Two-Spirit; bi-gender, tri-gender, third gender; genderfuck, rebel, radical).

New media is facilitating unprecedented connections among TGNC people, functioning, in part, as sources of validation and sites of communal identity exploration (see **Conclusions**). Many of the participants had turned to Tumblr and social media for information about non-binary identities, “to see if [they] could figure [themselves] out” (Eli), and to meet others who shared their experiences, as they had known of few in their day-to-day “offline” lives. In the past five years, several public figures have publicized their non-binary or genderfluid identifications

and clarified their (often gender-neutral) pronouns through new and social media; on-going photography and short-film projects featuring “gender creative” children and non-binary-identified adults have been picked-up by numerous online news media outlets; Advocate, Aeon, BuzzFeed, *Cosmopolitan*, Gawker Media, *The Guardian*, The Huffington Post, *i-D Magazine*, NPR, *The New York Times*, Slate, *Vanity Fair*, and *The Washington Post*, among many other online newspapers and aggregators, have published articles about non-binary identities as well as personal and political essays by non-binary writers; hundreds, perhaps thousands, of blogs, maintained by non-binary bloggers, function not only as publicly-accessible diaries and resources but also as sites of participatory validation; hashtags (e.g., #nbrightsnow, #whattranslookslike), which allow users to find messages with a specific theme or content on social network and microblogging services, have been created to draw attention to the rich variations within trans; and various mobile photo- and video-sharing platforms provide opportunities for amateur non-binary users to represent their under- or heretofore un-represented self-(re)presentations and for writers, speakers, advocates, and organizers to publicize their work.

Research is only now beginning to author accounts of the diversity of folx who identify as non-binary – the breadth of identificatory terms, as listed above, but also the specificity of the subjectivities they name and the range of gender expressions therein (e.g., Beemyn, 2015; Chang et al., 2017; Factor & Rothblum, 2008; Harrison et al., 2012; Kuper et al., 2012; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). The responses I heard when I asked during the first interviews, “How did you come to self-identify as non-binary?” were so varied I knew then the results I’d write could not be organized according to some overarching model of non-binary gender identity development, as has been done for binary trans people (see **Trans Gender Identity Development**). Some of the participants had always known they were non-binary; some had arrived at the term only after

having first toyed with a more conventional (binary) trans identification. Some had undergone gender confirming procedures; most had not; a few would not. To apportion certain milestones, at certain ages – well, not only would that have been incompatible with this dissertation’s epistemological framework, it seemed futile. What, when and for whom: Who could predict? To report all 24 of their responses chronologically, like second-hand memoirs, would have illuminated little about gender identity development, trans or otherwise, other than its variability and individual specificity, which is why I’ve chosen to outline what I believe are certain qualities of becoming rather than to present it as some progressive update to our current models of development (see below).

All that could be said, really, to characterize each of the participant’s narratives was that their self-designated genders differed from their assigned ones but not oppositionally so: they had to disidentify with that assigned gender to reidentify with their self-designated gender, carving out space for themselves to live as what they had designated. This is what Foucault wrote about as his attention shifted to provide an understanding of individual agency, how it is one creates one’s own role through discourse (see also Hanna, 2013), hence my positioning of non-binary as a contemporary form of the various Foucauldian reverse discourses on transgenderism. It exploits the forms and modalities of practices or technologies that have enabled a hermeneutics of the self by which “the individual constitutes and recognizes himself [sic] *qua* subject” (Foucault, 1985, p. 6). In other words, that embodied, relational process of becoming a singular subject with an individualized identity, what I’ve called subjectification, is determined, “to some extent” (Brinkmann, 2005, p. 778), by self-interpreting individuals who “choose” the practices they will allow themselves to be constituted by. Participants did not position themselves as beyond the binary (see **Transgender studies and queer genders**), so



much as *on* its “spectrum” or *within* its “matrix,” acting on and within it so as to undo it or else complicate its logics. Such autonomy in heteronomy expands the possibilities that normative gender refuses by using the binary against itself: one’s self-designated gender, for example, need not be the opposite of one’s assigned gender, just as one’s expression(s) of gender need not be congruent with one’s identification(s); those identities and expressions may change across the span of one’s life, even within the span of a day, as the technologies of gender in our present time and place – its names, its pronouns, its expressions – are reassembled so as “to promote new forms of subjectivity” (Foucault, 1982, p. 785). The critical reflection (on gender, on the technologies of gender) this expansion necessitated was palpable across the interviews. Though not beyond, they there not “hyper-determined” (Dean, 1994) by the binary either, nor by the discourses and models that had come before, including the false premise that all TGNC people feel trapped in their bodies or experience an incongruity between mind and body that is oppositionally gendered. They described struggling against these dominant subjectivities/subject positions as they sought to open up new ways of being. Non-binary, as spoken by the subject who hails themselves as such, puts into discursive circulation gendered subjectivities not previously named by the subjectifying disciplines, so that one can emerge at the limits of intelligibility under that very category of self-identification.

### **Reconceptualizing Gender Identity Development**

None of mainstream psychology’s theories of gender identity development consider gender independent folk: that boys might not grow up to be men and that girls might not grow up to be women, or that the ones who do might not stay men or women – these options are not within the realm of possibility. This has been true since the get-go. Freud’s invention of psychoanalysis placed the question of gender at theoretical ground zero. His revolutionary opus,

*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), laid out the oedipal narrative, whose entrenchment of anatomical difference and gender splitting continues to dominate classical psychoanalytic theory today. Launched by a child's discovery of sexual difference, that is, the moment of realization that girls are "castrated," the oedipal drama aligns femininity with passivity, with a girl's horror at her genital mutilation; penis envy and hatred toward her mother for being deficient follow, which lead her to repress her active (phallic, masculine, homoerotic) romantic tie to her mother and turn to her father. For boys, genital narcissism is central: incited by his fear and disgust at female genitals, a boy abandons his wish to displace his father, repressing his romantic love for his mother until puberty, at which time he will have renounced his oedipal rivalry by identifying with his father's (hetero) masculinity; at last, it is his turn to possess a woman of his own.

This fixation on anatomical difference undergirds Freud's early theorizing, which concretized masculinity and femininity as expressions of an individual's "mental sexual character" – an unwieldy phrase that nevertheless captures the conflation that has dogged his thesis ever since. Freud defined sexual difference and psychical gender solely in terms of the have/have not status of the penis and the "castration complex" its presence or absence engendered. Castration anxiety (male) and penis envy (female) ultimately became biologically irreducible bedrock. The resultant gender splitting (masculinity = activity, femininity = passivity) was thought necessary for procreative purposes. As theory and as lived experience, the Oedipus complex accords personal meaning and social legitimization for the cultural imperative that links the binary system of gender to the obligatory status of heterosexuality (and implicit prohibition of homosexuality). The pre-oedipal boy (girl) emerges into heterosexual masculinity (femininity) from his (her) early embeddedness in a pre-symbolic, pre-cultural maternal universe

in accordance with an invisible *a priori*: gender must be an exclusionary (either/or) category that brings about procreative heterosexuality.

Freud's gynophobic premise (femininity = castration) that gender was a "psychical consequence of the anatomical distinction between the sexes" (Freud, 1925), and his heteronormative thesis that gender splitting was necessary for heterosexual reproductive coitus, the inevitable goal of sex and ultimate statement of maturity, now read as so antiquarian they do not inspire much indignation. Of course, there have been many feminist critiques throughout the years, from Karen Horney's challenge to the view that there is a worthier kind of genitalia to the works of the contemporary relational analysts. Yet, with almost a century of criticism levelled at his theory of the sexes – its principle of gender polarity, its biological essentialism, determinism, heteronormativity, and so on – the terms of the debate have been primarily concerned with issues of gender splitting and gender hierarchy, not with the number of genders humans can produce (Goldner, 2011a). An exception that proves the rule is Person and Ovesey's (1983) one-line remark, embedded in a footnote: "The question is really why only two gender possibilities exist" (p. 221). In any case, aside from a considerable body of research in the 1940s, later exemplified by the work of Sears and colleagues (Sears, Maccoby, Levin, 1957; Sears, Rau, & Alpert, 1965), which relied on a psychodynamic view of identification, mainstream psychology has largely discarded (or, discredited, as its proponents would have you believe) psychoanalytic approaches in favour of a scientific research paradigm that has sought to reveal the processes by which children become sex-typed in their behaviour and gain a sex-linked component of their identity. Within this paradigm, social learning and cognitive-developmental perspectives dominate, which tend to note the influence of both biological and social factors, the latter figured as that which coheres biological unfolding in one linear direction or the other.

A pivotal moment in the field of the psychology of gender arose with the publication of Eleanor E. Maccoby's (1966) edited book, *The Development of Sex Differences*; several of its chapters remain to this day the foundations of research and theory on children's gender development, including Lawrence Kohlberg's (1966) in which he draws from Piagetian notions of cognitive schemata and object constancy to elucidate the development of stable gender identity and consequent sex-typing from a cognitive-developmental perspective. Gender-role identity emerges in three stages: at about two or three years of age, the child recognizes that he or she is either male or female, an awareness that is predicated in the presumption of only two sexes. This is followed by "gender stability," which occurs when the child realizes that gender identity is consistent over time (boys become men, girls become women). Then, at around six or seven years of age, children develop "gender constancy," the understanding that gender remains unchanged across situations and behaviours, which, of course, is inapplicable to those who have grownup TGNC. Nevertheless, according to cognitive theory, once the child has established himself/herself with some certainty as male or female, his/her gender identity becomes an important, self-defining category; he/she will attach greater value to gender-appropriate behaviours and will find the performance of such behaviours to be more reinforcing than gender-inappropriate behaviours (Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002).

There have been other theories since: in 1972, Money and Ehrhardt's book, *Man and Woman, Boy and Girl*, advanced a provocative one about gender identity and differentiation that continues to spark debate regarding the relative contributions of nature versus nurture. Based on research with intersex patients, Money and Ehrhardt reported that a child's gender identity is apparently shaped by that child's sex of assignment and gender-congruent rearing (gender role socialization) more than by genetic or other physiological determinants. The case of John/Joan, a

person who was determined to be a boy at the time of his birth, then was determined again within a few months to be a girl, which was decided for him when his penis was accidentally destroyed during a botched circumcision, and raised as such, until he decided himself to become a man in his teenage years, was widely thought – at first, while he was still a girl – to have confirmed Money’s theory (cf. Butler, 2001a). As Constantinople (1979) commented, the data that Money (1965) had reported was taken as evidence of a critical period for gender identity acquisition, coinciding with the advent of language acquisition, including gendered terms and phrases (“What a good boy,” “Such a pretty girl”), in which the child’s core gender identity develops consistent with the sex to which they were assigned. Obscured are the cases in which linguistic gender assignments contrast with one’s self-designation(s). Though some discover their gender through external attributions and associated parenting practices, TGNC people often report an awareness of themselves as “different” well before they acquire the language to articulate their gender self-designations (see Namaste, 2000; Serano, 2007). Many trans kids are aware of their gender identity long before expressing it to others (Factor & Rothblum, 2008; Scheim & Bauer, 2015), sometimes as early as at least four years of age (see e.g., American Association of Pediatrics, Human Rights Campaign, & American College of Osteopathic Pediatricians, 2016; Olsen et al., 2015). Societal transphobia, risk of family rejection, safety concerns, and pressure from therapies designed to discourage trans identity can all influence whether such an identity is expressed (Kennedy & Hellen, 2010).

Beginning in the 1960s, social learning theory added modelling (learning by imitation) to differential reinforcement as a process involved in gender socialization (Bandura, 1977). Children learn vicariously through observation. Focus here has tended to be on gender stereotypes (widely held beliefs about the characteristics that are appropriate for men and for

women) and “sex roles” or “gender roles” (the reflection of gender stereotypes in everyday behaviour), the “public face” of gender (see Liben & Bigler, 2002), though the “private face,” gender identity is likewise considered to be the result of a learning process that involves modelling, imitation, and reinforcement. Social learning theory rests on the assumption that boys learn to be masculine and girls to be feminine, because gender-appropriate behaviours are rewarded and inappropriate ones are punished. Parents and other socializing agents (teachers, other children, media) map out gender roles for the child; as the child is repeatedly reminded that he is a boy or she is a girl, and reinforced for doing boy/girl “things,” it becomes rewarding to think of himself as a boy or herself as a girl. Children appear, as such, to exert (unintentional) influence on their parents’ behaviours only to the extent that that influence shifts the child closer to a more accurate (normative) approximation of maleness or femaleness (Maccoby, 1992).

Despite evidence of a trend toward same-gender modelling from preschool to college (Bussey & Bandura, 1984), direct reinforcement does not play as strong a part as originally believed, nor do children always select same-gender models to imitate (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Raskin & Israel, 1981). As an intended remedy to these limitations, Perry and Bussey (1979) incorporated cognitive elements to social learning theory, as did Bandura (1986), whose social cognitive theory suggests that children, as they mature, begin to regulate their own actions through internal rewards and punishments (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, there was a surge of interest in gender cognitions whereby children come to be viewed “as active selectors and users of information pertinent to their developmental levels and personal goals” (Maccoby, 2000, p. 400). Gender schema theory (Bem, 1981; Martin & Halverson, 1981), an information-processing approach to gender typing that combines social learning and cognitive-developmental features, resulted. Once preschoolers can label their own genders, they

select a gender schema (masculine or feminine categories) that is consistent with that gender and apply those categories to themselves, which gender-types self-perceptions that then serve as additional schemata. Though the widespread reliance on gender schemata for organizing information is attributed to “social ideology” (Bem, 1985), why the only theorized option for children is to select a consistent gender schema is unclear: “gender aschematic” children, those who are unlikely to sort people, characteristics, and behaviours into masculine or feminine categories, are described as outliers, unable to “view” gender, as opposed to children who are troubled by their assigned genders and/or resist said social ideology. Children are deemed active selectors and users insofar as they select consistency.

Each theory has its proponents. Yet, despite differences between the theories’ hypothesized sequence of events and foci (e.g., the strength of the socialization pressures that children experience vs. the nature and coherence of their gender schemata), their outcomes are much the same. Once established, once the child has come to call himself male or herself female, his/her gender identity is set and thereafter usually cannot be altered with much success (Hampson & Hampson, 1961; Zucker, 2001). None question gender’s stability nor its consistency; all assume it to be binary, never self-designated, and consistent with one’s sex assigned at birth. No wonder the guiding empirical questions have always been: “In what ways, to what degree, and how consistently, did boys and girls differ in the developmental pathways taken?” (Maccoby, 2000, p. 398).

### **Trans Gender Identity Development**

All these models account for only those whose assigned and self-designated genders are imagined to be one and the same, either male or female, and fixed as such for life. TGNC people were never considered by these models’ creators, because non-cis folx are viewed by the

discipline as different kinds of people, requiring their own models of development. Of course, there are differences between the experiences of TGNC people and of cis and gender conforming people, though disagreeing with others' labelling of one's own gender does not make one a fundamentally different kind of person. As Hird (2003) astutely noted, the assumption that a stable gender identity develops from a stable morphological base has allowed clinicians and other (mainstream) researchers "to delineate between a majority 'normally' gendered population, and a minority 'deviant' population" (p. 189), the latter of whom are marked as the effect to be explained (Ansara and Hegarty, 2012). This might be why so few models of trans gender identity development exist: as I note in **Quality 1**, the mainstream focus has been squarely on locating a causal explanation for trans people's existence rather than on conceptualizing the processes by which they have developed their identities in hostile environments in the first place.

And, of the few models of trans gender identity development that do exist, few escape the pitfalls of mainstream theorization of (cis) gender identity development, nor of development more broadly, with its models' tendencies toward individualization, hierarchization (of normality and morality, for example) and cross-cultural universality, among others (see Burman, 2008). The usual structural and ethical assumptions apply here. These models are "stage models" (e.g., Bockting & Coleman, 2007; Devor, 2004), with distinct starting and end points. You start as one gender, then physically transition to the other; your development ends once you have "come out," publicly and proudly, as of that other gender with which you will be forever identified. (As I prepared this dissertation for its defense during the summer of 2019, I discovered one exception to the rule of stage-like development, Kuper, Wright and Mustanski's [2018] intersectional approach to gender identity development among TGNC young adults; theirs is a process-based model which substantiates many of the qualities of becoming I'd landed on: embodiment and



gender identity, expression and presentation are highly variable, formed as they are through “intrapersonal processes” which have the potential to support and consolidate one’s unique “gender-related” sense of self.) The stage models, though proposed by well-intentioned researchers, nonetheless repurpose the normalizing (binary) fallacy of “wrong body” telos and gender stability (to which neither becoming nor Kuper et al.’s [2018] model adhere). Their focus on the late-stage achievement of self-acceptance means that little is said substantively against the dimorphic logic of gender regulation, unlike the participants I interviewed, all of whom spoke of themselves as engaged in daily struggles for interpersonal and institutional recognition of forms of being and becoming in excess of the gender binary. That consistency and continuity of identification is expected following one’s “coming out” glosses over the difficult terrain TGNC people must navigate so that their identities are dignified by family, friends, employers, and various other governmental institutions, not to mention the violence they are susceptible to when visible and out, even within LGBT communities (see Rankin & Beemyn, 2012).

For all intents and purposes, these are models of *binary* trans gender identity development; I could find none specific to non-binary folx (see also Matsuno, in press; Matsuno & Budge, 2017). This means that MTF transsexuals are said to experience the following “identity milestones”: (1) feeling and often expressing a female gender identity from a young age, (2) repressing or hiding one’s identity in the face of hostility and/or isolation, (3) learning about and meeting other transsexual women, (4) recognizing oneself as transsexual, rather than a cross-dresser, (5) overcoming denial and internalized transphobia to accept oneself as female, (6) taking hormones and perhaps having surgery to look more like one’s self-image, (7) choosing whether and when to tell other, and developing new relationship after disclosure, and (8) having a sense of wholeness even if not always able to be seen as a woman. FTM transsexuals

experience them, too, though, of course, with the genders swapped, and in place of the transsexual woman's realization that she is not a cross-dresser, the transsexual man realizes that he is not a lesbian. Rankin and Beemyn (2012), who outlined these milestones, were the only researchers of trans development to note that what they had outlined did not entirely apply to the genderqueer individuals they interviewed for their large-scale study of transgender diversity.

Non-binary identities, on the whole, however, remain un-represented, even though approximately 35% of individuals who identify as trans primarily identify as non-binary (James et al., 2016). Despite permitting individuals to cycle through tasks across stages, depending on one's psychosocial challenges and available support systems, the contours of these stage models follow the wrong body template such that the linearity of the cis gender models, such as Kohlberg's, is maintained but just presented as a somewhat more circuitous path toward an inversely gendered outcome. What we find here is not unlike what we have found described in the *DSM's* "development and course" subsection of the "gender dysphoria" diagnosis: early onset of "pervasive cross-gender behaviors," among other symptoms, then anatomic dysphoria, followed by years of coming to terms with the fact that said symptoms represent transsexualism. Devor's (2004) model of transsexual identity formation lists the following 14 stages: (1) Abiding Anxiety, (2) Identity Confusion About Originally Assigned Gender and Sex, (3) Identity Comparisons About Originally Assigned Gender, (4) Discovery of Transsexualism, (5) Identity Confusion About Transsexualism, (6) Identity Comparisons About Transsexualism, (7) Tolerance of Transsexual Identity, (8) Delay Before Acceptance of Transsexual Identity, (9) Acceptance of Transsexualism Identity, (10) Delay Before Transition, (11) Transition, (12) Acceptance of Post-Transition Gender and Sex Identities, (13) Integration, and (14) Pride. Discovering that one is a transsexual (stages four through 10) inevitably clears one's identity

confusion (stage two) and provides “a possible course of action” (p. 52): transition (stage 11).

When the participants I interviewed had first learned about binary trans identities, however, none were any less confused about their gendered subjectivities, and this was not because they found it difficult to “accept” “the idea that they might be transsexed or transgendered” (p. 53). Many described having been quite capable of entertaining that possibility; indeed, at least three, at the time of their interviews, did identify as trans and had for some time:

Participant 3: I thought maybe I identified as a trans man and kind of explored that for a while and realized that wasn't right and slowly over time over like exploring like on the Internet, the term non-binary came up and I was like, “Oh, there's other people that feel this way” and then from there I started exploring different things. So I guess it's about the end of my Grade 10 year or near the beginning of my Grade 11 year of high school that I started really identifying as non-binary.

The hesitancy to identify with trans, then, when they first learned of it, and, for some, more recently, pertained less to non-acceptance than to its insufficiency: it connoted a medico-scientific narrative and “course of action” or else was said simply to be “too binary,” the paradigmatic options understood as only either female-to-male or male-to-female, each with their standard trajectories. The participants had preferred non-binary identities, in part, because they presupposed no standard trajectory and instead embraced ambivalence and uncertainty, as well as vacillating futures (in terms of identification, but also expression and embodiment; see also **Quality 2**). Sukie's account of “genderfluid” was characteristic:

I think being genderfluid (.) sometimes for me it's a space for me to kind of like question my identity, like, “Am I just going to transition to a different identity?” Um (.) and I think part of it is also like a way to resist a certain way of like how, whether it's Western-Eastern or like masculine-feminine identities, I think it plays with a lot of like gender presentation as well. Um, it's like that identity gives me space to let my other experiences kind of like mesh together or interact with each other so that it's not separate. ... Um, for me even like picking genderfluid was weird in a way because I know that I don't have to transition to identify as like a trans man. I don't have to go through everything just to be who people want to see. Um, but I guess for me it's hard to see something stay still.

For them, there was no “relief offered by the possibility of a transsexual or transgendered identity” (Devor, 2004, p. 55), no wholehearted belief in these labels as panaceas of confusion; never could they be fitting containers for their felt senses of gender. This is why they continued to seek out further information, mainly through “a lot of websites or forums and stuff” (Participant 3), about “alternative” genders, in what they described as sometimes protracted periods of research and experimentation with various terms of (non-binary) identification (see **Quality 1**). Throughout the latter stages of Devor’s model, binary trans folk gradually come to accept their identities, in part, by relying on others to “act as impartial expert witnesses who can validate what they feel like on the inside is real enough to be perceptible by others” (p. 56). But, as I’ve written, these participants are not usually legible to others as non-binary. Their narratives evinced no “reality testing” (p. 56), as Devor proposes, once they knew themselves to be gender independent, because, as they explained, most others would not “see them as they see themselves” (p. 62), nor was it routine for them to experience “the confirmation of having their self-image witnessed and mirrored back to them” (p. 62), which supposedly comes with transition. Post-transition (as if that were a discrete period), “feelings of gender *dysphoria* are supplanted by feelings of gender *euphoria*” (p. 63), though nothing is said about dissonance or the distress it can cause and continue to cause despite a transition (whether physical or social).

Of course, within the participants’ talk, transition featured as a contested term. Yet, for Devor, a binary physical transition is characteristic of trans development, which is also true of Piper and Mannino’s (2008) narrative family model of identity formation among transsexuals. First comes “identity foreclosure,” then “identity moratorium”; if all goes according to plan, then one will arrive at the third and final Identity Status, “identity achieved.” *A fait accompli*? Not so for all, as some never “ultimately reach this point” (p. 83), nor maintain “integration, pride, and

synthesis” (p. 83), all of which is figured as what ought to be the endpoint. Progress through these stages is labelled as a “transition” (p. 87), as it involves aspects of an incrementally more pervasive “gender transition” (p. 87), such as cross-dressing, “while at work, with family and friends” (p. 91), as well as “Going through sex ... transition” (p. 87). In Gagné et al.’s (1997) passing is the goal: for trans women, for example, that is “to be perceived as a [cis] woman and treated like a lady” (p. 504), given that “most transgendered individuals” (p. 504), they suggest, “come out quickly and cross over to the ‘other’ gender category” (p. 504). These models, as Devor (2004) acknowledges, are predicated on “underlying assumptions” (p. 44) about sex and gender: “that there are two and only two biological sexes, male and female, and that under ‘normal’ circumstances persons’ sexes are unchanging and can be definitively determined from a visual inspection of their genitalia” (p. 44), and “that there are only two social genders, men/boys and women/girls, and that under ‘normal’ circumstances persons’ gender classifications are unchanging and can be determined by casual visual inspection of persons in everyday social situations” (p. 44). Models that assume that “sex and gender are inextricably linked in a fixed and biologically natural way” (p. 44) would be of little relevance to the participants, many of whom problematized Devor’s claim that “In order for persons to socially legitimate their gender identity claims, they must ultimately have bodies which match their gender claims in socially expected ways” (p. 45).

A caveat is provided: Devor’s model “cannot possibly apply to all individuals in the same way” (p. 42); some may never experience certain of the stages, or they may repeat some, or pass through some more quickly, more slowly, or in their own order, yet the end, even if one were to “go no further than any particular stage” (p. 44), remains intractable: “Pride.” Going “no further” implies linearity: You could stop here, but there’s more to go, you know. This trajectory, the

“commonly followed path” (p. 44), though its stages can be skipped and repeated, completed at variable rates, is sequential: anxiety and pride, confusion and acceptance, dysphoria and euphoria, none, apparently, are experienced at once. They are mutually exclusive. You start anxious, you progress; you ought to end prideful. Bockting and Coleman’s (2007) model similarly outlines the developmental stages of what they called “the transgender coming-out process.” For Gagné et al. (1997), too, transgender identity formation involves “coming out” (in addition to “crossing over”). These models were forged in the image of Cass’s (1979, 1984) Homosexual Identity Formation model, which ends with “identity pride” and “identity synthesis.” For Cass, environmental factors (e.g., societal norms, family beliefs, negative events) interact with individual (i.e., needs, desires, learned behaviour) and biological (i.e., level of sexual desire) factors, such that identity formation is acknowledged to be complex and multifaceted: some individuals might not progress to the final stage should they encounter restraining environmental factors. As Johnson (2015) has detailed, subsequent critiques of Cass’s model have centred its concocting of development as “multiple, distinct, linear stages ... that a person must move through in order to develop a secure self-identity as lesbian or gay” (p. 36) – that is the only outcome. Though “this linear progression is intuitively appealing, extant research suggests that it is far from universal” (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000, p. 608). Malatino (2015) probes the neoliberal imperatives these minoritizing out-of-shame-and-into-pride coming out models, as applied to trans identity formation, repackage:

coping with transphobia, the difficult and ongoing struggle to accept and embrace bodies that aren’t cis-normative, and the affective ambivalence of navigating everyday life as an out trans [person is] reduced to a coming-out story documenting movement through insecurity toward a public declaration of pride and self-love.” (pp. 400)

The lure of such triumphalist narratives “that conclude with individualized banalities about the importance of ... finding self-fulfillment, happiness, or some other dangling existential carrot” (p. 398) is compelling and coercive: vulnerability, trauma, continued shame, negative affect, generally, are extirpated, a feat carried off by the individual themselves. These narratives seem banal, perhaps disingenuous, because, according to Malatino, “the terrain of gender transformation” (p. 398) is “inextricably bound to the diverse racial, ethnic, sexualized, classed, and bionormed inequities” (p. 398) of our time, yet these models present such “interactional, organizational, and structural barriers” (Gagné et al., 1997, p. 504) to us, if they present them at all, as extricable and individually surmountable. Devor’s (2004) says this use of pride implies not only “a personal sense of pride in oneself” (p. 65) but also “a political stance” (p. 65) by which one is both “open about [one’s] transsexualism or transgenderism” (p. 65) and “working for transgender political rights [and] toward greater social understanding and acceptance” (p. 65). Elsewhere, Devor (1997) describes “identity pride” as “fully” and “publicly” claiming one’s “bifurcated” history (e.g., that one was assigned female but identifies as male) as a challenge to the restrictive binarisms of the dominant gender scheme, as if those who chose to pass, as Hansbury (2005) critiqued, were “developmentally stuck ... misguided victims of the heteropatriarchy, suffering from internalized transphobia” (p. 247), even though such folks may actually garner much pride from their ability to pass. Yet the perils and possibilities of such “open” visibility – Who gets seen? Who gets celebrated? Who gets murdered? – remain so undertheorized as to render Devor’s invocation of politics suspect if not apolitical. The onus is placed on the individual to maintain their “identity pride” through “continual effort and vigilance” (Devor, 2004, p. 65), a black-and-white, inward-turning imperative that has little to

say about the new forms of social governance associated with the juridico-discursive language of individual rights and single-issue politics I've outlined in the **Queer studies and ethics** section.

Finally, implicit in these models is the notion that, once you have transitioned, even if “just” socially, to the other gender, you *stay* there, as that gender. No mention is made of the sort of (welcomed) ambivalence and uncertainty regarding future identifications and embodiments that “non-binary” was said to have named for the participants. That one might willingly change one’s identifications or fluidly express one’s gender – and that such changes or fluidity might not mean for the individual that their original change of identification was mistaken or that they are searching for *the* one truest, most authentic expression of their gender – runs antithetical to these models’ view of postoperative stability (of identification, expression, embodiment) as one’s “final destination.” The coding of stability as preferable – indeed, as a good developmental outcome – is evident in the mainstream child literature, whose follow-up (desistence) studies (conducted by leading “gender dysphoria in children” researcher-clinicians) have been misinterpreted in media, among the lay public, and in medical and scientific journals to indicate that over 80% of trans children will grow up to be cis. These studies are often invoked as justification for delaying a child’s social transition; doing so may prevent them from de-transitioning in the future (see Temple Newhook et al., 2018). The assumption is that a second transition would be distressing, even traumatic, though evidence is thin (Ehrensaft et al., 2018): one case study of two children at Steensma and Cohen-Kettenis’s (2011) clinic. At another clinic (Edwards-Leeper & Spack, 2012), however, a girl, who had transitioned twice, and her mother, expressed gratitude for her opportunity to live as a boy for a time; they believed her mental health would have suffered had she been pressured to live as a girl for her entire childhood. Future adult distress is conceivable, not certain, but nevertheless supersedes the known



childhood needs: “It is conceivable that the drawbacks of having to wait until early adolescence ... may be less serious than having to make a social transition twice” (Steensma & Cohen-Kettenis, 2011, p. 649). In the adult literature, any movement back, to the original gender, is represented through a discourse of regret: the transition is regretful, a mistake, because the transitioned individual was never truly trans, but rather its opposite, cis, all along – much like the desisting child. Could one not be trans and then cis or some other self-designated gender? Studies of postoperative transsexuals vary considerably in terms of outcome criteria – success has been defined as a combination of subjective satisfaction, mental stability, social-economic functioning, among other indicators – but regret, specifically, trades on the sort of essentialism to which Ansara and Hegarty (2012) referred: trans and cis people are different kinds of people, you are either one or the other, and with this “neo-binary,” as Hansbury (2011) calls it, comes two options for development. Becoming, in contrast, recognizes a plurality of trajectories.

### **Becoming Non-Binary**

Garner (2014a) locates the origins of becoming with Heraclitus and Aristotle; they had used it as ontological concept that described change and movement in opposition to the stasis of being. The contemporary form of this usage can be located within certain poststructuralist feminist theories of the body as a way of undermining the dichotomies of nature/culture, body/technology, and self/other (see e.g., Braidotti, 2002; Butler, 1990b, 1993; Grosz, 1994, 2011; Shildrick, 2002). Many of these theories are grounded in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1972, 1980) version of becoming, which theorizes a destabilization of being and the structures of power associated with it. For them, becoming was both an ontological and an ethical position that involves movement from official, “molar” entity to indeterminable, “molecular” non-identity, extending beyond the limits of dominant corporeal and conceptual logics. Molarity

implies a tendency toward unity or oneness: “When we say that a molarity is grasped as a whole, the emphasis is on the *as*. The particles are still there, no less numerous than before. A molarity remains a multiplicity – only a disciplined one” (Massumi, 1992, p. 55). Binarization, rigidification, categorization, and stratification evince that discipline; free-flowing desire is obstructed, channelled into specific categories of identification, such that the molarized individual’s actions are made to conform to those prescribed by its assigned category – the cultural image of unity. Power differentials are produced, such as those between men and women, and dualisms (e.g., masculine/feminine) perpetuated. The molecular line involves “‘particles’ and ‘emissions’ which ‘scatter’ the aggregations of molar, binarized, segmented lines” (Williams, 1998, p. 72), separating itself, disaggregating, from the first line, such that we might locate the “lines of flight” through which desire could be released from its hierarchization and regulation.

Deleuze and Guattari endorsed “nomadic” wanderings along such lines of flight, creating alternative trajectories that would counteract the inhibitory effects of molar and (to a lesser extent) molecular segmentations by rupturing them, “[breaking] a territory from its boundaries” (Jordan, 1995, p. 132). Trained as a philosopher and a psychoanalyst, respectively, they critiqued the patterns of knowledge that governed the disciplines in which they were schooled, notably the oedipalized psychosexual development of the subject. As a molar assemblage, psychoanalysis and its oedipal narrative limited and restricted expression – not the expression of any innate aspects of us but rather of what we could become. Their version of desire does not subscribe to the normative phallogentric model of lack or loss, nor is it associated with normative heterosexuality; they dispel with the prevailing psychoanalytic notion of women’s bodies as lacking and castrated, along with the oppositional positioning of “woman” as the necessary

negative or other of “man.” Desire, here, is positive, active, and inventive (“desiring-production”), non-teleological and unpredictable; it breaks through, or “deterritorializes,” categorization; its forms exist in us as “desiring-machines.” The de-oedipalized body becomes a “Body without Organs,” the space “where desiring-production is transformed from a general principle into a particular desiring-machine” (p. 127) not governed by “phases” of development and not organized into “bundles” or knowable “organs.” This is the body “before and in excess of the coalescence of its intensities and their sedimentation into meaningful, organized, transcendent totalities constituting the unity of the subject and of signification” (Grosz, 1994, p. 170); this is not an annihilated body, however, but rather a self-less one “in suspended animation” (Buchanan, 1997, p. 70), an indeterminate state, a body which must be interpreted with reference to what it can do and not according to its assigned identities and their conventional meanings.

One could write an entire dissertation alone clarifying and explicating the complexities of Deleuze and Guattari’s affirmative theory of desire, as well as of all the neo-concepts therein (I’m sure a number have been written), but for our purposes what we can take from their criticism of the capture of desire by molar institutions is yet another mode of understanding power and the production of meaning, as well as “escape” – that is, what the body could become if released from organization, government, and control, when it has become the surface of the free production of desire through the intensities, fluxes and flows of its constitutive assemblages. Desire without reference to lack or loss, nor the opposite (the illusion of presence and completion), requires the dissolution of subject and object, in addition to various other metaphysical dualisms. In place of absence and presence is becoming. Braidotti (2000) described “the enfleshed Deleuzian subject” as formed “in-between” the binaries, defying their established

modes of theoretical representation: “Neither a sacralised inner sanctum, nor a pure socially shaped entity ... it is a folding-in of external influences and a simultaneous unfolding outwards of affects” (p. 159) (Sounds psychosocial, no?) As Garner (2014a) explains, the affective body of becoming is as much outside, as it is inside, itself, webbed in its relations, such that firm distinctions between mind/body, inside/outside, subjectivity/identity, and psyche/social cease to matter. Becomings represent the zigzagging processes that create difference, manifesting the “counterdesire” (Massumi, 1992) to leave the over-coded body behind, to escape molarity (non-consensual categorization) through molecular transformations.

Becoming has become a highly productive concept in transgender studies, given its vision of the body and potential for reconsidering the nature of body modification, such as the accusation that TGNC bodies are unnatural or constructed (in comparison with cis bodies). Sullivan (2006) most influentially took up becoming in relation “‘trans’ practices and procedures” (p. 553) with her examination of the similarities and differences between gender confirming surgeries and other forms of bodily modification, such as tattooing, piercing and branding, as well as cosmetic surgery. She contends that all these other forms of bodily modification can be considered trans practices, because they are “[examples] of the many ambiguous and complex ways in which bodies are continually changed and changing” (p. 553) not just “a means by which one moves from one sex/gender to the ‘opposite sex/gender’” (p. 553). Of concern, though, is how, across various discourses, critics, through their moral judgements, have established dichotomies between “good” and “bad” forms of embodiment: in some accounts of the differences between transsexualism and transgender, as well as between “non-mainstream body modification” and cosmetic surgery, “the assumption seems to be that forms of body modification that do not *explicitly* set themselves up in opposition to so-called

‘normative’ ideals and ways of being are politically suspect” (p. 553). This is the conformist/subversive dichotomy described above, according to which transsexuals, like those who have undergone (“mainstream”) cosmetic surgery, are understood as reaffirming normatively gendered standards of beauty, unlike those seemingly autonomous (presumably transgender-identified) subjects who have “intentionally” used surgery to challenge masculine and feminine modes of bodily being.

Of course, intentionality is a rather unstable foundation upon which to build a theory of the relative subversiveness of various forms of body modification (see **Quality 3**), but the point of Sullivan’s associating trans practices with other forms of body modification is to “enable a move away from essentialized, essentializing and/or pathologizing theories of trans embodiment and the social and political implications of such” (p. 554). In her formulation, becoming is “part of the process through which we all negotiate the boundary between self and other, and through which we perpetually transform ourselves in relation on an Other” (Stryker & Whittle, 2006, p. 552). Opposed to articulating yet another moral condemnation of the “unnatural,” Sullivan (2006) argues that we have disavowed and projected onto the marked body of the so-called unnatural other “this inter-subjective relation of marking and being marked, of becoming and unbecoming” (p. 558), including the modificatory processes, practices and procedures that create, form, and transform each and every one of us. Such is the trans-formative character of embodiment: ambiguous, unpredictable, and open-ended, “entwined in (un)becoming rather than ... simply mired in being unless [bodies] undergo explicit, visible, and identifiable transformational procedures” (p. 561). Conformity and subversion, natural and unnatural, self and other, being and becoming – she presents them as false oppositions in this deconstruction of humanist logic. For her, being *is* becoming; the nature of the body is always already constructed;

(gender) identity, likewise, is “always already relational, and in process” (p. 562). Fundamentally an interrogation into the operations of power (and resistance), this perspective makes visible the identity-forming technologies within both discourse and practice.

I chose becoming for this reason: to move gender in mainstream psychology toward an alternative to its current standing as a teleologically-ordained developmental achievement inside the mind of a supposedly unitary, rational being.<sup>18</sup> Like transition, becoming refers to the ways in which people move across socially defined boundaries away from an assigned gender. But, unlike transition, becoming does not conjoin expectations of ongoing, indeterminate process with expectations of eventual arrival but instead names a beginning to be, now in progress, with no standard trajectory, no finished crossing from one gender to the other. Also troubled here is the notion that there exist two kinds of development, one that describes the unmarked norm, the other its opposite (transsexual, transgender). The qualities of becoming I detail below are not without their relevance to those of us whose self-designated and assigned genders are selfsame (see also Shotwell & Sangrey, 2009): the binary gendered among us, I’m sure, have felt ambivalently identified with traditional gender codes; have experienced disjunctures among their intrasubjective experience of gender, their expression of it, and others’ gendered readings of them and their bodies; have experienced shifts in those disjunctures; have sought to assemble their own versions of “man” or “woman”; have sought recognition of those versions; have had those versions invalidated, policed, corrected. As noted earlier, relational psychoanalytic theories of gender, among many, many others, theorize cis development as *relational*, intersubjective, non-dualistic, and non-teleological; gender there, as here, is “conceived as a complex field (imagine a cube filled with floating dots), in contrast to the traditional claim that gender follows in accord with a masculine/feminine gender binary (imagine two dots connected by a taut line)

founded on anatomical and developmental determination” (Corbett, 2008, p. 840). The participants, too, invoked comparable metaphors of complex topologies (spectrum, matrix) to describe their “nomadic” subjectivities, just as did Deleuze and Guattari wrote of “rhizomes” as what the true map of all “lines” (molar and molecular, as well as the lines of flight) would resemble; not subject to centralized control or structure, rhizomatic networks produce offshoots in unforeseen directions. The nomadic way of being in, and open to, this world (of cubes, spectra, matrices, rhizomes) names an ethics or “pragmatics” for Deleuze and Guattari of becoming that has no beginning or end.<sup>19</sup> Of course, for those whose self-designated and assigned genders are not selfsame, the below-detailed qualities appear heightened – perhaps they are felt to be more distressing, but also more freeing – though I invite us to consider what we can *all* learn from the participants’ critical reflections on naming themselves into existence and subsequent becoming of that which they had named.

**Quality 1: Shifts from “why” to “how.”** Clinical research on transsexualism has long sought causal explanations for the condition (e.g., Benjamin, 1966; Coates, Friedman, & Wolfe, 1991; Stoller, 1968, 1975), many of which were, at first, overtly pathologizing: repressed homosexuality, perversion, masochism, neurosis, psychosis, character or personality disorder, and brain trauma have all been implicated (see Denny, 2004). More recently proposed ones include brain structure (e.g., Guillamon, Junque, & Gómez-Gil, 2016) and functioning (e.g., Case, Brang, Landazuri, Viswanathan, & Ramachandran, 2017), genetic factors (e.g., Heylens et al., 2012), and prenatal hormones (e.g., Wallien, Zucker, Steensma, & Cohen-Kettenis, 2008), though both research studies and clinical experience have failed to produce data that support robustly any of them (Saketopoulou, 2014). With cis people, researchers have questioned *how* they developed into men and women, not *why* men and women exist; though whatever processes

produce gender variance also produce gender normativity (Goldner, 2011a; Lev, 2004), only the pathologized identities, the anomalies, as Johnson (2015) notes, are subjected to such “frameworks for imagining the answer to questions of causality” (p. 94).<sup>20</sup> For the participants, the question of “why” – *Why am I trans? Why am I non-binary?* – never arose; what did was “how,” as in: Now that I know how I identify (“non-binary,” or some version thereof), *how* do I go about making that a legible and livable gender? Though I never asked them “why,” their interviews were noticeably absent of any sort of etiological musing, which I’d noted then was very unlike the narratives of gay and queer identification I’d heard when conducting interviews for my Master’s thesis; some of those participants seemed almost preoccupied with the “born this way” discourse that was so popular at the time (Vasilovsky, 2014; Vasilovsky & Gurevich, 2017). As Participant 21 remarked: “If you have a non-binary identity, you have to invent your own way to be, so you ask yourself, ‘How should I be?’” If the available genders – man, woman, trans man, trans woman – “didn’t represent [them], didn’t fit” (Sukie), then by what means would they make theirs viable?

That knowing of oneself as something other than what had been assigned to them began many of the participant’s narratives of becoming non-binary-identified:

Participant 4: Even before I had the words, I knew I wasn’t a girl but like I knew I wasn’t a boy either like I was something else– actually something more.

...

Participant 19: Yeah whatever I felt that wasn’t captured by what my parents and teachers and all the people around me were calling me.

Words and phrases like “something more,” “not belonging” (Participant 2), and “being extra” (Participant 3) speak to what Stephenson and Papadopoulos (2006) have called the “excess of experience” (p. xvi) which “resides inside the social space” (p. xv) of that experience. In this



case, that excess, that “something more,” denotes gendered subjectivities “that aren’t captured by” established, nor assigned, discursive positionings. The emergence of such subjectivities in the “social space” (of the home, of schools) calls to attention the psychic life of subjectification (see also Papadopoulos, 2008): according to Frosh (2003), “there is always something ‘excessive’ about psychic functioning, and ... this ‘excess’ leaks into the social, structuring it and giving it intensity and significance” (p. 1554-1555). Not just a “knowing” that occupies an internal space as a kind of mediation of reality, this excess has positive, material effects, directing our activities and investing our social worlds with meaning. Though normative ideals are inculcated as a kind of psychic identity, the psyche can “[exceed] the imprisoning effects of the discursive demand to ... become a coherent subject” (Butler, 1997, p. 86). Butler’s account of the psychic life of power, as with her earlier works, is focused on the norms of the heterosexual matrix:

The psychic operation of the norm offers a more insidious route for regulatory power than explicit coercion, one whose success allows its tacit operation within the social. And, yet, being psychic, the norm does not merely reinstate social power, it becomes formative and vulnerable in highly specific ways. The social categorizations that establish the vulnerability of the subject to language are themselves vulnerable to ... psychic ... change. (pp. 21)

Exposing gender’s “performative failures,” its imitative character, in this way, she proposed, embroils the entire phantasmatic scene of gendered identification, including intrapsychic-interpersonal distributions of power, in addition to the institutional and discursive conditions that structure the subject’s social regulation (see also Butler, 1990a, 1991, 1993; Elliot & Roen, 1998; Martin, 1994).

As the phantasmatic trajectory and resolution of desire (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973), identification need not seek a predetermined path: the participants' accounts presumed complex crossings of identification and desire capable of working with and through, as opposed to outside and against, the dominant terms of gender identification so as to form into possible selves the identity one knows oneself as. Participant 19's trans-masculine demiboy identification, for example, had been consolidated following "a new-ish revelation" that they themselves were a "system" elaborately comprised of "different gendered facets," all with their own "feelings," affective tendencies, "personalities," and fantasies, as well as behavioural repertoires, "styles," and preferred pronouns. (They had identified at least four "facets" and labelled them "the host," "white," "blue," "the child"; see Appendix F). Non-binary identification's "failure to imitate" does not assume "counteridentification" (see Pêcheux, 1982; Rancière, 1995/1999, 2007), a turn against the symbolic system, so much as "disidentification," which, following Muñoz (1999), I understand as "the ways in which identity is enacted by minority subjects who must work with/resist the conditions of (im)possibility that dominant culture generates" (p. 6). Muñoz's disidentification implicates a psychic reality at the borders or margins, neither that of the "insider" nor that of the "outsider"; it "works to restructure [identity and identification] from within" (p. 28) the confines of the majoritarian culture. Thus, for the participants, who understood themselves to be operating *within*, as opposed to beyond, the binary, their (dis)identificatory practices "negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative [gender]" (p. 4). To "activate their own senses of self" (p. 5), the cultural logics of the binary must be engaged:

Participant 3: Yeah, oftentimes it's taking elements of both ["boy" and "girl"] and um different things like that and kind of combining it in my own way and it's um (.) sorry

I'm just trying to think, like (.) um, yeah that's really the best way I could put it into words I guess, say recombining it, I just keep coming up to the word collage, it's like a gender collage, which is the most art student thing I have ever said I think?

...

Sukie: I guess um, part of me sometimes feels like it's a rejection from [masculinity and femininity], like a two-way rejection, I guess. It's like being in and not completely fitting in to one category or the other, but also not being out either ... Um, I guess that can be like a rejection of mainstream um I don't know, stereotypes? Like ideals. I don't reject them [masculinity and femininity] but more like you can only be really progressive or really traditional um so I guess it is kind of a rejection of various kind of like um (.) heights of intensity.

...

Participant 4: I think in terms of my relationship to the gender binary, I think that like, it's really hard to— I feel like it would be very difficult for me to reject it wholesale when I live and have been raised with like this like very fundamental deep understanding of like this concept? ... The reason why I've gone down this path [of non-binary identification] is because I decided that both of those things ["man" and "woman"] were like, insufficient categories and then like, figuring out how to navigate them still.

This was so even for those who identified as agender and post-gender: they spoke less of a lack of gender than of feeling "neutral" (hence, Participant 2's identification as neutrois), like "more of a person than of a gender" (Participant 18), or of having an unknown or "undefinable" gender (Participant 14). Participant 8, who identified as agender, addressed this lack of lack: "I guess I kind of, like, flow in between both, like, like a fifty-fifty, um, although sometimes a little bit more feminine, um, just because gendering stuff is a thing."

Forming themselves as subjects was structured through multiple and sometimes conflicting sites of identification, including those that were not meant to accommodate certain of their investments which, too, could be multiple and sometimes conflicting. Participant 15, for example, had "always yearned and desired to become more masculine," "especially as a child [who] was perceived as female," because "femininity was always presented to [them] as the weaker sex," and "[they] didn't want to be weak." As they grew older, their "[wish] to construct

[themselves] as someone big, and strong,” “to embody the strength of the masculine archetype,” remained, though they came to “realize” that this embodiment could be accomplished through feminine identifications, too, “that there is definitely a lot of strength, and a lot of resilience in being soft, and [that] being perceived as soft, and emotional, and vain are not necessarily negative or ‘weak.’” Alternately, “the masculine archetype” to which they had aspired now meant for them an “ultimate weakness”:

That’s definitely something that’s very hard for a lot of people to understand and reconcile with [that] being loud and arrogant, and— being loud and talking over people could ultimately be the display of ultimate weakness, because of the— like because of the fragility, and wanting to reconcile the fragility with taking up a lot of space.

Their “relationship with femininity” has become one of newfound entwinement; with regard to masculinity, “[they are] searching for another source to validate that, um part of [themselves],” a “less misogynist type.” According to anecdotal reports from clinicians and a handful of small studies of trans youth (e.g., Aitken et al., 2015), throughout the past 15 years, the “sex ratio” of adolescents referred to gender identity clinics shifted, such that the majority are now AFAB. An emerging explanation among mainstream researcher-clinicians of childhood gender dysphoria for this reversal is “social contagion”: one methodologically-flawed (see Restar, 2019), yet oft-cited study by Lisa Littman (2018), for which a correction (Littman, 2019) and an apology (Heber, 2019) have since been published, concludes that interacting with trans-themed social media and/or having TGNC friends “contributes” to the “sudden or rapid onset” of “gender dysphoria,” among AFAB individuals, in particular, at puberty – or so this sample of parents of transgender-identified adolescents reported. Zucker speculates that pubertal AFAB individuals are especially susceptible to “rapid onset gender dysphoria” (ROGD) via peer influence, because they, around that age, become “aware that they are perceived as sex objects” (Keating, 2019, para. 36) and consequently “feel more alienated from the category of being a girl” (para. 36);

trans identification results from their sexualization and objectification. As I describe in **Quality 5**, the participants spoke at length about the psychic repercussions of others invalidating their identities as “trendy” or a fad, as the social contagion theory of ROGD implies (for critiques of the social contagion and ROGD constructs, see Serano, 2018, 2019), and at no point did any of the AFAB participants, including Participant 15, consider the misogynistic coupling of femininity with weakness to have goaded their non-binary identifications. Most of them continued to be misgendered (and mistreated) *as* women; some said they had been sexually harassed by men despite their own more masculine presentations.

As opposed to some sort of strategic or self-preserving flight from feminine identification, these participants spoke of uncoupling misogynistic associations so as to open feminine sites of identification for themselves, as evidenced by Participant 15’s realization that femininity is not inherently weak: “In this construction I’m finding value in something [femininity] that’s been devalued ... and now I’m trying to find a kind of masculinity that works for me.” Kira had come to recognize “what else masculinity can be” by “dissociating the kind of toxic masculinity [their abusive father] embodied [from Kira’s] own.” Like femininity, the “social construct of masculinity” (Kira) was said to have its hegemonic forms, to be sure (see Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), but “softer” permutations (see Bridges, 2014; O’Neill, 2015) had been located and enacted. Kira further described having identified with “radical, um, effectively cis lesbian writers from the seventies and eighties,” as well as with contemporary “butch culture and femme culture, at the same time.” These identifications were moulded into what came to be Kira’s identity as a genderqueer trans woman:

I understood that like these practices [of butch and femme cultures] are not cis, they’re not cisnormative, they’re not heteronormative, and then by embodying them, I’m like being not only specifically queer, but also in a sense, like— ’cause to me butch and femme in some sense also are genderqueer. And one way I’ve reconciled this is by labelling

them and modelling them in my mind as genderqueer. And ever since I accepted that, then it was also at the same time easier to accept my lesbianism.

The gendered experiences described to me did not line up with prevailing (cis) cultural symbols and ideals in the expected ways, and one result is the transfiguration of certain identificatory sites: Participant 15's femininity is non-binary, Kira's has rendered radical lesbianism and butch/femme identifications non-cis. Golder (2011) has shown that the tendency implicit in most conventional theories of (gender) identification is to formulate that process in terms of likeness (to the same-sexed parent) and difference (from the opposite-sexed one), as if masculinity and femininity reside inside coherently gendered parents who transfer their respective genders to their like-bodied children. The boy who calls himself a girl, therefore, has identified with his mother and dis-identified with his father. Goldner's point is that these theories need not reify the binary, as is their tendency: Could both parents not channel either (any) gender? And, why must we remain within the familial scene? She encourages us to theorize subjectivity beyond the desires and conflicts of a small cast of domestic characters:

[A]s families weaken and mass culture fills the void with its ever-increasing powers of penetration, we should not presume a child's male or female gender reflects an identification with their mother or father, so much as with mother or father's authorized *access* to femininity and masculinity. (pp. 162)

Just as a child's enthrallment with gender tropes and props cannot be reduced to the relational scaffolding upon which it is built, neither can non-normative identifications be consigned exclusively to the status of *cross* identification (see Corbett, 1998). Gender, for all of us, is built though the accrual of an infinite array of exchanges (Corbett, 2008), between us and our caregivers, our social worlds, our culture, its available practices and technologies, our bodies. The participants' talk makes this explicit – that the structuring of gendered subjectivities, trans

and cis, non-binary and binary, emerge from this “complex and chaotic open nonlinear system” (p. 846). No one develops outside this system, with its norms, its established terms and sites of identification, its expected patterns of investment, but neither does anyone develop as a simple mechanical reiteration of such norms (see Corbett, 2001): for those who have come to view themselves as in excess of this normative structuring, the sort of disidentification at play reveals not the possibility of a “radical refusal to identify” (Butler, 1997, p. 149) so much as the possibilities of stubborn, passionate attachments to a multitude of forms and types of femininity and masculinity that are maintained, withdrawn, reattached in multiple, contestatory, and ultimately (hopefully) self-affirming ways. What is foregrounded here is what Muñoz (1999) has called the “lost object of identification” (p. 30): the new (non-binary) possibilities that had been foreclosed, disavowed, disguised, or otherwise evacuated by the regulatory system of binary gender (see also Goldner, 1991, 2003).

These processes of disidentification (with one’s assigned gender), and of reidentification (with what will be one’s self-designated gender), established for the participants an awareness of gendered subjectivities for which there existed few representational precedents. While these participants talked about “looking for labels that matched [their] own identity” (Suki), a distinction between “gender identity” (their own) and “gender identities” (the available labels) surfaced. The term they most used to describe their intrasubjective experience of gender was “gender identity,” though they relied on other kindred descriptors, such as “knowing,” as I’ve detailed, but also “a felt sense” (Participant 23), “my gendered self” (Kira), “the gender I am now” (Participant 19), all connoting a first-person perspective. When invited by me to elaborate, many invoked variants of “feeling,” but not in the sense of a confluence of affects, nor simply of body sensations, so much as an ineffable “something,” a “personal,” embodied awareness of

one's gender, which they said they had struggled to verbalize since establishing awareness of that something. It was not uncommon for me to hear "I don't know" in response to my invitations to elaborate:

Alex: What's that feeling like? I mean, how'd you describe it, if you could?

Participant 8: I, it's, I'm not sure how to put it, like I just know that's how it is for me, that's my gender, I'm not that or that or whatever but I'm this.

...

Alex: Could you tell me more about how you knew?

Participant 18: I don't know, I just knew.

...

Alex: Yeah. Why does it feel right?

Participant 23: Yeah still trying to figure that out. It's definitely like, um [laughter] yeah—I don't think I have like a response for that. It just does. I can't put my finger on it.

They pointed out that "no one really ever knows" (Suki); however, with cis identities, "you don't even really think about *why*, you could, but that's just never really a question that comes up," whereas for TGNC people "it's like, 'you need to justify your existence and why you came to be.'" Who actually has infallible knowledge of their own gender? Is there such a thing as feeling like a man or like a woman, a primordial sensation inside, like hunger, pain or fatigue, with which one could consult? Perhaps not (see Overall, 2013), but cis people, however, have been permitted "first-person authority" (Bettcher, 2009) with respect to this knowledge, whereas non-binary folx are required, as Suki asserted, to justify themselves:

Participant 11: I don't know how to describe that feeling. And people are like, "Well how do you know you're non-binary?" and I'm like, "I don't know, how do you know that you're cis? Like literally can you explain that? 'Cause I don't know what that feels like." It's a weird conversation 'cause I don't know if I do actually feel different about gender from a lot of cis people. I just know I made different decisions about it. Um, it's the only thing that I know for sure because I'm not in their heads and I know lots of people who



feel discomfort with their birth-assigned gender even when they're still cis because the way we use gender in this culture harms everyone at some point. Hooray!

To say what one's gender is, based on a knowing, feeling or sense, is primarily a moral, not an epistemic, claim: it is not a statement about how we know what gender we are but rather who is entitled to legislate our gender. In these cases of "not knowing" how to articulate that knowing, participants would usually double down on their first-person standpoint ("the gender I am"), such that "I" came to stand-in for the difficult-to-verbalize. As Participant 18, who identified as agender, stated: "I am no gender." Participant 13 described their selection of genderqueer thusly:

For me, genderqueer has really worked because I guess I always felt as though I was just being me. [laughter] And I didn't really feel like I necessarily identified with a particular gender or another one. Um but that there were boxes that kept on kind of— I kept on comparing myself to and finding that none of the premade boxes really fit. And then genderqueer felt like a kind of non-box that really worked in many ways.

This sort of ontologizing ("I was just being me") might seem to suggest an atemporal, passive gendered beingness, but I did not find that to be the case, for these standpoints (knowings) were said to be animated by a "will" to do, to be symbolized. Teo (2017) has proposed complicating our theories of subjectivity so that they include, in addition to the first-person perspective, "move-points" and "do-points," the former indexing a change in one's originally articulated position, the latter the doing of things that express said position. Move-points here found their own articulation through the common metaphors to describe one's intrasubjective gender, such as the spectrum and the matrix:

Participant 4: Um, and like this is like a very like one thing you hear all the time at like workshops on gender identity or whatever where people say like, "It's not binary, it's a spectrum." Um, I feel like deeper than that, I see it as less a spectrum and like a little more abstracter than that? So, it's not like a slow fade or it's not a gradient, it's like a galaxy where there are different points and like maybe these two qualities are really similar but they're like on— they're like far from each other. Um and they don't need to be related, but they can be. ... Like on a spectrum there's like something on either end, right? Then that to me also suggestive of like, um opposites?

...

Peter: I think of it not just like a continuum where on one end you have one and then the other on the other end but more of a spectrum, like 3-D or something. Um, so you can float all around it and there's different kinds of femininities and masculinity of like all these different genders and sometimes you're more here or there up here down there.

...

Participant 13: Like one really prominent way of thinking about that and the gender binary just essentially being these two collections of like attributes and titles and ideas that are sort of stamped onto something that is much more varied and diverse. So, it's like a really arbitrary sort of like drawing of boundaries on something which is much, much more complex than that. Um, and then specifically just laying out like this very rigid understanding of masculinity and femininity as isolated from one another. Um, yeah, it's like opposites in some ways. I feel like those ideas have sort of evolved now when people talk about a spectrum [but] it's still like this very linear idea where like you're allowed to inhabit a point. Um, which I— again it doesn't really feel like it works for my experience.

...

R.E.: Most people just see it as two points and a line in-between so even the existence of the line is sort of— but I see it more as like a, three dimensional plane you can land in any quadrant and any point and you can be really far away from anything and, I guess, I don't know what other metrics you might use it by. Like maybe masculine feeling but femme presenting or something like that? And you can end up at like a point way out from like the origin. But when you try to reduce that to just a line it's actually not telling you very much information at all.

Peter's and R.E.'s artefacts, for example, address the three-dimensional quality of non-binary subjectivity. Participant 19 likened gender categories, and their own, to clouds:

They're just sort of more, like, they're not really solid, but they have a form, sort of and they move but they're not like water, they're not like the tides, but they're also not, like, hard, not like earth, more like— and lighter too, like, not very, like, my gender feels wispy like it— it's not, not really something you would consider to have weight, but it still exists (.) it's not heavy, really. I don't know if that's just, like, way too abstract.

For some, they “floated” (Peter) throughout, not just along, this spectrum, some days waking and “feeling more on the femme side of things” (Participant 13), some days feeling themselves to be elsewhere. The matrix (or “galaxy”) was preferred by others for its explicitly multidimensional possibilities: “you can be a little bit of both at the same time, like maybe being more ‘mannish’

and a little less womanly, or like a lot less of one and more of the other” (Participant 19). And, of course, with genderfluid identities, the expectation of intrasubjective and potential identificatory change is self-evident. No one could say for certain what might prompt feeling one way or another. As Participant 6 said: “I wake up and it’s like, ‘Okay, I guess this is the kind of day we’re having today,’ and then I just figure myself out and move on with my life.”

Despite faltering to put into words an account of non-binary subjectivity, including its changeability, what was presented as undeniably certain was that willing of symbolization – to express or “say” to others what one “knows” or “feels” about one’s own gender. The specifics for each of them in terms of how they would do/say so in concrete life domains and contexts varied and was presented to me as continually mediated through interactions with others, as well as embedded within larger contexts, contexts that had occasioned investments in a sociocultural-niche, barely-intelligible (sometimes self-made) identificatory site:

Sukie: And so, with gender it *is* about like “Oh, so how do you represent yourself?” You do sometimes feel like you’re out of your own skin but you still kind of like push through it because you feel like there’s some sort of effect you want to have on people or um, I guess kind of that’s the purpose with a label and ways it comes together. I know I need one because it makes sense of myself for me but then I hope I can make that happen for the people around me.

In seeking to make “happen” what was felt to be possible in subjectivity, many participants said they sought both to support the sociocultural circulation of non-binary as a legible and livable gender identity and to live legibly as non-binary in their own personalized way through this self-reflexive onto-formative process. Assembling new (non-binary) identities for themselves, as such, meant the participants had been engaged in the knotty task of becoming recognizable as differently gendered beings for those others who themselves have never “known” non-binary subjectivity:

Kira: I imagine gender as being models where you can assign some of these categories– or assign some of these activities or values or preferences or expressions to them. And in my mind, I often associate certain of those categories or ideas or beliefs with my own internal identities and expectations. (.) I’m just trying to think this though, because at the same time, I’ve not only created these models, internal models, but I’ve also superimposed them on myself and others. ... But I also tend to believe that, like, my models of [gender] are, like, incomplete. How can I say what is a “real gender” for someone else based on my own [models]? Though I wish that the gender I know of myself would be recognized by others who make assumptions from their own expectations, values, preferences, beliefs.

In her examination of the ways of knowing and modes of truth that forcibly define intelligibility for transsexuals, Butler (2001) wrote: “When we ask what the conditions of intelligibility are by which the human emerges, by which the human is recognized ... we are asking about conditions of intelligibility composed of norms, of practices, that have become presuppositional, without which we cannot think the human at all” (p. 621). Foucault, too, had broached “the relationship between variable orders of intelligibility and the genesis and knowability of the human” (p. 621); he called this the politics of truth which pertains to those relations of power that circumscribe in advance what will and will not count as truth (see Foucault, 1985). This politics has us ask: What may I become in a world whose limits of gender are already set out for me? How do I become what I am when what I am has had no place in the given regime of truth?

***Non-binary gender expressions.*** A common (Cartesian) belief is that our expressions of gender function as “outer” signs of an “inner” gender: the body here is rendered an empty vessel of the self, upon and through which the mind’s gender is materialized (see Burkitt, 1998). Such mind/body splits underwrite those narratives of being “born in the wrong body” and of “having the brain of the other gender.” As Participant 2 – who advocated a philosophy of “neutral monism,” the view that the mind and the body are two ways of organizing or describing the same elements, which are themselves neutral (i.e., neither mental nor physical) – declared:

“Westerners are way too dualist in their thinking.” Many lamented the futility of recognition-via-

visibility of one's expression or embodiment of one's identity: "They think you can just change your body or like how it looks and other stuff but that doesn't mean they'll really see you" (Participant 24); "The way that you express and how that's read doesn't equal your gender" (Participant 8). This was so even for those who had undergone various gender confirming procedures: "It's not just a matter of intention" (Participant 15; see also **Quality 3**). Unintended misattributions of one's gender expression would prove to be a sometimes-insurmountable hurdle to recognition.

The history of that truth to which Butler and Foucault referred is excavated and read through a history of bodies, which, for them, were sites of power and resistance. As Salamon (2010) explained, "Bodies can only be understood, only become legible, through their historically contingent specificity" (p. 79). Their legibility is produced through subjection, as I've detailed, such that they "bear the evidence of a power that is nonlocalized and dispersed" (p. 79). The disciplinary regimes that produce bodies as gendered comprise a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of applications and targets which cannot be reduced to the institutions or apparatuses through which this discipline flows; the modality of its exercise, as I've also detailed, may be adopted by the subject itself, whose gender is displayed and read through culturally and symbolically mediated actions, postures, and other embodied practices (see e.g., Harris, 2000, 2009; Laqueur, 1990; Butler, 1990b, 1993). Indeed, the technologies of gender the participants named throughout the interviews produced an extensive list of such practices. Participant 23, as just one example, discussed body hair:

I was talking about coming from a culture like from a Brazilian family and like culture where like women are permanently supposed to be like hairless and like long flowing hair like super hypersexualized. And then, um, you know if I go see my family now like I have like something as basic as like hair on my body like my legs, my armpits, but like um to them that is like— to me that is like I am kind of like subverting like gender from like my culture's perspective, from my culture's point of view.

They wondered, however, would their family have read their body hair as indicative of non-binary identification, specifically, had they not been informed, by the participant, of that term and their identification with it? As they explained, “It [non-binary] wasn’t exactly on the tips of their tongue.” They also sometimes packed (the practice, usually associated with trans men, of wearing padding or a phallic object in the front of one’s pants or underwear), which also spoke to the limits of this strategy of intelligibility:

I can talk about that stuff [packing] and [binary trans] people will be like, “But that’s not so much like ‘non-binary’ that’s just like a trans identity,” and I’m like, “But why are you—” like it’s like this, people kind of putting in their own perspectives when like I’m trying to cultivate my own like identity? Or like narrative of what it means?

The imposition of a binary trans “narrative” upon their packing practice, they said, was “so invalidating” of their non-binary identity: “Why do they think they have to correct me? I know what I’m doing and who I am.” One of the ways this disciplinary power’s nonlocalized effects operate is through a misreading (misgendering) of certain embodied practices that establishes the gender of the person being read as the gender they are perceived to be, circumventing that person’s self-identification. (I detail the intersubjective dynamics and psychic repercussions of this misgendering in **Quality 5**.) Thus, Participant 23’s packing, in this scenario, does not signify non-binary identification to their binary trans perceivers, who believe they must be like them, like the other trans men who pack, or else a cis interloper, encroaching upon a survival tactic (packing) that had been forged in vulnerable communities to which the participant ostensibly does not belong. We encounter, again, the crisis of referentiality: just as the signifier “gender” does not always refer to the signified “sex,” one’s gender expression does not always refer to one’s gender subjectivity-identity: “They’re not the same and one doesn’t beget the other” (Participant 14).

Such misreadings wedge the gaps between the two (expression and identity) that had formed because in actuality there is no specific, uniform representation of non-binary identification in broad sociocultural circulation – nor could there be: with non-binary folx, a range of femme and masculine or butch expressions – clothing, hairstyle, mannerism – are exhibited (Rankin & Beemyn, 2012), none of which have any necessary bearing on one’s self-designated or assigned genders (Chang et al., 2017). Though many express their gender(s) androgynously, some are primarily femme, some masculine, some butch, some more fluid (Matsuno, in press). A given term of identification does not necessarily result in a certain communicative form of presentation, nor is communication of an identification always intended:

Participant 4: I think like those things [gender identity and gender expression] can overlap but not necessarily– like there are people who may have similar ways of expressing as I do, but not in ways of feeling. And there are people who can have similar ways of feeling as I do, but not similar ways of expressing. That’s to say like we may have um similar thoughts and experiences or um or ways of experiencing gender but the presentation of that might look totally different. Um, and vice versa.

...

Participant 8: I don’t know ’cause I– you could be a trans male and still wear very feminine stuff or be trans female and still be very masculine, the identity doesn’t equal the expression or vice versa. It can be arbitrary, you know?

Eli voiced a common sentiment: “The way I look shouldn’t mean my gender identity.”

Expressions were said to be specific to the individual:

Participant 15: Being non-binary does not have one certain look. Kind of like how not all gay people look the same or dress the same. Non-binary people all look different, and are all just trying to express themselves, just like cis gender people are. You know, if not all cisgendered girls look the same, then why should non-binary people look the same?

What had appealed to Participant 15 about non-binary was its capacity to “dismantle ... this societal need to have a perception of what a non-binary individual should look like, and what an androgynous individual’s body should look like.” As they went on: “There’s more than one way

to be non-binary and express it ... [If] some people still want to be, or present, or flaunt their female or male body that should not cancel out the fact that they are non-binary.” Such expressions are neither singular nor stable:

Sukie: I get to like navigate in through different spaces with it. Um, like exploring different paths and different solutions to expressing gender. Versus kind of like just saying “Like this is me as a picture” and it’s stationary. You’re stuck there. This is how I’m painted and like, um, (.) like you’re not going to be able to express yourself unless other people paint you. And like that’s not what I want to be framed as I guess? I choose where I want to go if I pick how I want to represent myself (.) to a certain extent I mean.

...

Participant 4: There are times when I feel like hyper-aware of and interested in the different ways that I like physically present. And, I’m like very carefully being like, “Okay, this thing signifies feminine. This thing signifies masculine. How can I combine these things in a way that feels um, like honest and good and affirming to me?” And then there are days when like something that may feel like an empowering garment one day feels painful or weaponized against me, and that’s sort of always shifting and changing.

...

Participant 6: If I have to go to a family event, it’s [gender expression] usually a lot more feminine. ... But other than that, if I’m just, going to school, or you know, not doing anything all week, I’ll be like, “Hey, masculine,” and then a couple days like, “Hey, feminine,” or sometimes I’m just like, “Ahh [laughter] what is any of this?”

Gender “affirming” (Participant 4) forms of presentation – “how I would ideally like to express my gender, if I wouldn’t be mocked” (Peter); “what feels comfortable” (Eli); “how I settle into my genderqueerness at home” (Kira) – could involve aspects of bodily styling, such as tattoos, make-up, hair (length, colour, condition, placement, style), shaving, and waxing, among others. These forms may also include certain ways of dressing, talking, walking, sitting, and more.

Participant 3, for example, preferred a more “androgynous look”:

A lot of what’s coming to mind is very much like presentation-based like the way I look, which isn’t really, like the way that you look isn’t necessarily tied to how you identify, but for me, I would prefer more of an androgynous look like there’s a song by David Bowie and in it he talks about this person he’s going out one night with, and ah the lyrics, sorry I’m trying to think, it’s sometimes you’re not sure if you’re a girl or a boy.



They went on to say that achieving this look entailed “taking various parts of what’s traditionally seen as masculine and traditionally seen as feminine and kind of combining them,” as well as “various things that are not really gender,” like their affinity for the “masculine interests” they learned from their single-father:

I also love more feminine things in terms of like makeup and sewing ... but at the same time I always wanted to look more masculine and I always like had some masculine ... interests, like what’s traditionally seen as masculine like um, making things in terms of like woodworking or my car and stuff like that and, again I like um, when I started seeing like musicians like Motley Crew or other like very glam rock band where ... there was a lot of big hair and um, like lots of makeup and all that stuff but on men and it was a very interesting combination of as what’s seen as traditionally feminine and what’s seen as masculine and it just was something that I really enjoyed.

Participant 19 likened these practices to “an artistic process,” should one “have access to like a palette.” The combinations “*in theory*,” they stressed, could be endless, as they do not exactly, nor only, place the participants at some intermediary point – halfway, say – between masculinity and femininity. An alternative, new set of possibilities is afforded. Non-binary feminine and masculine identifications, and any associated practices, express neither an underlying female nor male nature, nor something “in-between.” All those forms of self-presentation were understood as specifically non-binary, reducible neither to an aping of cis norms of gender nor to their transgression. This is what Bettcher (2013) was getting at with her multiple-meanings view, which encourages us to take seriously the meanings and usages of certain gender terms “*as [they are] deployed in trans subcultures*” (p. 243). Among non-binary folx, familiar gender terms have no one meaning, nor are they fixed, and their usages do not undermine their self-identifications, because these practices *are* non-binary practices, not cis ones (Bettcher would call this a metaphysical fact, not a political decision). For some, these were also queer practices: recall Kira’s identification with contemporary “butch culture and femme culture,” for example. Terms

like “trans-masculine” and “trans-feminine” have been introduced for this reason, to indicate that cis meanings and usages are not the only ones, even though the first-person authority that has been permitted to cis people would have us believe otherwise. As Participant 8, who identified as agender, advised: “I can still identify as masculine or feminine without identifying as a guy or a girl.”

But, of course, there are the misreadings, among other constraints to non-binary first-person authority. As Kira noted, some TGNC people “don’t have the ability to express gender how they’d like,” due either to lack of self-acceptance or to threats of violence:

On the one hand, because of my upbringing and way I’d been disciplined, I didn’t have the ability, I think, to establish my own femininity, or my own style in terms of my own genderqueerness. I didn’t have the ability to, how would you say, embody or practice the gender expression I would want. Therefore, I had to develop it along the way. But the issue is that I had to do it while in public, and that’s very dangerous, because, yeah, there’s a lot of violence. ... As I grew up, I uh— so I didn’t have the ability to express my gender as I might have liked, but I also didn’t really have role models, because I was repressed, I was unable to allow myself to identify with people who might have been role models for me. ... So, part of this process too was also identifying with people to whom I could relate my experiences. And once I found people like that, I started to accept that things that I was feeling and things I was practicing were not invalid.

R.E. likewise cited safety concerns: “In my day-to-day life and I want to maybe not get yelled at by some stranger on the street who looks aggressive so I’m just going to present something that’s perceived as normal.” Others noted potential lack of funds; certain of these practices cost money.

Participant 13 raised “lack of access”:

And for me that was a thing that like resonated throughout my life, like if I don’t have access to the feminine clothing, like I still know almost nothing about make-up but I’m learning about that. But like those kind of things which are exciting to me as potential avenues to help people see a little bit more of who I am and also help express a little bit more of who I am regardless of how people are actually reading that. Uh, those avenues aren’t always open to people. And I don’t feel like they’ve always been open to me. I often wish that people would be able to discern the difference there. Uh, that identity and expression are actually totally different things.

All the usual technologies of gender may not always avail themselves, but even if accessible, there is no guarantee any given expression of gender will be read in as its expresser intends. Participant 1's assertion of the intelligibilizing capacity of others' "painting" of oneself reminded me of psychologists Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna's (1978) elaboration of the concept of "gender attribution," the process through which we all assign a gender to every person with whom we interact, based on rules and assumptions that are usually unacknowledged or underperceived. Gender, for them, is produced through interactions with others: the attributions we make, based on various characteristics of bodies, their shape, styling, movement, et cetera – all the combinations therein – are culturally and historically variable process that in the case of our non-optional two-gender system has rendered certain gendered realities non-attributable. Thus, a common occurrence for many of the AFAB participants was to be mis-attributed as a "tomboy" or lesbian, and for some of the AMAB participants to be mis-attributed as gay men:

Participant 8: Because, like, when I dress feminine or femme, people just see me as a girl, but if I add more masculine properties to that, then, like, I think most of the time people just see me as a lesbian. Yeah, I don't know.

Alex: So, how do you get someone to see you as not a lesbian, wearing the same thing, but not as a lesbian, but I guess agender?

Participant 8: I don't know.

...

Participant 13: I remember meeting a friend of– the same friend I was talking about who also identified as a lesbian, who had a party and was like "Hey, so you identify as a gay man right?" or something like that. Like we had– that was literally the first thing we said to one another and I was like "No, what? What? Hello?" [laughter]

...

Participant 15: Oh, definitely, I was definitely the like tomboy. Um, I was definitely you know the strong independent young lady at some point to people. But it wasn't about being strong or independent for me, and it wasn't about being a tomboy, it was about

completely forfeiting the idea that my identity is somehow related to what set of genitals I was born with. That was just something that really bothered me.

...

Kira: So, the issue was, for instance, some people think I'm gay now, even though I do not see myself as a gay man. And often I'm attacked on that basis, actually, 'cause in the street, for instance, um someone might think I'm a flaming gay man.

...

Sukie: I think that expression is more complex than we think just because uh I had this interaction with someone. They came up to me they're like, "Hey do you mind me asking if like uh like are you gay?" And I'm like, she's like openly queer and so it's fine, but then she brought up, "Well you just looked a certain way, so I just assumed," and that in itself it's kind of like a day-to-day thing that happens to me.

As many others raised: Based on expression alone, how could you know that someone identifies, for example, as a butch cis lesbian or trans man or a trans-masculine non-binary person? And, which attribution would be more readily made? Cis, binary trans, or non-binary trans?

Participant 13: I often wish that people would think more about the idea that just because you see someone presenting as a certain way doesn't mean you know their identity. Right, so if someone says "I identify as a woman" but they're presenting in a way that you think is masculine like your assumptions may just not be rooted in their reality.

Participant 5 had chosen their object – the shell – to convey this point:

I like it because all shells of a certain sort kind of look the same on the surface, it's like, usually you can point to some and be like, "that's a clam, or that's an oyster, or whatever," right? But you can't tend to differentiate like, if I gave you 12 oyster shells, you can't be like, "That's the girl and that's the boy," right? Or like, ... you kind of have to take the time to investigate. So, like, this one has a bit of a crack in it. But you can't actually really see it. You can feel it. But it's pretty invisible. Um, so it's like there are indicators and there are signs but you really have to pay attention in order to find them and to look, and I feel like, especially people who aren't intentionally trying to like, dress provocatively, or [don't] feel very dysphoric, I feel like that's sort of how society expects them to be, is like ... "you're all going to look like this." Anyway, you can't ask a shell how it identifies [laughter] but you can ask a person, too, you know?

"You can't tell if someone's non-binary just by looking at them" (Participant 15) was, as I've noted, a common refrain; an addendum: "If they're going to make a guess, I can guarantee that

‘non-binary’ won’t be the first one” (R.E.). Usually, “the first” attribution was of cis-status: when one’s presentation is read as incongruent with one’s sexed body, the assumption is of homosexuality, not trans-status, and certainly not non-binary-identification. Even the deliberately transgressive expressions of genderqueer identification might not be read as such: those who tend to be identified, outright, as gender nonconforming, challenge others’ abilities to “know,” impair their knee-jerk tendency to assign either cis-male or -female designations, yet their legible illegibility might not always mean a non-binary attribution. As Participant 4 suggested, “for mainstream audiences the image that comes to mind” of an androgynous person is “like an effeminate White cis man, like David Bowie or something.” The majority, though, presented in a relatively normative fashion, through clothes and comportment they said tended to be read by others as congruent with what were imagined to be these participants’ assigned genders. As Participant 13, who had likened gender expression to an artistic process, further analogized:

And the difference between like what the author intends and what the viewer reads in any work of art or anything really uh that’s created uh, can be huge. And so, um, thinking about you know not making assumptions necessarily based on— you can appreciate a piece of expression but you might not be able to necessarily name it without um, or name the experience of the author without actually speaking with them.

Given these constraints, verbal disclosure would be necessitated, I was told, should someone wish to be out to others as non-binary, or not misgendered, particularly if they had not sought hormones or other gender confirming procedures:

Sukie: I think when gender became a conversation with myself about different identities, it kind of led me to question um how do I word my gender ’cause like we can assume that that person is male or female in most um, based on what you see like we could make that judgement. But, um, unless that person says something about it nothing’s really true.

But first one required the terms of one’s disclosure: an identificatory label and attendant pronouns.

*Non-binary gender identities.* It is not for nothing that most of the narratives of becoming non-binary-identified detailed often protracted periods of experimentation with, then settling into, various terms as they searched for the ones that would best name and define their experience of gender. When asked how they came to self-identify as non-binary, I sometimes heard something along the lines of: “Jesus! Good question, um I think that like it was a very slow process” (Participant 4). These “slow” periods of “process,” some explained, had led them to “think so much about [their] gender, like— and how [they’d] want to call it” (Participant 10), critical reflections from which some came to realize they might wish to revise their selected term(s), should they find a “better fit” (Participant 19), or should “how [they] feel about gender change later, down the road,” (Participant 3). For Participant 6, “there was a lot of talking to others and a lot of research and shuffling through terms and identities, until [they] finally came to ‘non-binary.’” Most others would have related, Participant 23 included: “Over time I just like, thought about it and talked about it and said, ‘Okay let’s kind of like, in a sense like try this out see how it fits’ and it seemed to work best.” As participant Ray Feinberg described:

I have three sisters, and, so I grew up in a home with lots of female presence and influence, but you know I never was into dresses like, my mom had told me like even before I can remember, that I was like flat-out refusing to wear flowery dresses and things like that. ... And, you know things like that, where I was doing those things before I ever got to a place where I was like you know, “maybe this has something to do with my gender?” You know it’s like, that is me it’s who I am, it’s who I’ve always been and now I’ve just like thought a little harder about it and put a name to it. You know?

“Putting a name to it,” to certain behaviours, certain feelings, “helped to make sense of all that,” as Participant 9 put it:

It’s something I’ve sort of always done, like from when I was a kid. Um, I had weird femme things I would draw in and hold— present with. Um, so it just sort of made more sense once I started to build the language around it and more of an understanding of, um, what other folks were doing or, I’m not really part of any sort of trans community but there are precedents [in trans communities] I can draw from and take language from and

so it just sort of made sense to expand on that and have it be less of a quiet blip here and there and more of actually drawing it in and identifying with a term I wanted to use.

R.E. similarly related an “unpacking [of their] own feelings,” which led to their non-binary identification:

And, you know I used to be cis-female and I had to sit down and think, “Do I feel this way? What about it makes me feel this way? Um was it something I was taught?” And I’d found that you know most of the time things that society says is feminine I’m just not interested in? But also the idea of like being purely masculine is equally unappealing. And so I just kind of was like, “Oh, I’m somewhere in the middle and one of my friends was like, “Yeah that’s called ‘non-binary.’” And when I went through and started looking I found a lot of the terms that I related to especially like genderfluid and genderqueer, and I think you know they kind of all fit into non-binary.

Peter “did a bit of exploration” before “[figuring] out” he “[didn’t] want to actually live as a woman,” despite “[knowing] for a long time that [he] didn’t strongly identify with masculinity either”: “I know that there are kind of feminine guys out there, there are androgynous people ... but then there’s also you know [terms like] non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid so that’s— I guess that’s how I feel.” Participant 24 “landed on” non-binary after several lengthy discussions with their partner about “what [they] don’t identify with.” After years of “automatically questioning, critiquing, investigating [their] gender,” another participant, Kira, found “transgender,” but “that’s when things started getting a little complex,” because “it [transgender] didn’t do justice to the experiences [they’d] had.” So, Kira kept searching. Eli only came to accept “that [they were] trans” when they became friends with other non-binary folx and “understood that was something that existed, this community [they] could be part of.” “Putting a name to it” (Ray Feinberg) could also make sense of themselves for others, which Participant 14 referred to as the “double function” of gender identity’s labels:

I just knew that the assumptions that people made [about their gender identity] never felt right, never felt comfortable, I just allowed it to happen because, you know, when society thinks a certain way, it’s much harder to say, “Well, actually” but at some point I discovered that there were other options and when I found that there were other options, I

found that this— that the description of “agender” and the experiences of other people who were agender and non-binary fit more closely to what I felt.

With that “better fitting” description, they then had an “other option” with which they could say, “Well, actually *this* is how identify.”

Some presented non-binary identification as a pragmatic compromise of sorts: “it doesn’t really get at the specifics of my gender personally but it’s good enough” (Suki); “the conclusion I came to was that there is no word that I feel like one hundred percent captures it as well as non-binary does, so I’m sticking with it” (Ray Feinberg); “it’s the closest it’s going to get to telling people what my gender’s all about” (Participant 19); “the label is kinda simple, like ‘OK, what does it even mean?’ but that’s okay too because cis people could catch on and start to get it easier” (Participant 3). For Participant 18, this was the utility of the term – it might not “perfectly fit,” but it comes “close”:

I suppose especially with labels, it’s the idea with having a definition associated with that label which you feel applies to you possibly not in its entirety but at least in a general sense. It’s not necessarily useful for describing you as a whole but it is useful for conveying these ideas to other people. They don’t all fit in these nice boxes that have been made but I can say that this [non-binary] box is something that is close.

Participant 11 thought this to be true of all gender identities:

I know people with binary genders who will talk about their gender in a way that’s like these are pragmatic reasons why this is the gender that works best for me. Like not that’s it’s an inherent necessary truth, but like within the culture that I’m in this is the most comfortable category for me to be in. Which is sort of how I feel about my gender too.

For Ray Feinberg, who, like many others, struggled to describe their “feeling” of non-binary subjectivity, found that term to be “satisfactory”; it adequately named their feeling of being neither a man nor a woman:

Ray Feinberg: It just basically means, not a man, not a woman. Like to me I feel— I kind of looked at the kinship I felt with women and the kinship I felt with men. And women— I feel like I just did not relate to on a personal level? You know? Especially like learning more about feminism in university, you know like— I can completely support feminism,



but I don't feel like I am (.) of women. And same with men, like I feel like I relate to men a lot better, but I don't feel that I fit, the criteria of "man" so with that conclusion, then I come up with "non-binary" and that's satisfactory.

Alex: Yeah, that makes perfect sense. How do you explain or kind of describe this feeling like, you're like not "woman," not "man"?

Ray Feinberg: Mhm, I feel like that's the tough part to conceptualize.

The term's *prima facie* simplicity, I was told, could more expediently support the social recognition of non-binary genders "without getting bogged down by specifics" (Participant 23), yet that same capaciousness seemed so all-encompassing for some as to require qualification. Even after non-binary had been established as "sufficient" (Kira), most participants continued to refine, to determine their "subcategory of non-binary" (Participant 19). The term was said by many to be sweeping in its inclusivity: there are connotations of simultaneous or separate male and female identifications (e.g., intergender, bigender, genderfluid), of no gender identification (e.g., agender, neutrois ), and of identifications between or outside "man" and "woman" (e.g., genderqueer), among others (see also Harrison et al., 2012; Matsuno & Budge, 2017). Some representative descriptions:

Participant 4: I think non-binary is um, seems to be more like saying, "I am neither this nor that." Or, I'm going for that, working toward it. Uh, whereas genderqueer says to me, and then again this is like, my personal relationship with these words, "I am both/and." Um, or like, "Both plus." Uh, and in some ways those terms feel like um, really far points on a spectrum from each other, despite having a lot in common?

...

Participant 5: Non-binary is like— 'cause I kind of consider myself sometimes both and sometimes neither. So, it encompasses both of those options. Um, and "fluid" kind of embraces like the fact that it can change, and it's not set, like, one specific thing like, "I'm one thing all of the time!" [laughter] though some people are.

...

Participant 6: I self-identify as non-binary because even though I do have a masculine leaning, I'm not like, one hundred percent down, like I'm not like, "Yeah, I'm gonna

transition.” It’s more like, “Oh just, you know, I’m just like cool with wearing a dress sometimes, I’m cool with, you know being called ‘female’ I’m cool with that.” Like I’m not strictly one or the other, I’m just kinda like (.) both, in a weird middle ground.

...

Participant 18: To me it’s, non-binary is not fitting into the ascribed male, female being the only two options, the ideas associated with them being, “OK you have all these things where for instance, say men do, work with cars where women in the kitchen” things like that, and these aren’t, these are silly ideas that you can have women who work as mechanics, you can have men who enjoy housework and so the idea that this rigid binary exists, instead not ascribing to that idea.

...

Alex: Yeah, what does that mean to you, demiboy?

Participant 19: It means that non-binary for me is sort of close to boy-ness or, like, mas– not masculine even, but more like man-ness, but not all the way. I don’t feel like it perfectly fits so it’s not, like– some aspects of it I identify with, but others I don’t really. I don’t really like being thought of as a man, but, like, it’s not that wrong, it’s kind of okay, it’s just not great but it’s certainly better than being thought of as a woman.

Its inclusive destabilization of binary identification meant certain participants spoke of non-binary as an umbrella term, much like the trans umbrella: “It’s an umbrella term being an inclusive, all-encompassing place that captures [all] identities” (Participant 13). As they explained:

I’ve seen a couple different sort of, activists and authors frame things in terms of like a trans umbrella, so often I’ve thought about gender and terms like non-binary as being sort of very all-inclusive. And then terms like genderqueer being kind of nested within that which– there seem to be all sort of variations that people have. So, I’ve often met people who use that different language to frame their experience and then will drill down more specifically to identities that they refer to.

As I’ve noted above (see **Trans Reverse Discourses**), some viewed the non-binary umbrella as separate from the trans umbrella, whereas others viewed non-binary as a subcategory of trans: “I consider it under the umbrella of trans” (Participant 24). Michel’s account of “gravitating

towards” genderqueer, for example, was characteristic of those who viewed non-binary as its own umbrella:

Michel: Well, um I realized that I wasn’t transgender and that it didn’t really fit– when I realized that I wasn’t cisgender I guess I sort of decided that needed to fall into a certain category of people and this [transgender] was all that was available to me. And I still felt that I was changing aspects of myself to fit into something that I wasn’t. And I just sort of want to be my own individual and not have a particular narrative forced onto me.

Alex: Mhm, how did you realize that you weren’t cisgender?

Michel: Um, you know there’s those forums online where you can sort of like make a little avatar and chat with people? I gravitated towards making male avatars and I never really thought too much of it. And that just seemed more, right to me? So, I’ve gone with a separate umbrella I guess, not the trans one.

Participant 6 would have concurred: “I know I’m not cisgender, but I also know that I’m not transgender, there’s gotta be something else – that was non-binary.” Regardless of its placement within the trans umbrella, non-binary itself could be broken down into the subcategories. For two of the participants, it meant genderfluid (see **Quality 2**). For four of them, it meant agender or neutrois, which, as we’ve seen, did not mean a sort of genderlessness. Some, like Participant 8, had turned to this term to signal their view that our culture’s system of gender attribution is “nonsensical”:

I don’t know, it’s so silly. I just realized how silly it is (.) that, like, just ’cause I like pink or a skirt or makeup and that’s gendered as feminine that makes me femme, um (.) and that’s agender for me to say I just wanna get away from all that nonsense.

Agender, thus, functioned as a public distancing maneuver. According to Participant 14, “if you strip away all cultural context, everything’s neutral” – that is, neither masculine nor feminine – which is what agender for them connoted:

For some people, [agender] means that you just don’t have a gender but for other people, including me, it just means that there’s, um, there’s no gender description– there’s no, um– you would prefer to have neither or to be indistinguishable from either or neutral, which wouldn’t be so hard if people didn’t place you one way or another, not have people use “he” or “she” all the time.

How that neutrality or indistinguishability could be non-verbally expressed presented as a conundrum for these participants, given, among other impediments, that “dressing neutrally, really– dressing neutrally really actually means dressing low-key masculine [laughter]” (Participant 14). As Stryker (1994) once said of agender: it is “the mark of gender and the unlivability of its absence” (p. 250). The participant who identified as androgyne and as post-gender expressed a comparable sentiment:

Participant 21: I guess especially for post-gender, I see a lot of my non-binary friends being, like, “Oh, like, I feel so femme today.” And for me, that doesn’t mean anything other than what I know it’s prescribed to mean. So, like, being post-gender doesn’t have a way of looking or being or doing inherently. Whereas, like, non-binary even might or genderqueer? I don’t know. I don’t feel like particularly amorphous or anything either. I feel solid in the ways that I am without having them identified by certain binary means.

Though the majority of the participants would disagree with this assertion that non-binary or genderqueer has an “inherent” “way of looking or being or doing,” their wish to stand solidly on their own terms echoed the agender-identified participants’ wish to be treated “more [as] a person than [as] a gender” (Participant 18).

For four of the participants, non-binary meant genderqueer, which named, for some, “an additional element of sort of like queer politic” (Participant 13) – a deliberately explicit signalling for others of the destabilization of binary identifications and the norms therein – though those without genderqueer identifications spoke of non-binary similarly:

Participant 4: I think it means to not just like a personal rejection of like the categories of masculine and feminine but like a rejection of the social understanding of masculinity and femininity. ... It’s not just being like, “I am neither nor this nor this,” but saying these two things are real or– that people can’t be masculine or feminine, but like these are categories that are like fundamentally (.) well like that are constructed. Socially constructed. And like, are not innate. Not that they’re not real but these are things that are like not fixed. And they can be changed or done differently.

...

Participant 15: Well, non-binary I feel like is a direct political term, because the term in-and-of-itself implies that there is a binary and that you are not participating in it. It's not only a way of identifying, but also, I feel, like is sending a political message.

For a minority, genderqueer reflected one's intention to deliberately transgress cis norms of gender presentation. Participant 9 drew on a contrast with androgyny to explain, positioning the latter as an unattainable "avoidance" of "gender markers":

Um, because I'm not going for, sort of, pure androgyny of, "Oh, I can't quite tell, like this sort of awkward in between-y like I have no idea who this person." (.) Uh, I enjoy pulling more explicitly binary gender markers and roles and whatever and pulling those in and playing with those and fucking with those than trying to avoid gender entirely. I'm drawing from binary and non-binary gender traits to build what I want to present as and hold rather than trying to avoid gender. So, I'm non-binary but I'm drawing from gender things rather than non-binary avoiding gender, androgyny, like agender [does].

One of their jobs was in retail, so they were "very visible as like the first person most people see and deal with." In this position, their "wardrobe is just [their] own choice," and they "always" choose "some sort of gender fuckery" presentation; they were somewhat shielded, they acknowledged, from the public's "verbal abuse" by virtue of being at work, though they have become inured over the years to the murmuring of harassment they receive "on the street," before and after work, when out socially, and elsewhere (see also Harrison et al., 2012). They viewed "people's heads turning or murmured conversations or whatever" when "wearing explicitly feminine clothing" as "confirmation" that they are "on the right path" with regard to "fucking with people's expectations." As they went on:

Genderqueer partly is fucking with people's perception of gender. I'm fairly visible in a lot of positions, so as a way of just continuously letting people know like "Hey! Gender binary isn't always a thing." ... Um, I mean, ideally, I'd kinda like if people, you know, saw me, read me, and immediately went for, "Okay! This person's non-binary I'm gonna ask for their pronouns, or I'm gonna assume uh, 'they' or something." But in the absence of that I'm comfortable making other people uncomfortable.

Kira called genderqueer "a mode of resistance," but, unlike Participant 9, "not only in the sense of the gender expression that [they] want to express": "I am, like, unable to actually— not unable,

but many times I feel that I'm unsafe or uncomfortable expressing much of my genderqueerness." As such, "genderqueer" is not an aesthetic or expression, but rather their "actual personal experience and understanding of gender," their belief, for example, that certain "attributes or constructs shouldn't uniquely be assigned to femininity or masculinity or that they could even be exhaustively assigned to them": "So, I guess that on the one hand, I'm denying there is in fact like a stable or, in fact, *a priori* a masculine or feminine." Kira identifies as a genderqueer trans woman, because "even when [they] conceptualize [their] own femininity, [they] don't see [themselves] as embodying society's femininity."

Just as Kira made femininity their own, for some of the primarily non-binary-identified participants, their identities came with further qualifications, which Participant 19 called "adding more pixels to the image": Participant 4's non-binary meant being more "androgynous," Participant 6's meant "masculine-leaning," Participants 10's "nonconforming," and Participant 24's "genderfluid." Some were non-binary as well as trans-identified: "transgender" (Participant 2), "genderqueer trans woman" (Kira), and "trans-masculine demiboy" (Participant 19). As I've indicated, a number of them did not consider themselves to be trans (I did not keep track of the exact number); though no one named cisgender as a gender identity of theirs, we cannot assume that those who did not specify trans identification were cis-identified. As with expressions of gender, identities were changeable:

Participant 21: For a long time, I identified as androgyne which, to me, meant like just androgynous looking, the perfect mix of masculine and feminine But, I realize more and more that gender is, like at the time I also felt gender was arbitrary, but I felt androgyne. And eventually, I felt like I just grew away from that idea and feel differently.

...

Participant 10: I don't know, like I feel like I have feminine aspects and very like masculine aspects like just as the way I dress or just present myself, but like it also changes like so does— it can become more like fluid because there are days where I dress

more feminine or um or just come across as that, like I don't know. ... I think it really depends on like the days or whatever like how I feel like identifying also, that's also another thing but I think I would lean towards a more like masculine side.

Some changed because participants realized other identities constituted “better fits”; other times, however, their “feeling differently” about gender necessitated revising their term(s) of identification. Again, what might spur such a shift in feeling was difficult to say. Given this flux, when to disclose which identifications was no straightforward affair. One's audience and context would be taken into account:

Ray Feinberg: Even if somebody is not fluent in the language of gender theory and gender identity and all that stuff, then you can still get a feeling of what non-binary means in terms of gender, right? So, I start there, it's maybe a little easier to understand than agender or neutrois, or something like that where you have to go a little deeper and explain things more.

...

Participant 9: I would say, I tend to use non-binary as more of a broad umbrella. I'm this form of trans, so not binary trans. Um, and then genderqueer as a more specific um, identity that I feel— I feel more comfortable with identifying as genderqueer. Um, but I lump that under non-binary for clarity at times, it depends who I'm talking to, what the context is as to which one I will go for and they— or whoever I'm talking to is understanding and how much I want to delve into it.

...

Participant 13: The challenge for me has been asking myself like, “Do I actually want to do this for this person?” Because my default is doing it, so I will just like tap into like a whatever reserve of patience I happen to have for that day and I'm just like, “This is going to be an educational moment for this person” and try and like really hold them and really explain it. ... But at the same time like the disrespect from some people is so palpable that I'm like, “I'm not interested in having this conversation with you.”

...

Participant 19: Usually, I wouldn't even describe my [gender identities] at all. I'd just drop the whole subject and be like, “Yeah, I'm just a boy,” but if I were to have to get into it, like, the first level in I'd go is trans-masculine, which implies a bit of non-binarity as well as the sort of masculine side-identity and, um, but it's less vague than just non-binary by itself, it's sort of a nice marriage of the specificity with not having to

go really deep into it and having to, like, have a gender studies class when I'm just trying to talk to somebody. If they get it, then maybe I'll tell them demiboy.

The amount of detail one provided depended on various factors: How much “energy” (Participant 11) they had to “educate” on any given day; whether they thought their audience would be receptive to, or understanding of, such an education (e.g., younger vs. older, online vs. offline, progressive friends vs. conservative family members); whether they required an education (R.E., for example, had found “that most cis people do”); whether it would be safe to educate or even disclose; and so on. Therefore, despite the capacity of “non-binary” to more expediently support social recognition as compared with gender expression, for reasons often outside the individual’s control, such recognition would go unrealized, as would be the case with an unreceptive audience. Language, as a technology of gender, can be harnessed to name oneself into existence; but doing so is never unilateral: others might not listen. Such was the case, too, for one’s preferred pronouns.

**Pronouns.** Many non-binary folx use gender neutral pronouns, such as them/them/their or zie/hir/hirs, though some prefer he/him/his, she/her/hers, a combination, or no pronouns at all (e.g., using a name in place of pronouns; Matsuno, in press; Matsuno & Budge, 2017). Some create their own pronouns, derived from a specific word, usually a noun; these “nounself” pronouns, of which as many as 400 exist, first popped up on Tumblr around late 2013 and are used by virtual communities whose members do not exclusively identify as non-binary, though the first usages of them are documented to have been by non-binary folx seeking alternatives to existing gender-neutral pronouns (Miltersen, 2016). All but two of the participants used they/them, which many said they found to be the most popular gender-neutral pronoun among the non-binary people they knew (Sukie: “I use ‘they’ just because it’s the easiest thing to use.”). According to the report of the *2015 U.S. Transgender Survey* (James et al., 2016), 29% of all



respondents used they/them pronouns. The singular “they” had already been established as a widely-used epicene pronoun, given its applicability in sentences with an unspecified antecedent (e.g., “*Somebody* left *their* umbrella in the office. Would *they* please collect it?”), as a substitute for the (androcentric) generic “he” (see Foertsch & Gernsbacher, 1997; Noll, Lowry, & Bryant, 2018). The APA’s *Publication Manual* (2010), for example, cautions authors against such generic masculine language; elsewhere, authors are advised to “refer to a transgender person using words (proper nouns, pronouns, etc.) appropriate to the person’s gender identity or gender expression, regardless of birth sex” (p. 74). These guidelines demonstrate that epicene pronouns are not just of interest to psycholinguists and grammarians: personal or “preferred” pronouns “are particularly susceptible to modification in response to social and ideological change” (Bodine, 1975, p. 130), and the growing uptake of they/them suggests an increased awareness of these words’ capacity to signal meaningful aspects of identity.

Concerns have been raised about dichotomizing gender through the use of “he,” “she,” or combinations thereof (e.g., “he/she,” “s/he”) insofar as they may misgender those who do not identify with either category (see Ansara & Hegarty, 2013). Though (unintentional) misgendering may occur to anyone, it is a particularly common experience of TGNC people. They/them, as such, functions both a solution to the dilemma of third-person references in the English language and as a means of breaking down the rigid confines of a language that fails to capture the complexities of gendered identification:

Sukie: I’m from [“City 1”] and my family speaks Cantonese so when I was like growing up learning about writing in Chinese it was always like there are some radicals associated for like male and female. And then for like French it’s always kind of like, well, masculine and feminine and it kind of is like left that way. So, I guess for me the concept of having new [gender-neutral] pronouns and like put them in the language, I’m hoping that will open further conversations about it— how unnecessary it is to gender objects (.) and people.

Participant 11: Um so pronouns I think are one of the ways in which we most habitually acknowledge people's genders and or assume them. ... because it's very hard to talk about anyone for more than a couple of sentences without using a pronoun for that person. Um, I know this because I've met people who prefer not to have pronouns and that is actually hard. ... I find it very fascinating how early and how quickly we start unthinkingly using "he" and "she" for people without even thinking about how we're making that decision. Like it's so ingrained. ... Um, one of the things I like about [gender-neutral] pronouns ... is that it makes people think about this stuff.

...

Participant 15: Uh, okay so, like in Latin, you conjugate verbs differently based on gender, you gender every noun, not just proper nouns but every noun, and pronouns are different depending on the perceived gender of the individual. And, a biproduct of the perceived gender people are given names, you know, differently based on their gender. In Chinese, there are no gendered pronouns, "he," "she," and "it" are the same word. Um, verbs are conjugated completely neutrally, and all names are gender neutral. So, if you go up to any Chinese person and give them my name, they would genuinely not know what gender I am, until they meet me right, and I tell them.

Just as gender identities and expressions are tied to sex assigned at birth, such that genitals stand in for the gender of the whole person, in synecdochic fashion (Shotwell & Sangrey, 2009), so too can the (mis)use of gendered pronouns mark a network of social relations that in part constitute a (binary) gendered being. Gender-neutral pronouns, in contrast, were said to "tone down" these "assumptions of the gender binary" (Participant 6): that, for example, someone's gender pronouns are inferable from their outward appearance (and assumed genital status), or even from knowing their gender identity. I was told a person may prefer being referred to as "he" despite identifying as a woman. The participants spoke of assigned sex, gender identity, gender expression, and gender pronouns as distinct; we cannot make assumptions about one based on another. Not all feminine appearing people, for example, were assigned female at birth, identify as women, or use she/her pronouns (McLemore, 2015).

For the participants, however, they/them pronouns, though certainly not indicative of sex assigned at birth or gender expression, had been selected for their "ability to buck the binary"

(Participant 9) and, potentially, to signify one's status as non-binary. Participant 11 said they found them "validating": "Like words and pronouns that don't gender me just feel more comfortable and they feel more right and they make me feel like people are seeing me." Gender-neutral pronouns were integral to Participant 9's becoming non-binary-identified, more so than their gender expression:

Alex: How did you come to self-identify as non-binary?

Participant 9: Um, so that sort of came from a partner who I was living with. Um, maybe four, five years ago, they came out as non-binary, and started to use, uh, gender-less pronouns. Um, which I think just sort of ticked that, "Oh! This is a thing I can do" in my head, and it was less than a year than that before I talked to them and started checking things off on forms, and talking to friends and lovers about changing the pronouns I was using. Um. It didn't actually change how I was presenting a whole lot. ... Um, it was kind of just—my partner's coming out with it and then the thoughts and discussions and where it, where it went from there, I sort of— it solidified some things that had been like bubbling under for a couple of years, or they'd been there for you know decades. Um, that was like. "Oh! I can actually sort of lean into this more."

As yet another way of putting into discursive circulation gendered subjectivities not previously named by the psy disciplines or recognized by the gender binary, they/them functions, too, as an affectively charged signalling of oneself, of that feeling or sense of being "something more," something in excess of the usual two positions in discourse, which is relayed *to others*. The participants described choosing their pronouns, actively informing certain others – of their pronouns, of the identities said pronouns are meant to signify – usually, first online (on non-binary-inclusive forums and on message boards, where the Internet's anonymity thwarts appearance-based assumption; through one's social media profiles), then in "real life," with friends and, later, certain family members. Much like their terms of identification, when and how they used their pronouns depended on context:

Participant 14: Yeah, sometime in middle school, I actually learned about, um, alternative pronouns (.) um, and I thought that that was essentially the most cool thing I've ever seen because that was a different option than the ones that I was given and I really, really

wanted to use them and— like no one around me got it, and so I kind of dropped it um, but the thoughts never left me, I remember trying to incorporate it into my writing.

It was not until high school that Participant 14 began asking folks to use they/them pronouns in reference to them, but, even then, selectively. Their family, for example, was “really religious and they expected [them] to be a cisgender heterosexual, uh, woman that is willing and expected to take on a wife/motherly role once you get married,” so they figured their family would not be where they would first “test out using [their] pronouns.” They found support groups online and others in person who were willing to use their pronouns and hence “to validate [their] identity, and [their] whole struggle with gender up to that point.” Such disclosure is a common concern for non-binary folx (McLemore, 2015). Participant 14’s employment, for example, was precarious enough for them to “stay closeted”: “Because who knows how that would go, I don’t want to risk it.” As I describe in **Quality 5**, disclosing a new name or pronouns entails embarking upon treacherous terrain due to anticipated or enacted rejection or negativity; indeed, one’s physical safety could be jeopardized (James et al., 2016). For these reasons, different pronouns may be used in different contexts (Matsuno, in press); six participants had more than one set of pronouns, with three of them indicating a preference for one set versus another:

Eli: It’s been interesting I don’t correct people [when they misgender them] because I’m still, understanding how safe people is yeah because that’s for me the biggest mystery, because I come from a very aggressive environment so for me understanding that this person won’t be nasty to me if I say I’m different. It takes time for me to understand if their person is safe. ... in El Salvador the moment you say about pronouns that the first reaction is like, “It’s just a phase.”

With that said, staying closeted and/or being continually misgendered can also negatively affect mental health (McLemore, 2015; Testa et al., 2015). All the participants, however, had to weight the risks and benefits of disclosure and nondisclosure in different contexts, such as among friends, family, co-workers and strangers. Do I remain invisible, or do I risk invalidation?

**Quality 2: Eschews teleology.** The wrong body model of transsexuality outlines a standard telos (genital reconstruction surgery); one's status as trans would be dubitable, should one not view one's body as "wrong" nor seek to bring it into "proper" alignment with one's "experienced/expressed" gender. According to Devor (2004), "Having come to the decision to call oneself transsexual or transgendered is only a first step" (p. 59) toward transsexual identity formation: though not all who identify as trans "decide to proceed" (p. 59) with a binary transition for various reasons – health, family, and financial considerations are cited – this decision to forgo a certain kind of physical transition is framed by Devor and other stage model proponents as "not taking action." "Crossing over" (Gagné et al., 1997), to the other gender, and staying put and prideful there, after all, is the inevitable outcome. Recall, however, all those who reported to me ambivalence regarding trans self-identification due to its implication of postoperative stability (of identification, expression, embodiment) as one's "final destination" (see **Trans Reverse Discourses**). Some had believed that identifying as trans would entail "impeding" upon others' "space," despite suspecting that that space might be "home" for them, too:

R.E.: Being able to accept that I am trans– because before, I was thinking that if I called myself trans, you know, like, binary trans person who's done hormone replacement and going through sexual reassignment surgeries, like was I actually impeding on their space and taking away from who they are? I felt very uncomfortable with that idea. But now I have like come to accept that it is sort of trans, that's my home too. Just because you know it's either you're cis or you're not and I'm not cis at all so.

...

Participant 15: I do not want to take up space in a trans community if I do not have the same level of struggle, and suffering as the trans community does. Because, despite the fact that I experience um, mild dysphoria, and despite the fact that I do identify as something other than cis, I acknowledge my privilege as someone who is comfortable enough in their own skin, and I don't want to take up space where I don't belong ... as someone who is definitely not going to go through any hormone replacement therapy, any surgery, um, or any type of drastic alterations to their appearance.

For some of these participants, feeling “trapped in the wrong culture” (Participant 2) was a more common refrain, yet one that risked others – not only the professional gatekeepers, but also binary-identified trans people (see **Quality 5**) – questioning the authenticity of their non-cis and/or trans identifications.

Another (less addressed) downside to the gatekeeping administration’s adherence to this notion of telos is the perhaps inadvertent restricting of access to manhood or womanhood itself through hegemonic class-, race-, and culture-inflected modalities (Bettcher, 2014b). For example, most gender confirmation procedures are tremendously costly; if not covered by insurance, as they have been here in Ontario since 2008, they are inaccessible to many. Note, also, that in those trans women’s subcultures where sex work is a dominant presence, genital reconstruction surgery may not necessarily be desired, as it could cause the loss of one crucial source of income. More generally, desires for such surgeries, the hallmark of psy’s transgenderism, are shaped by what is envisioned as possible as well as by what is valued within a given local subculture. Some simply do not centre genital reconstruction; other modifications might figure more centrally; or, none: “I have no intention of undergoing a binary transition from my, um, birth assigned gender,” said Participant 9, as did several others (see **The Psy Disciplines’ Trans**), who, throughout the histories they recounted, claimed no specific end goal. Initiating hormones or undergoing surgical procedures, for those who had or thought they might, were not presented as the final leg of one’s gender journey.

Unlike conventional understandings of transition, becoming eschews the teleological pull of linear, stage-like developmental progress. Even binary physical transitions, I was told, “come in so many different forms– it’s more than just, ‘I’m getting bottom surgery.’ There are so many options, so many combinations and reasons, or dreams” (Participant 6). As Participant 2, who

had initiated hormone therapy, stated: “Progress is a transient process.” “Process,” instead, was more often invoked to describe one’s relation to the technologies of gender, hormones and surgery included, but also to the in-flux state of one’s identifications and gendered feelings:

Alex: Now that last bit about “coming to non-binary,” you used the word “process.” Um, like it’s still a process, I think, so can you tell me a bit more about what you mean?

Participant 5: Um, well like ... the world hasn’t changed yet, so, have to keep working on— working with myself, like, um, accepting myself, and like, understanding all of that sort of thing. Because like, um, it’s just not like I woke up one day and was like, “I have all of the answers!” Right? So, I’m still finding them, and like, my understanding of it [gender identity] is still changing, so, that’s what I mean by the process.

...

Participant 6: I think it’s a process. Like no one wakes up one morning and goes, “I’m non-binary.” It’s more like, “Okay (.)” [nervous laughter] ’Cause it’s different— like transgender people I know who kinda, like some people I know are just like, “Oh you know, I’ve known since I was a kid.” Or, “I woke up one day and started going, ‘I don’t feel like I’m, you know, male or female, I’m more of the opposite.’” But with non-binary, you’re kind of in this weird sort of middle ground ... So, I feel like it’s a process, ’cause you really have to deconstruct yourself, ’cause you’re like, “Maybe I’m just being overdramatic?” And then you have to continue processing. To realize what you’re experiencing is real and valid and like a thing.

...

R.E.: I mean I don’t think there’s ever an end really. I mean death but [laughter] like the journey of like self and gender and like learning about yourself and about the world, I think that’s a constant process. Learning about what’s possible for yourself in this world.

Participant 9, who was at the time of their first interview just “starting a like hormonal adjustment of some sort,” said they “[weren’t] looking for a binary transition”:

I don’t feel like I’m working toward a goal of when I reach, I think “Great! I’ve made it.” Um, it’s partly just an ongoing process (.) um, and partly if I didn’t have access to hormones, or wasn’t taking that route, I wouldn’t feel any different— I don’t think it would change what I felt about it [their gender identity], it’s just another way that I can adjust the external appearance that I have to what I can or want it to be like. But again, who know what others will see!

An appeal of non-binary was this refusal to forecast particular futures:

Participant 3: I'm still young and I still don't know if my gender identity is going to change as I get older. And some days I do feel more attached to some terms, but, um, like even when I identified more with genderqueer I still also identified as non-binary and anyway it, ah, seems cooler with that change, like open-ended for the future, but also like meaning so many things to different people. ... I know that at this point my own identity doesn't fluctuate enough that I feel like genderfluid or anything like that (.) but because I do sometimes feel like it might change, I like that it leaves things a little bit more open.

...

Participant 4: Um, I don't know what the future holds um and like kind of since like this whole thing began [identifying as non-binary], like as I began to like tell people like, "Please use these pronouns for me, etcetera, etcetera," I really wanted to make it clear like, "This is who I am, now. I don't know what I'm going to be in the future."

...

Participant 10: When I was younger I did want to transition at some point and like get top surgery but it just changed like I just kind of realized that that wasn't going to make me happy and kind of made me realize that if I did go through with it there's a possibility that this isn't what I actually want or I'm just going to be more unhappy with the results of that (.) but maybe I will want it in the future. ... I have thoughts about like top surgery still, like there's a possibility— everything is very like fluid or whatever so there is a possibility of me even changing the way I identify which has happened in the past so.

Participant 15 said they had chosen non-binary, in part, for its inclusive openness to change or revision: "But, um, my— how should I word this? The way I perceive myself is consistently changing as I grow, and evolve, and develop as a human being." "It leaves the conversation open" (Suki). Some described a "space" within which one could continue to experiment:

Alex.: Um, you were talking about genderqueer providing a space. Now, is that something that came with sort of taking on that term? Or?

Participant 13: So, for me it felt like pretty instantaneous in some ways. ... When I started hearing about [genderqueer] it just felt like it essentially was a space that encompassed and allowed I guess a lot of the things that I had been thinking about and struggling about in terms of yeah different relationships I had had with folks that felt or had been critiqued as being sort of like outside of a norm. Or ways of wanting to express myself that ... I had just had never voiced around my identity. Um, all of those different pieces, it felt like they could fit inside that space. Um, and that was great and it also then like allowed me to feel like I wasn't alone.



They went on to describe drawing others through various means – their pronouns, the androgynous spelling of their name – into this space in which these others are “immediately” “thrown off,” because the signified gender is not readily apparent as “one of the usual suspects.” They called this drawing in of binary-identified others an “ongoing” “practice,” which they “enjoy in a lot of ways”:

Sometimes I get a kick when people assume that I identify as feminine. Um, because it is wrong. Like [scoff] the binary, but it’s like skewering the assumptions. So, that feels good. I appreciate the social space that I feel like I can help people come into these days where there’s a lot of things that are confounding gender binaries and the rigid guidelines around expression that mean that like people have these moments of “I don’t know!” and it encourages them to actually ask questions around like what they need to know. So, having people look at my name and not be able to figure that out, I imagine whatever preconceptions they were trying to bring to our first meeting have been confused. *Also*, whatever you think you’re perceiving, that’s not *it* even for me, and I’m trying to disobey the idea that there’s this one single, simple, stable thing to perceive.

Liminality appeared central, here, as elsewhere: this ongoing process/practice seemed sustained less by some solipsistic hunt for an inner, authentic, personal self that could be discovered by the individual through a range of practices than by one’s surrendering to a life rife with “phases,” shifts, ambivalences and uncertainties regarding future identifications and embodiments:

Participant 8: I guess I have phases now, um, for like a few weeks or months, maybe I’ll just, like, dress very, um, I don’t know, I found like slacks that are also like sweat pants so, I dressed very, like, masc for a little while and sometimes I’ll go through months where, like, I only wear skirts or do my makeup a certain way or like not wear makeup at all, but then that can also change too if I’m getting misgendered all the time that affects dysphoria those perceptions and then how I present and my mental health, like, it’s interwoven and blurred together, sort of blurry too.

As I note below (see **Quality 3**), many participants were attuned to the trappings of a neoliberal discourse of individualism by which the flexible and autonomous subject seeks to achieve an expression of the self that is as closely related as possible to the internalized, idealized vision of the self we are said to possess. That self is formed not in isolation, nor was that, like a binary transition, as Michel noted, necessarily a “goal”:

I don't really know where I'm headed. Honestly, I don't really have an end goal? I guess that's sort of why the trans narrative doesn't really— I don't feel comfortable settling into those communities because I don't have an end goal in terms of who I am and what my gender is. People want that of me, "Go off and figure yourself out!" And I just feel like this is who I am right now and that's all that really matters. I've had to accept that other people want that, but I know what fits for me. I think they think that I'll then want to transition maybe?

Nordmarken (2014a) refers to this struggle against the dominant (gendered) subjectivities- identities – and against the dominant expectations of identity (development) – as an experience of “in-betweenness”: of having different genders attributed to you, depending on context, but also within the same context, of experiencing the world experiencing you in differently gendered ways, even within the same day, even when nothing else about you has changed much in the interim. The gender(s) one is perceived to be may differ, but unstable too are the genders one experiences oneself as:

Participant 13: For me it feels like a project that's ongoing in a lot of ways. There have been a lot of struggles that I've had that I feel like I'm kind of like going on a weird spectrum back-and-forth so there are moments where I'll feel like I'm too— I'm getting so invested in this notion of like public queerness that I feel like sometimes I'm performing something that doesn't even do justice to my experience of gender in that moment.

...

Participant 23: Yeah it has seemed I mean up until this point like this odd, um (.) I don't wanna say like transitioning stage but it's just this— I feel like I'm kind just floating in this weird space where I'm like, "I don't know where to go," like it seems like a very, a space where, um. Like simultaneously I feel like this is a great like descriptor for my gender, but then I feel, potentially through like, talking to people and a lot of people assuming this means I haven't made my mind up, like being binary trans or cis. Maybe it's more transience than transition, this floating or movement.

Living “in-between” genders (e.g., man and woman) and other identities (e.g., cis and trans), in the borderlands of oppressions but also privileges (see **Quality 4**), means moving among identities, subject positions and discourses, existing equivocally within them, as others search, relentlessly, for a sense of stability or certainty you might not wish for them to locate or believe

is locatable. As Nordmarken (2014b) recounts, being and becoming gendered is a state of constant movement, an articulating of movements rather than a sequence of movements or a journeying from one state to another (see also Adams & Holman Jones, 2011).

Finally, “no goal” problematizes the unnecessary conceptualizing of shifts in gender identity through the desistance/persistence dialectic now in vogue among many mainstream researcher-clinicians of childhood gender dysphoria, wherein a shift from trans (in childhood) to cis (in adolescence or early adulthood) is labelled as desistance (the reverse shift does not figure in this framework) and the maintenance of trans (not cis) identity as persistence. With its roots in the field of criminology, as Temple Newhook (2018) have noted, “desistance” denotes the cessation of an offending or antisocial behaviour. That only TGNC identities are figured as desisting (or persisting) marks transness as the deviant kind of gender identity development: the assertion of cis identity at any point in one’s life can invalidate any antecedent assertion(s) of a trans identity, yet trans identity is granted validity so long as it persists, unwavering and static, *at all points* throughout the remainder of one’s life. Embedded here is the assumption of stability of (preferably cis) gender identification as a positive health outcome, though many individuals move through a process of “[renegotiation] of ... gender throughout childhood or adulthood with no observable detriment to their mental health” (Ehrensaft, 2016, p. 59). Nevertheless, genderfluid identities are pathologized. Those who eschew teleology, as described throughout this quality, are to pick a side, cis or trans, as if neither of those identities ever waver. For these participants, however, the most consistent aspect of their gender was that it is ever-changing, owing in large part to intersubjective dynamics to which we are all subjected. What their talk suggests is the need for an alternative conceptualization of changes in gender identity not as

obstacles in the actualization of one's true self/gender but rather as necessary if not welcomed vectors of exploration which might be forever in-flux.

**Quality 3: Privileges gender self-determination.** Stanley (2014) refers to “gender self-determination” as a collective praxis that “indexes a horizon of possibility already here, which struggles to make freedom flourish through a radical trans politics” (p. 89). For Stanley, that politics demands more than legal recognition and inclusion into a national body for whom the operation of norms is central to justifying the maldistribution of life chances (for trans people, for people of colour, especially for trans people of colour), despite said recognition and inclusion. The totalizing violence of everyday domination, Stanley suggests, can be fractured by “the claiming of a self” (p. 90), even in our age of neoliberalism, because the “self” of “self-determination” is not “the fully possessed rights bearing subject of Western modernity” (p. 90), but rather the collective self. As “an ontological position always in relation to others and dialectically forged in otherness” (p. 90), the potentiality of this collective self rests with those among us who are antagonistic to “practices of constriction of universality” (p. 90). Indeed, Spade (2006) has said the goal of any medical, legal, or political examination of or intervention into the gender expression of individuals and groups ought to be gender self-determination, or “the expression of variant gender identities without punishment (and with celebration)” (p. 317). This is the hope for the freedom of genders to announce themselves as idiomatic creations, of non-binary folx to collectivize their struggle to demonstrate that what we take as given is, in actuality, fashioned:

Participant 2: People talk about how this generation is all about designing our own lives, like designer bodies and all that but we just wanna say who we are— determine that for ourselves, like tailor it to what we want without everyone telling us otherwise. They do that all the time!

...

Participant 4: My perspective as somebody who was assigned female at birth and like, made to socialize as a woman um, is that for me in many ways, masculinity seems so um, like there seems to be like a lot room to move around in it? At the same time, there are some very hideous and ugly limitations that are placed on one, by virtue of being masculine. So, I'm doing what I can to pick and choose among them, though I know there's a ceiling to what I can do given what's available to me. But maybe if others could see these things are changeable too? Can't we band together for that!

...

Participant 9: I do explicitly play with, um, feminine gender markers for example. I don't attempt like to cross-dress or present as female, but I do draw a lot– I always have some sort of like femme flare going on. My hope is to show people that these things aren't just natural you know whether that's for friends, lovers, housemates, or a random stranger that walks past me in the street, or someone who I'm working with professionally. That's also a queer thing for me, the purpose of drawing on dissonant gender markers.

...

Participant 15: I can only speak from, um, a person of colour's perspective where a huge part of my culture was taken away from me. So, when I say I'm creating my own gender what I mean is I've had to create myself in *many* ways. Because not only did I have to create myself, in the sense that I had to express myself, and my gender identity, despite microaggressions, I also had to be able to express my connection to a sense of belonging – I had to go back and relocate my Chinese identity and I had to manifest my sense of belonging in something that wasn't White, modern, Canadian society.

...

Kira: I guess I am cultivating my own agency in coming to terms with what is or constructing my own sense of gender. But I have to survive so there's also a learned practice or coercion of it– or maybe even constrained behaviour.

As opposed to naturalized determination, we encounter here gender according to the logic of composition or craft, as what one does within the milieu(x) one inhabits. To privilege gender self-determination is to question and deconstruct dominant epistemologies that assume the existence of an essential self. Gender identity, for each of us, involves negotiating forces, orchestrating elements, sometimes rearranging corporealities – an always simultaneously constraining and enabling performance of what is felt to be possible. The “designing” of one's

own gender in accordance with such felt possibilities suggests a TGNC epistemology which locates the authority to know (one's gender, oneself) in that *feeling*, rather than in biology (sex) or in others' apparent abilities to know. This is an affront to the structures of knowledge and power that lay claim to gender nonconforming bodies, structures whose methods claim the imprimatur of such knowing and knowledge-production. How can we shift the register from stable ontology of gendered being to an active, collaborative, and ever-shifting ontology of (being-)becoming?

To write about determining one's own gender, however, is to wade into the contested waters of trans agency. Those participants who had some knowledge of the history of trans liberation contextualized their own struggles to live their self-designated genders within a history of other communities "telling us that we're just making a mockery of femininity or that we're living a fantasy and don't realize what it's like out there" (Kira). Gender self-determination, I was told by certain of these participants, has been misconstrued by certain feminists and transgender/queer theorists to suit their two antagonistic political agendas: either trans agency is a "false consciousness" (trans-exclusionary feminist) or a paragon of individual freedom of expression (transgender/queer).<sup>21</sup>

As TGNC people in the West began to engage in community organizing and to form enduring organizations by the 1970s (Stryker, 2008a), they became increasingly visible and many Anglo-American feminists took note, some of whose scholarship was explicitly hostile or discriminatory, misgendering women who were assigned male at birth as "males" or "she-males" and men who were assigned female at birth as "females" or "confused lesbians" (Namaste, 2005). Most of the germane accounts begin with the publication of Janice Raymond's (1979) *The Transsexual Empire*, a book that came from a tradition of radical feminism and early lesbian-

separatism which stressed the autonomy of “woman-identified” women from men, including MTF transsexuals (she calls them “male-to-constructed-females”) whose symbolic usurpation (through surgical intervention) of women’s power to reproduce, as interpreted by Raymond, is read as a sadistic gratification, akin to rape. As artefacts of medical procedures, transsexuals could only be ersatz women, appropriating misogynist forms of femininity, because the possession of female genitals generates specific kinds of reactions from others that differ from those generated by the possession of male genitals and which invariably have a specific effect on character, such that only those born with female genitals warrant the label “female”; all others merely “wish” to be, or “act” like, women:

The androgynous man and the transsexually constructed lesbian-feminist deceive women in much the same way, for they lead women into believing that they are truly one of us – this time not only one in behavior but one in spirit and conviction. (p. 100)

Raymond’s assumption of an extremely invariant relationship between biology and character (spirit and conviction) was unfortunately to influence the dominant feminist position on transgender phenomena for much of the succeeding decades. The figure of the interloping transsexual has animated the “border wars” between butch lesbians and FTM transsexuals (see Halberstam, 1998), as well as debates about the founder and organizer of the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival restricting access to “womyn-born womyn” (see Koyama, 2006). Here, we find TGNC agency as a so-called false consciousness, a dismissal that, like other such appeals, makes no attempt to account for Raymond’s “male-to-constructed-females” apparently having succumbed to the motivation to seize symbolic control of (certain) cis women’s “reproductive power” (see Nicholson, 1994).

Sandy Stone's (1991) rebuttal to Raymond's polemic, "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" (the text that gave us posttranssexualism), undermines the foundationalist assumptions that supported Raymond's narrower concept of womanhood "by claiming a speaking position for transsexuals that [could] not be automatically dismissed as damaged, deluded, second-rate, or somehow inherently compromised" (Stryker & Whittle, 2006, p. 221). One of Stone's goals in critiquing these representations of transsexualism was to encourage new forms of self-expression that would reveal the deep and powerful ways we all construct a sense of self in reference to our particular form of embodiment. As a precursor to the transgender/queer perspective on gender variance (see Elliot, 2009), Stone's (1991) manifesto discourages attempts "to occupy a place as speaking subject within the traditional gender frame" (p. 295) and proposes, instead, recruiting transsexuals who live to pass (and pass to live) from their lives of invisibility so as to effect the growth of "the genre of visible transsexuals" (p. 296), which would expose the fallacy of (women's) universal experiences and oppressions. Though deconstructive in intent (see Stryker, 1998), the encouragement of certain kinds of troublingly gendered selves – visibility seemed imperative – set the stage for another binary that would emerge throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, a conformist/subversive dichotomy, which prioritized and celebrated the supposedly more transgressive effects of openly contesting the (gender) binary with sometimes little consideration of the systemic barriers to such visibility for some (usually the most vulnerable TGNC people).

The popular works of Bornstein (1994, 1998) and Feinberg (1996, 1998), among others, established a "beyond the binary" discourse through which it has been claimed "that because transgender people don't fit neatly into the two dichotomous categories of man and woman, attempts are made to force them into this binary system" (Bettcher, 2014b, p. 384) which they



are already beyond, over, past, outside of. One concern with the celebratory trend of this model has been its alleged commitment to the view of gender as a mere cultural construction or “performance” that could not accurately capture the realities of transsexual people for whom gender identity seems impervious to cultural modification. Critics of the transgender/queer perspective, many of whom are transsexual themselves, have argued that the defining features of transsexuality are minimized, such as “the importance of flesh to self; the difference between sex and gender identity; the desire to pass as ‘real-ly’ gendered in the world without trouble; [and] a particular experience of the body that can’t simply transcend ... the literal” (Prosser, 1998, p. 59). The sort of post-referential epistemology that informed transgender studies, for example, neglects the implications of gender as it is lived in “real life,” according to this “transsexual critique” (see also Namaste, 2000; Rubin, 1998, 2003), as it is now known.

Namaste (2005), one of these critics, is correct to point out that the idealization of incongruence assumes one has the luxury to take on the gender order in this way, a stance that she notes is unavailable to poor and working-class transsexuals whose ability to earn a living, or to access housing or healthcare would be jeopardized by such visible transgression of gender norms. Indeed, some of the popular beyond the binary works had adopted the language of individual freedom of expression with regard to gender. The eponymous “gender outlaw” of Bornstein’s (1994) memoir, for example, is imagined to be a post-gender subject who “possesses absolute agency and is able to craft hir gender with perfect felicity” (Salamon, 2010, p. 96). Gender is reduced to a question of choice, a performance, an ability or volitional activity; the atomistic language here presents certain nonconforming, non-normative, “outlaw” expressions of gender as if those performing them stood autonomously outside gender’s norms, acting on them.

This is agency as an *a priori* capacity with little consideration of the ways specific kinds of “agencies” are constructed and differentially distributed.

With that said, I agree with Salamon (2010) that certain of these critiques trade in misreadings of social constructionism and, specifically, performativity theory (see **Transgender studies and queer genders**): not all queer and/or transgender writings on the matter mistake performance for performativity. As Butler (1993) herself wrote, the notion

that one woke in the morning, perused the closet or some more open space for the gender of choice, donned that gender for the day, and then restored the garment to its place at night [would require] a willful and instrumental subject, one who decides *on* its gender ... and fails to realize that its existence is already decided by gender. (pp. x)

Butler’s emphasis on construction had been opposed to such a figure of a choosing (humanist) subject. Despite performativity’s frequent positioning as the epitome of the transgender/queer perspective’s misrepresentation of the lives of transsexuals to further the academic interests that perspective’s authors, Butler never located the positing power of the performative (whether speech act or gendering practice) with an impenetrable, invulnerable, and independent (transsexual) subject. (She had turned to psychoanalytic theory and deconstruction precisely to expose that subject as already pierced, already vulnerable to, and conditioned by, the discourse of gender.) Indeed, what Stryker and Currah (2014a) describe as their “avowed hope” (p. 303) for transgender studies to “change gender” “in ways that allow for more expansive opportunities for life for anyone ill-served by existing gender systems” (p. 303) rests on an understanding of “gender not just as a binary system of masculine/feminine codes or representations *but also* [emphasis added] as a biopolitical apparatus that operates on all bodies to produce unequally distributed life chances” (p. 303). Recent efforts to reconcile the internecine debates that decades

of trans-exclusionary feminist hostility toward TGNC people (many of whom are feminists themselves) had wrought have led to collaborative efforts that likewise mediate among disciplinary and biopolitical power, on the one hand, and, on the other, enactments of self-determination and autonomy. These “transfeminisms” (e.g., Enke, 2012; Scott-Dixon, 2006; Serano, 2007) scrutinize and confront not the choices we make but rather the social and political institutions, including “the patriarchal binary gender system” (Koyama, 2003, p. 246), which constrain our choices.

The participants did not speak as though their choices were unconstrained. Most, even those who identified as “post-” or without gender, seemed alert to, certainly familiar with, disparate and overlapping struggles to reconfigure this terrain of (self-)determination and first-person authority with regard to gender. Indeed, as I describe in **Quality 4**, most of the participants recognized identity categories as internally hierarchical, contingently normalized, and striated by and across other often overlooked differences, such as race and class, with a multiplicity of outcomes in terms of life changes. Unlike liberal humanist accounts of (transgender) subjectivity that fall “back onto an implausibly atomistic self that is given normative free reign to assert its gender” (Heyes, 2003, p. 1095), the participants’ accounts, particularly as detailed throughout **Quality 1**, provide some footing for an ethics of self-determination according to which the individual defines their identity – struggles against dominant subjectivities or subject positions, experiments with new subjectivities-identities – not by passively following a code, taking a standpoint, or affiliating with a particular counter-identity, but rather through critical reflection, seeking to fully understand “the discursive limits on individual self-transformation” (p. 1096). The self is not an ontological given here, like something to be discovered and then expressed accordingly/authentically:

Participant 15: So, um, I think [binary genders] are very self-perpetuating because there was a supply of– how should I word this (.) uh, there was a need to market things in a gendered way. Which thus then created this way of identifying yourself that was perpetuated by the idea that you need to buy your own identity, through consumerism, and through products, and the way things are marketed definitely contributes to the psychological establishment of your identity. Be careful!

The “will” to symbolize their gendered subjectivities ought not be equated with consuming oneself into existence, as Participant 15 cautions nor with the liberal sense of freedom as entailing autonomous rational will. As opposed to some utopian notion of “resistance” as this kind of freedom or positioning beyond the power/knowledge nexus, so often the participants instead spoke of themselves as caught among demands for autonomy, the manifold ideologies and institutions that sustain viable life, and the embodied, intersubjective dynamics (see **Quality 5**) through which such demands might be viably made:

Participant 4: Um, it’s also just like really prevalent in how um, like capitalism operates and therefore [how] I participate in the world. Like there are dozens of times every day that I interact with the gender binary and I’m like, “Okay well um I’m gonna choose how I’m gonna react to this today.” Um, but well it’s maybe not as simple as just choosing, like as often as possible and as many– and in as many ways as I can, like safely and that feel good to me, sure, but not always.

...

Participant 5: I’m not interested in being like, “I am only me and I am an individual unlike everyone else.” ’Cause like, that’s not what it’s about. Saying I’m non-binary isn’t about saying like, “I am this thing that is so different it can’t be pinned down.” But being like, “Well maybe like, actually just like these categories [man, woman] have like way too much meaning invested in them.” And like there’s got to be a way to bond over things– build a community with people who feel the same and are also marginalized and we can see what we can do about it.

I experienced many of the interviews as meditations on the paradoxes inherent in making non-binary a legible and livable gender within a binary-based system. This is why the term resistance was met with such ambivalence each time I asked a participant, “Do you understand yourself as

resisting the gender binary?” Recall Suki’s response: “I don’t think of myself as resisting, just living.” For them (Suki), resistance was “an internal resistance”:

I think it’s questioning where my beliefs come from? It’s uh like having one of those reflexive moments. But all the time. It feeds into, “What am I doing” (.) I guess like, “How can I manifest in my own actions?” What’s *actually* possible?

Some other kindred responses:

Alex: Um, do you understand yourself as resisting the gender binary?

Participant 2: I was cringing when you said that on the phone, by the way. I was cringing. It was like I don’t think it’s resisting. ... The idea that gender is male or female is just a bad theory. ... You realize that but then how do you realize that realization, you know?

...

Alex: Um, uh so how would you characterize like your relation to the gender binary?

Participant 11: Hm. Trying not to be involved with it. [laughter]

Alex.: Yeah, yeah.

P: Um, yeah, but I get that’s impossible, I’m in it. I don’t know I’m just tired of it, I don’t like it. I don’t understand why it’s there. I look at it and I’m just like, “Why?” and maybe this is why I’m non-binary.

...

Participant 9: I’m not fighting back against the gender binary, I’m just not adhering to it. Um, I’m sort of ignoring it more than fighting it. (.) Well, there are times where, I’m, yeah– I’m wearing like a skirt or whatever, and folks will ask about the kilt that I’m in. And I just have this, a moment of like, “You are really ingrained in this, and ugh I can’t,” and those are the moments where I feel like, I’m either like invisible in it. That’s the only time I ever really feel like its resisting or anything, to not be invisible.

As Kira remarked: “Like, it’s kind of the authority or disciplinary privilege I associate with [the gender binary] ... the authority to determine my gender for me. Shouldn’t it be the other way around?” Participant 8 described their “disassociating from the binary” thusly: “it means I won’t let all these other people who do invalidate me tell me they know me better than I know me.”

Many such limits to self-determination imposed by the gender binary were addressed, many said,

during “hours and hours” (Suki) spent asking: What is it? Where does it come from? How does it affect me? How does it affect us? What can I/we do about it?

When asked to define the gender binary, a number of their responses evinced the nuances one would expect from such (lengthy) critical reflections:

Participant 4: It’s like this um belief or system that there are like, two genders. Like, also often erroneously understood as like, being part and parcel of two different sexes. Um, which there’s more than that, but we can get into that another time. Um, and like that these two things are uh masculine and feminine or like, man and woman. And that in many ways the way that this is set up is that not only are these physical opposites, but they are opposite in *all* senses. It’s not just about gender roles!

...

Kira: I guess I’ll just say that, I assume, like for me, the binary is basically just a social construction of the assignment of those genders. The idea or conception that there are only two, which since I mentioned Julia Serano, Julia Serano calls oppositional sexism. And the idea that these categories are fixed and stable and can be assigned, mm, to individuals based on observable characteristics.

...

Participant 9: It’s restrictive. Um, it’s constantly mutating, but it’s sort of generally culturally understood and acknowledged, and adhered to, and even with these changes it’s so restrictive. ... It isn’t as if there’s a strict gender binary that, “this is what male is, this is what female is, and you just always stick to those.” You know, they have both shifted so much, but yet they’re still seen as so, uh, like natural in a way.

...

Participant 18: The main thing I think would be it stemming from the idea of, “OK well, there is this male gender and that is all derived from male sex, from people who have a penis etcetera,” whereas there is female that has been derived from “OK well these are people who have a vagina etcetera” and so that is where binaries come from, with people who are born intersex or who are otherwise not with traditional sex organs being made, being seen as very strange or even being altered to conform with one of the two. And so, the, the idea of gender as a binary has come from that, I would say.

...

Alex: How would you describe the gender binary and then also what’s your relation to it?

Ray Feinberg: I would describe I guess as just, the idea that there are only two genders, man and woman, and they are intrinsically tied to physical sex. And, and well in terms of my relationship to it I guess I was raised in it. Um, growing up I didn't really know any gay or trans people. So, I had no reason to, you know explore that, or think otherwise.

Alex: Mhm yeah, so what got you to explore then?

Ray Feinberg: Um, well first coming out as gay and getting to know people in the community (.) and really like, questioning my sexuality kind of opened the door to a lot of other stuff. You know, like reading, like a lot of literature on LGBT identities, and, uh (.) yeah just kind of— it wasn't very hard of me to think of gender as not being binary. Because, right away if you look at, how it's supposed to be like, gender is tied to your physical sex while there's not even like, two sexes. You know, like there's so many things that can happen and change, and intersex people are a thing. So, right away that whole theory goes out the window.

These and other definitions address the beliefs that maleness and masculinity are superior to femaleness and femininity, and that male and female are rigid, mutually exclusive categories, each possessing a unique a non-overlapping set of attributes, aptitudes, abilities, and desires (Julia Serano's oppositional sexism). The queer-identified participants' definitions conjured versions of heteronormativity (see also Warner, 1993): the belief that people fall into these distinct and complimentary genders with natural roles in life, that heterosexuality is the only sexual orientation or only normative one, and that sexual and romantic relations are most (or only) fitting between people of opposite sexes. Gender is routinely conflated with sexed anatomy, of which there are only two kinds (cf. Chase, 1998; Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Roughgarden, 2004), as well as with that which produces our desires and personality traits (e.g., male traits are linked with the desire for female traits). Social order, it is claimed, rests on the reproduction of this masculine-feminine gender complementarity. Some traced its origins to Christianity, some to post-World War II geopolitics, some to Western metaphysics and its binarized modes of "making sense" of experience:

Participant 15: But I think, what is masculine and what is feminine can even be traced back to Latin roots. Like even inherently in the language it was pretty pre-set what, uh

feminine and masculine were, even back in maybe ancient Roman times. So, I feel like the way our gender binary is structured right now is just a reflection of how the language is structured. Language definitely leaves a huge impact on the way people think.

Among non-Western cultures, several noted, individuals from groups sometimes glossed together under the “third gender” rubric (see Towle & Morgan, 2002) – the *hijra* of India, the *berdache* of native North American, the *xanith* of the Arabian Peninsula, and more – embody practices of gender that suggest complex understandings of the intersections among biology, identity, performance, power, and practice:

Sukie: Many cultures around the world, um esp– the one that I know of is China, Japan, even like Papua New Guinea, further going south, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, a lot of these countries already had non-binary as a concept, and it was taken away from the culture due to globalization, and capitalism, and marketing.

...

Participant 11: The gender binary are the two genders that are generally recognized um in our culture. Um this North American culture that we live in. This North American colonial country that we live in, 'cause well we know that many Aboriginal cultures recognize more than two genders so. I shouldn't just say North American um ... it's also important to acknowledge that like the things we associate with men and women are not and have never been stable or constant or natural throughout any culture or anything.

...

Participant 15: It is, um, widely accepted in other cultures, especially in more traditional Chinese culture, it is very acceptable to be gender neutral. ... My parents, the way that they were raised, um, both like– I mean culturally in China even there's a long history of gender-neutral pronouns, that's just part of the language, and gender-neutral names. Um, both my parents, and everyone I know that has a Chinese name it's impossible to tell their gender from their name. ... Um gender definitely, especially in the 1980s, around the Cold War era, um uh, in the Soviet states, or like in the Communist Bloc, gender was viewed as another construct that needed to be destroyed or dismantled by, you know like communist revolutionary thought. ... Um, male and female people, especially in China, um around that time, had the same haircut, had the same outfit, um everything was equal, they had equal pay, they had equal leave, they had equal time with the kids, they had– everything was equal, very different from North America.



Participant 15, and others, saw the gender binary maintained in the West by neoliberalism and inveighed against Eurocentric standards of beauty and the various disciplinary mechanisms therein that motivate conspicuous consumption along gendered lines:

Um, a lot of my, um, body image issues I discovered recently has come from this internalized perception of European, or White beauty standards. As a child I wanted, you know, like a, a tall pointy nose, I wanted large eyes, I wanted blue eyes in particular, um, I wanted pale skin. All of these things were um, all of these things I wanted, and was rather insecure with my own features. But that was– that was just something that like, I realized that a lot of my, um, like– a lot of my issues with gender presentation also comes from something very deep rooted and very similar.

...

Michel: Western commerce pushes gender on everyone constantly. You know, especially since right now there's unnecessarily gendered products and there's even more and more of those. And I know why companies do it because I studied visual culture. They sell twice the amount of something than they would have if it was not gendered. ... Because if they force people to sort of align to one gender or the other, then they can market to them better. Whereas if you aren't then it's a little more difficult for them because they don't really understand what you want and how they can get you to buy it.

...

Participant 19: A lot of [the gender binary] also is grossly tied into buying things, like, you have two of every product because, um, you can't use something that's for the wrong gender. It's so stupid, but people do it, they'll get nervous if they pick the wrong one, like the products are keeping up their gender. I don't get it.

Most recounted lengthy, detailed stories about various forms of “policing” of gender throughout their childhoods in accordance with the norms ascribed to their assigned gender. For example:

Participant 13: I guess I learned about [the gender binary] primarily through other people enforcing it– through policing essentially. So, action and presentation of self-expression were some of the big areas that sort of constituted the boundaries of those boxes in a lot of ways. Whether that was you know presenting myself in a particular way in childhood. ... Um, and so a lot of those different elements of my expression that were associated with femininity were questioned. And then people slowly started spelling out that there was that division, which I hadn't really thought of too much early on. Um, where emotion and sort of emotional caregiving was more associated with femininity. Where certain kinds of physical expression was more associated with masculinity.

Most also recounted lengthy, detailed stories about the binary's current effects on their lives; to do so, they often invoked the term "cisgenderism":

Alex.: Okay how would you describe the gender binary?

R.E.: So, for me the gender binary is, uh, going back to like the definition of cis it's born with certain genitalia— like, you're called that, you're raised with the social expectations of that sex and that's just what you're stuck with you don't really have a choice. And it's the cisgenderist assumption that sex and gender are the same and you're reprimanded socially— treated like dirt if you want to change your gender because it should be what your sex says it is.

They prioritized this term when speaking of their experiences operating within the binary, not the more well-known and widely-used "transphobia." Prejudice and discrimination researchers (e.g., Mizock & Lewis, 2008; Nagoshi et al., 2008; Sugano, Nemoto, & Operario, 2006; Winter et al., 2009) tend to use transphobia, and in that literature it refers to "an emotional disgust toward individuals who do not conform to society's gender expectations" (Hill & Willoughby, 2005, p. 533); violent and discriminatory acts against TGNC people are attributed to negative attitudes toward them. As opposed to transphobia, Ansara and Hegarty (2012) prefer cisgenderism, which they describe as an ideology that delegitimizes people's own designations of their gender(s) and bodies (see also Ansara, 2010, 2012; Ansara & Hegarty, 2013, 2014). For them – as for the participants – the transphobia framework misrecognizes a prejudicial *ideology*, which is systemic, multi-level and reflected in authoritative cultural discourses, as an individual *attitude*. Surely, phobic individuals' prejudices oppress, but "the buck doesn't stop with transphobes, their ideas about us had to come from somewhere" (Participant 2).

Furthermore, it is often the insidious institutional policies and practices that stigmatize and marginalize most perniciously: think of all the ways distinctions between bodies and genders are routinely overlooked, the ease with which we say "male" or "female" when we mean "man" or "woman" and vice versa. Assuming people's self-designated genders should and do match

their assigned gender can be deadly: TGNC people have previously described being refused necessary medical care, avoiding essential medical care, or omitting vital medical information that would reveal their non-cis-status due to prior traumatic experiences of misgendering by professionals (Ansara, 2010, 2012; Dewey, 2008; Dutton, Koenig, & Fennie, 2008; Namaste, 2000; Whittle, Turner, & Al-Alami, 2007). The rules that govern access to gender confirming and trans affirmative healthcare, the sex-segregation of key institutions (e.g., shelters, group homes, jails, prisons, bathroom), gender classification on government-issued ID, and so on – they all reflect the translation of cisgenderist delegitimization into action, which is perpetuated not only within medical systems and other governmental programs and institutions but also within the many sites of social life (workplaces, families, religious communities); the administrative impossibility of TGNC people's lives has far-reaching consequences, from pathologization to murder (see Spade, 2011).

What appealed to the participants about the cisgenderism framework was this ability to capture the wide range of ways in which they are themselves delegitimized by the gender binary. As Serano (2007) explained, so often the belief is that anti-trans discrimination arises from the fact that TGNC people transgress binary gender norms; but, as we've seen, many of the participants had opted for expressions that might read to most of us as relatively gender conforming. Participant 9's "genderfuckery style," for example, was not the norm here. Many of those who spoke explicitly of their political work said their aims were not so much to abolish the binary as to reset the terms of who gets to determine how someone identifies and what that means to them:

Ray Feinberg: Yeah, I don't really know how you would, um, subvert the gender binary when there's so many people who consider themselves a part of it. Um [throat clear] I think– yeah, I'm just kind of trying to become who I am you know. And, as long as people don't give me trouble for that then I have no reason to give them trouble for who

they are. *I'm* certainly not telling them who *they* are. ... So, to say then that you want to eliminate gender, like, people have their own feelings of gender. Like I don't see how you can convince people how what they're feeling is not gender.

...

Participant 8: Abolishing [the gender binary] would be sick, but also, it does make some people comfortable, so I don't know. It's all such sticky subjects. ... As in, like, I don't understand it and I don't get it, and it's kind of silly that it's there, but since it does make some people comfortable and it doesn't harsh, like, as long as the parts that aren't harshing on other people are there, it's okay, I guess. Like, as long as everyone's fine, you know. But don't harsh on me either when I say what I am, you know?

Of course, they had all experienced norm-policing, but, for them, a significant and less recognized form of oppression was this delegitimization, as it manifested in numerous ways – IDs and bathrooms, for example (see also Beemyn, 2015; Matsuno, in press; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012; Scheim & Bauer, 2015) – as well as interpersonally (see Harrison et al., 2012). It was not until May 1, 2017 that one could indicate “X,” as opposed to “M” or “F,” on government IDs and forms, so participants had had to face harassment and discrimination because their IDs were not consistent with their gender identities. The majority were students: residence hall rooms, locker rooms, bathrooms, sports teams, and certain other social traditions are all usually sex-segregated. (Ryerson University, however, instituted an “All-Gender Housing” policy so that no student is required to disclose their gender as part of the university’s residence admissions process; all residence room styles are advertised as “open to all gender identities.”) Participant 3, for example, advocated for “unisex washrooms” at their high school, which they said “changed how people [at their high school] see the gender binary and why the gendered washrooms just wasn’t right for [them]” and certain other students. Workplaces are generally less sex-segregated, but bathrooms there remain an obstacle (few are all-gender), especially for those who feel unsafe or uncomfortable in such spaces: “I could be a ‘predator’ in the women’s or ‘an easy target’ in the men’s” (Participant 9). Many said they avoided public restrooms entirely for fear of

experiencing physical violence or invasive questioning. Others used the one associated with their assigned gender – yet another negation of their self-designated genders. These institutional invalidations have their interpersonally-enabled counterparts, as we’ll see in **Quality 5**. Suffice to say, gender self-determination reveals the binary’s machinations to be ubiquitous, though often veiled: “It’s not just someone bashing your head in on the street, though that happens too” (Peter).

**Quality 4: Attends to intersectionality.** Just under half the participants used the term “intersectionality,” often as shorthand when detailing the inadequacies of the psy-sanctioned view of trans experience as binary, that it cannot but fail to sufficiently describe the diversity of gender, both trans and cis, including the idiographic struggles therein:

Participant 3: And now, um luckily more and more people are like realizing that transgender people exist and are valid, but even then a lot of people who will acknowledge that still um, think, that people need to get gender reassignment surgery and stuff to in order to be like to be validly seen as the gender that they identify as. But there are so many other valid trans people (.) What about people from other cultures or people who can’t get the surgeries for whatever reason?

...

Kira: The primary issue is that the way society is structured obviously gives rewards and consequences [to] different identities, and some are rewarded more than others. And I think at this time, like, people are starting to accept transness, for example, even if they’re not aware of non-binariness, but their transness is primarily couched in the binary itself. So, for example, *I* am trans, but if I do not present as a woman, like, if I do not wear women’s clothes, if I do not wear women’s makeup, if I do not do my nails, then people will attack me, because I don’t fit the binary expectations imposed on trans women. And even so, I can’t actually embody or practice all the genderqueerness or non-binariness I have in public– it’s dangerous as *specifically* a genderqueer trans woman.

Though mainstream psychologists are increasingly concerned with the effects of race/ethnicity, gender, social class, and sexuality on a range of psychological phenomena (e.g., discrimination, health disparities, identity development, psychological distress, socialization, stereotypes), little research has considered how these social categories are jointly associated with outcomes or

depend on one another for meaning (see e.g., Cole, 2009; Rosenthal, 2016). Through their allusions to and invocations of intersectionality, the participants acknowledged the obvious fact that every one of us necessarily occupies multiple categories simultaneously: “I feel like, with me, a lot of times for me gender is really tied to my experiences with race. And like I walk around looking like this, um it’s a visible marker” (Suki); “I do feel like my non-binary identity intersects with all these other identities” (Participant 15).

Feminist and critical race theorists developed intersectionality to describe analytic approaches that attend to the meaning and consequences of multiple categories of social group membership (see Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013). One of its earliest expressions, in a manifesto written by the Combahee River collective (1977/1995), a Black lesbian feminist organization, argued as follows: “We...find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously” (p. 234). At the time, major Western social movements organized around race, gender, and class failed to consider the intersections of these categories in their political analyses and organizing (King, 1988). The interests of those who experienced multiple forms of subordination were often poorly served (see e.g., Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). As scholarship by women of colour addressing the intersections of race, gender, class and sexuality burgeoned, critical race theorist and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), often credited with originating intersectionality, authored her critique of the “single-axis framework that is dominant in antidiscrimination law...feminist theory and antiracist politics” (p. 139) for its privileging of the experiences of the most privileged members of subordinate groups. In addition to comparable experiences (e.g., Black women sometimes experience discrimination in similar ways to White women), Crenshaw described additive or multiplicative effects (i.e., double discrimination, or the combined effects

of practices that discriminate based on race and on gender), and experiences specific to one's status as, for example, a Black woman (see also Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality highlights the ways that analyses considering categories such as gender and race independently may be limited, because, in practice, individuals experience these statuses at one and the same time.

Some participants highlighted that the positioning of the wrong body model as the default of TGNC experience, in both scientific and lay-public domains, likewise privileges the experiences of the most privileged TGNC people: those who have been able, historically, to access (and more often than not) afford expensive medical procedures, many of which are actually not covered by insurance, if they are at all. For those without such access to gender confirmation, "the paths toward being recognizable in this world are thornier— there are lots of weeds— oh! And not everyone gets a weedwhacker [laughter]" (Participant 23). We only have what is available to us to work with, tools that are inequitably distributed; who gets to determine the assembly of one's self, with those tools, is not only oneself. As but one example, Participant 18's "body dysphoria," as they called it, was "complicated" by "a number of medical conditions":

My body is alien to me and it's all of my body so [my dysphoria] is not just gender-based. It's a twist on the whole trapped in your body thing. Mine's twice as affected in a way because of these conditions, and in ways that wouldn't be for those who don't suffer like I do, like it's a meshing of ability and gender and I'm not sure I could even pursue some things like hormones given these conditions.

Others invoked intersectionality more broadly, to explain these contingent effects of the gender binary:

Participant 14: So the culture and the religion that you grow up in really affect your ability to do, um, sexual and gender exploration and— for me it was tough because being both AFAB and Vietnamese, well at that intersection uh, Vietnamese culture is really, really rigidly defined by um sex roles particularly at the— partially by Chinese influence, a lot by French influence after colonization, um, the role of women after French colonization went from a more or less equalizing force to, um, women becoming a

nationalistic symbol in a lot of ways in terms– um, and so, like, there has been a lot of expectations for me to be quote unquote normal. My female identifying Vietnamese friends worry that you’re not going to be normal one day, meaning: grow up and start families and stuff like that and have kids, just because that’s what’s specifically expected.

This may not be how the majority of Vietnamese women now living in North American think about themselves, but it was felt to be true for Participant 14 and had had “significant impacts on how [they] went about identifying [agender].” So much of these participants’ talk attended to this diversity within trans as well as within non-binary – indeed, to the diverse experiences of the binary – and, specifically, to the dependence of these terms on other categories for meaning in relation to “outcomes.” These intersections, they emphasized, produce hierarchies of privilege and power that structure social and material life, including gender self-determination. Participant 24, and others, addressed mental health (see also **Conclusions**):

I still have depression but also PTSD so it’s um. It was like from before it was a lot of not seeking help and I had luckily people who, would push me into that. And kind of like made me, seek help and make me um, want to be better? So just seeing other people that are living and thriving and not just surviving? I wanted that, too, but at first I couldn’t find a therapist who was affordable and knew about gender, too, so I’d be comfortable.

Other non-binary friends of theirs had come out (“thriving”) but doing so had proven “challenging” for Participant 24, given their abovementioned diagnoses: “I think there’s a lot of resistance right now like when you come out because not a lot of people don’t even know anybody who is non-binary, so could I handle that challenge?” Some others addressed race:

Participant 15: As much as I do not have a Chinese accent when I speak or as much as I, you know, try to present myself as normally as possible, it’s inevitable that my skin colour gives away that I am definitely not some, you know descendent of the Mayflower ... And that is something that has been inescapable to me, something that has definitely shaped the way that I view this binary society that I live in and gender ... Society will never include me, so why should I try to be the two genders it’s set up for me?

...

Michel: Okay, so you know, being Asian or Chinese, um the– even in North American culture, the men there are seen as more effeminate. So, that’s sort of why there’s sort of



like this feminization of an entire culture that happens. Because I am Asian, but also, I am— my body is female. So, it's sort of like, seen as like, twice that?

Being “seen” as “twice that,” doubly-feminine, has “brought with it a lot of extra objectification” which Michel believes exacerbates the “dysphoria” he experiences whenever misgendered as a woman based on “[him] being assigned female.” Still others, however, addressed the “passing privilege” that comes, for some, with being read as cis:

Participant 8: I'll join, like, trans groups and, like, I consider myself, like, a trans person. ... But, like, obviously when there's, like, someone that's not a non-binary trans person, like, I'll give them more space, so I won't take up too much space.

Alex: How come?

Participant 8: Um, because I feel like even though I am agender, I am cis-passing.

They explained that with passing comes certain privileges that might not be afforded to others; so, in these “spaces,” Participant 8 would prefer to prioritize the voices of those who are seen in public as, or known to be, trans, particularly given that TGNC people who report being easily identifiable (as trans) are more likely to seriously consider or attempt suicide due to increased experiences of gender-related discrimination, harassment, and violence (see Haas, Rodgers, & Herman, 2014); “their bodies disclose that even if they wouldn't want it said” (Participant 15).

Also addressed: nationality, disability, “neurodivergence,” “fat phobia” and “sizeism,” and class, particularly as they pertain to visibility. Participant 11, who was both educated (Master's degree) and White, said they recognized said privileges and “felt a responsibility” to be out as non-binary, to trouble the psy-view, because other “less cushioned” non-binary folx perhaps could not be so visible:

I mean I also like part of the reason I continue to identify as non-binary and part of the reason I try to be out about it wherever I feel like I can or I work up to it eventually everywhere is like when like so there's the— I know that I'll be happier if I'm out being non-binary. But if that's not enough motivation I can actually add that there is a political aspect to being out in a thing that not everyone can be out in. And if I have that, if I have

enough security and cushioning that I can do it than I should to make the path easier for other people who might have a harder time. I mean that's not why I identify as non-binary, that's why I tell people I identify as non-binary.

Participant 13, who had grown “exhausted” of “constantly being misgendered as a gay man,” recognized that being viewed as male could mitigate against “violent” responses should they choose to disclose their genderqueer identity:

I'm like, do I, like in a three-minute interaction with somebody do I want to take the time to spell it to them that that's not the case [that they're not a gay man]. Is it worth it? Could it go like wrong in some ways? I feel like I've been really lucky, and I think that a lot of privilege I carry as someone who is viewed as masculine, even as I say I'm not identifying that way, means that things don't usually go horribly wrong for me. Like I haven't really had really bad instances of like physical violence from those scenarios.

Several likewise referred to what is called “transmisogyny” in academic and popular activist writings (Serano, 2007), a combination of transphobia, cisgenderism and misogyny, which trans women and trans-feminine people uniquely face:

Ray Feinberg: You know very rarely in advertising will you see, uh, someone assigned male at birth in a skirt or a dress, or makeup, or something like that. It's not nearly as common as someone assigned female who, you know, is wearing pants and something you know a little more like stereotypically masculine. So, there's still like an acceptable way to be gender non-conforming. You know, which is very frustrating especially for those people who are underrepresented and face like the most marginalization of violence, like certain trans women, so misogyny comes into play here too.

These quotes illuminate the intimately specific ways in which the gender binary is navigated given any number of other intersecting forms of marginalization, stigmatization, and discrimination. The narratives therein were too numerous for me to do justice to their specificity here, but what we can take from them is the import of attending to the experiences of those who are overlooked when identities, such as trans, are assumed to include only certain (usually privileged) subgroups of all those who identify with a given identificatory term:

Participant 4: I think it's really important to prioritize those experiences and those people in our communities, the more marginalized or oppressed, even if we share the same identities, like within “non-binary.” ... Um, and also there can be such joy and pain in

meeting people whose identity is like extremely similar to yours. [To] have those people to like talk through our feelings with [but it] may not be appropriate to work through what I'm going through with somebody who has not had like the same privileges.

...

Participant 10: I think it's like really, really difficult like with you know me on top of like being brown and then also identifying as "non-binary" and then also being seen as female and then my sexuality it just kind of all just, it's very complicated and is just very like difficult and hard and, I just feel (.) [sigh] it just makes life a little bit harder [crying]

As Participant 13 suggested, "We need to start asking ourselves who's not included here. Who's getting pushed to the forefront? Who's not being served as a result and what conditions are allowing this? How can we get justice for them?" At least three of the participants of colour had told me they found politically-oriented non-binary virtual communities overwhelmingly White (see **Conclusions**). Their justice-oriented musing advocated "doing away with the erasure of diversity" – of the diverse experiences contained within categories which are crosshatched by multiple other identities – so as to repair the injustices that arise from this "washing over" of the interlocking systems of oppression that cut across conventional identity categories:

Participant 13: And then obviously like certain demographics within trans communities and certain communities are, at like a much higher risk so um so like Black trans women for instance are seen as sort of facing the largest of those intersectional obstacles in terms of getting access to basic elements of life and community and success. That kind of idea of intersectionality– those notions of overlapping oppressions and pieces like that really informs my political thinking. Let's not wash over that.

Analyses of gender that incorporate other category memberships disrupt the Procrustean presumption of "invisible" social statuses, such as middle-class standing, heterosexuality, able-bodiedness, and Whiteness (Sue, 2004). We could better see, for example, how various institutionalized oppression systems, such as sexism, racism, poverty and ageism, exacerbate the impact of cisgenderism. Across trans populations, multiply marginalized groups have it hardest: socioeconomically disadvantaged trans people experience the highest rates of discrimination and

violence (Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing, & Malouf, 2001); trans people of colour encounter more discrimination than White trans people, and African-American trans people encounter the most of all racial groups in the United States (Grant et al., 2011); ageism intensifies trans people's vulnerabilities (Witten & Whittle, 2004); and transmisogyny ensures that, for example, transitioning trans women are fired or demoted, or have their pay docked, whilst transitioning trans men are supported and incorporated into patriarchal social hierarchies (Schilt & Wiswall, 2008). Focusing on a single dimension – say, gender – in the service of parsimony represents a kind of false economy; doing so certainly does nothing to effect structural-level changes required to promote various equity and social justice agendas, which is what intersectionality's progenitors had hoped for the concept: that it would inform political activism (see also Alexander-Floyd, 2012; Bilge, 2013; Collins, 2015), drawing our attention to the heterogeneity of groups and, thus, to opportunities to build coalitions with others who may be disadvantaged in similar ways.

**Quality 5: Foregrounds intersubjectivity.** The crisis of referentiality discussed in **Quality 1** foregrounds gender as an intersubjective category, not simply a psychological one (nor a cultural one for that matter), as well as gender identities as reflections of what individuals, institutions, and cultures “do” together. That one's expression or embodiment of gender does not always signify for others one's gendered self-identification(s) reveals the insufficiencies of conceptualizing such identities as an “individual difference,” inherent in each of us (the mainstream view). Gender was said to be rarely if ever experienced as “a” trait, dichotomous variable, and isolatable from the world and its inhabitants, as if it could simply unfold along its own developmental pathway. According to several of them, there is no such thing as “a’ gender” (Kira): “it’s more complicated than ‘this is what I am, that’s it.’” As Participant 2 put it:

“There’s a gender I experience myself as and then this other one that people view me as or say I am.” Sometimes “experiential” and “perceived” genders align; usually they do not. This is why the relational analysts refer to gender as a “necessary fiction” (Harris, 1991), a “real appearance” (Benjamin, 1998), a “false truth” (Goldner, 1991), among other oxymorons: our identifications cohere much less than has traditionally been assumed, nor are our bodies always malleable to our desired presentations. The identities we end up with are tantamount to “compromise formations” (see Goldner, 2003; Harris, 2000), they say, forced as we all are to assemble ourselves with only the (symbolic) resources we have at hand.

The hope, despite such compromises, is that in the “field of intersection between two subjectivities” (Benjamin, 1990, p. 34) one might exist for others not just as a subjectively conceived “intrapsychic” object but as an objectively perceived “outside” subject, as “another mind who can be ‘felt with,’ yet had a distinct, separate center of feeling and perception” (Benjamin, 2004, p. 5). “Others” includes people, family, friends, strangers and the like, but can also denote institutions that administer gender in binary fashion and a culture which operates according to oppositional norms. “Intersubjectivity” here refers to the aspect of interpersonal experience that is characterized by the interaction of two individuals with different subjective experiences of themselves, each other, and the events between them. Jessica Benjamin – one of the founders of relational psychoanalysis, and one of the first to introduce feminism and gender studies into psychoanalytic thought – expanded upon Winnicott’s (1971) crucial distinction between subjectively conceived objects and objectively perceived subjects to show how gender is not only an individual strategy (deployed by the child or their caregivers) to facilitate wishes for separation-individuation or merger (see Person & Ovesey, 1983) but also a critical aspect of the intersubjective process of recognition and negation circulating among them. She wrote:

Intersubjectivity theory postulates that the other must be recognized as another subject in order for the self to fully experience his or her [sic] subjectivity in the other's presence.

This means, first, that we have a need for recognition and second, that we have a capacity to recognize others in return – mutual recognition. But recognition is a capacity of individual development that is only unevenly realized. (Benjamin, 1990, pp. 35)

To this postulation we can add that one's ability to truly perceive the other as outside, as distinct from one's own mental field of operations – crucial as that is to the other's self-development – may be depend on certain sociosubjective realities that have rendered some gendered subjectivities more recognizable and “perceptible” than others. The denial of TGNC people's first-person authority presents for them additional obstacles to self-determination, but also to recognition and validation of one's self-designated gender(s): aside from a handful of safe spaces, the participants' felt sense of non-binariness was seldom recognized. Indeed, their gender expressions were usually misattributed – and, should they say something with an eye to securing recognition – they are often met with invalidation.

This sort of erasure, this negation of interpersonal recognition (and sociocultural legibility), endowed with the heft of institutionalized oppression (cisgenderism, in this case), has been documented with regard to other minoritarian identities, though this recognition/negation dialectic uniquely invisibilizes TGNC people. According to Bettcher (2007), most transphobia, defined by her as “any negative attitudes (hatred, loathing, rage, or moral indignation) harbored toward transpeople on the basis of [their] enactments of gender” (p. 46), is fueled by a rhetoric of deception that backs deployments of gender attributions that delegitimize and invalidate TGNC people's self-identifications:

Identity invalidation is the erasure of a trans person's gender identity through an opposing categorization (e.g., a trans person sees herself as a woman, but she is categorized as a man). This invalidation is framed in terms of the appearance-reality contrast (e.g., a trans woman may be presented as "really a man disguised as a woman"). And this contrast is manifested in one of two ways that constitute a double-bind for trans people – namely, passing as nontrans (and hence running the risk of exposure as a deceiver) or else being openly trans (and consequently being relegated to a mere pretender). Genital verification can be a literal exposure (as with Brandon Teena, Gwen Araujo, and Angie Zapata) or else a discursive reveal through euphemistic comments like "was discovered to be anatomically male." (Bettcher, 2014b, pp. 392)

Bettcher calls the type of transphobia grounding the deceiver representation "reality enforcement," and the most extreme cases of it occur where there is a maximal intermeshing of oppressions: of the TGNC people who were murdered in the United States in 2017, young trans women of colour were disproportionately affected (see Human Rights Campaign & Trans People of Color Coalition, 2017). Reality enforcement cannot be reduced to sexism, racism or classism, yet all are fundamentally interwoven. The cultural conflation of sexed anatomy and gender identity (i.e., cisgenderism), coupled with this presumption that one can know a TGNC person's true identity and that one's knowing is more valid than that person's own self-knowledge (see also Serano, 2007), is inextricably bound up with the transphobic hostility and violence. Recognition, within this context of omniscience, inevitably breaks down, more so than Benjamin (1990) has suggested is normative, if it is even established to begin with.

As variations of reality enforcement move away from paradigmatic cases, they tend to lose some of the commonly associated features and hence become less severe or less likely. For

non-binary folx, identity invalidation and pretender representations seem most salient (see Beemyn, 2015; Factor & Rothblum, 2008). The non-binary and genderqueer-identified respondents of the *2015 U.S. Transgender Survey* (James et al., 2016) were asked what gender they are perceived to be by people who do not know they identify as non-binary, and the majority reported they are usually assumed to be cis women (58%), including 72% of AFAB non-binary respondents and 2% of AMAB non-binary respondents; only 1% were assumed to be non-binary. Because “most people do not understand,” many respondents refrain from explaining “non-binary” (86%) or find it “easier” not say nothing (82%); just over half (44%) “sometimes” corrected others and told them about their non-binary identity and only 3% always did so. Approximately two-thirds reported their non-binary identity is often dismissed as “not being a real identity or a ‘phase’” (63%), and others feared they might face violence (43%) upon disclosure. Matsuno (in press) calls this “prevalent misconception ... that nonbinary gender identities are invalid or nonexistent” (p. 2) a “unique experience of nonbinary individuals” (p. 2), which they blame on the “narrative that trans people only transition from one binary gender to the other” (p. 2; see also Bradford, Reisner, Honnold, & Xavier, 2013; Bradford et al., 2007).

We’ve already encountered numerous dissonances between experiential and perceived genders: certain participants’ androgynous expressions signal cis identification (Participant 2: “It really means like cis masculinity, it’s usually not femme at all”; R.E.: “When big corporations market ‘gender-neutral’ what they mean is ‘inoffensively masculine’”); AFAB participants are mis-attributed as tomboys or lesbians; some of the AMAB participants are mis-attributed as gay men; and so on. When one seeks to rectify such dissonances – to make one’s non-binary identification known – and is then delegitimized as “pretending and not real” (Participant 21) or “non-existent” (Participant 24), as “someone playing dress up” (Participant 2) or “going through



a phase” (Eli) that will either desist or end in a binary transition (Singh & Burnes, 2009).

Additional challenges arise, which include: “(1) having one’s life constructed as fictitious; and so (2) failing to have one’s own identifications taken seriously; (3) being viewed in a highly condescending way; and (4) being the subject of violence and even murder” (Bettcher, 2007, p. 50). In the case of those who did not seek deliberately transgressive presentations, one could opt for invisibility, remain perceived erroneously by others, and bear the negation of subjectivity that comes with such misrecognition:

Participant 24: I mean we can be invisible because people would just read me as probably like I don’t know like, a butch-y lesbian. But I just don’t want that to happen that erasure, being bit into this other box [butch lesbian]. ... On the other hand, sometimes I do feel like calling myself non-binary in public spaces is um– can be dangerous? So, a lot of the time I’ll just fall back on like, “Well yeah I’m just like a lesbian.”

For everyone, however, regardless of how their non-binary identifications were made known to others – transgressive expressions and verbal disclosure being the two main ways – dismissal and invalidation of said identifications were pervasive:

Michel: I’m trapped being invisible to some extent because of the society we currently live in. And I feel like there’s really nothing I can really do about presenting or asking for people to treat me the way I believe I should be treated: as an individual, and not as a person of either gender. I’ve tried, they can be so dismissive. It hurts. And it’s kind of frustrating sometimes because there’s been times when I’ve thought about, you know, um going on hormones and that kind of stuff to push myself more into the ambiguous sort of aspect, even though I don’t have much dysphoria to how I look, and why should I change myself to fit the narrative of what’s supposed to be legit in their eyes?

Pervasive identity invalidation can come from any number of folks captured by the LGBT umbrella, including gay men and lesbian women (see also Rankin & Beemyn, 2012):

Participant 9: I’m more concerned about personal safety around, um, straight men. Um, but with gay or queer men, I’m more concerned around rejections slash “Oh! You’re not what I thought you were.” Um, there have been a couple times where I’ve been trying to organize a hookup or whatever, and it’s become really clear in their line of questioning that they either don’t understand that I’m trans, or they’re expecting me to be trans-feminine, or something and I find the general trans knowledge in the gay community is just almost nothing or very narrowly focused [on trans women] and there’s no knowledge

at all of non-binary stuff, or care for them to know. That the gay village is some queer mecca is bullshit.

Most hurtful for some was the invalidation they experienced from binary trans people:

Participant 5: My relationship with the term [non-binary] is really complicated, because I kind of had an abstract idea of, like, what trans is or something. ... The first person I met who educated me was a trans man, who was very, very binary. And so that really screwed up my understanding of myself for a while. ... My understanding growing-up had always been like, I am neither gender. And that was cool [chuckle] like, I got that. And then, he came along and was like, “That’s impossible! You can be male or female, or you can be a trans man or a trans woman. Or transitioning. Like, those are your options.”

...

Participant 8: People still get a lot of shit, um, from other people in the trans community. I felt invalidated sometimes because, um, I’ve seen some people complain about femme non-binary people that were born female or masculine non-binary people that were born male, um, and they kind of use it to, like, invalidate them as a non-binary or agender person– like, just because I wear a pink skirt doesn’t mean I’m female. Like, “You telling me I’m really female is just as shitty as someone telling you that you are what you were born as.” It’s so hurtful to me there’s this division between us all.

...

Participant 13: I was speaking at a panel once and there was a trans woman was talking about her experience and then I think I had said something about non-binary identities and then she made some comment about how, you know, she didn’t really understand how that worked and you should just pick sides and pick an identity and go on with it. And those moments, yeah, like ... for me are really saddening on one level. It hurts when people who are also mouthpieces of community speaking to their own experience and then shit all over another identity group at the same moment so.

Some, like Participant 13, blamed a “lack of understanding,” which was attributed to the hegemony of the “wrong” body narrative and associated (self-)understandings of trans embodiment and experience:

Participant 14: I actually get questions more from binary trans people than I get from cisgender people yeah, there are a lot of binary trans people who just don’t get it because more often than not, when they transition, they end up trying to become the opposite binary gender and so they don’t get it when you’re trying to not do that.

...

Participant 24: What I experience is um a lot of the other letters I guess in the [LGBT] community will try to define what the T is and the label? ... And then there's people within the trans community under the T umbrella who try to do the same, but they've had experiences that are very binary so they can't— there's like no empathy almost for experiences besides their own. Or what is common experience.

Participant 24 went on to describe “internal divisions within the T” (“sometimes it's like binary versus non-binary trans”), such that there had been attempts to “push [them] out of [the community]” for “not fitting their [binary trans people's] qualifications” of trans experience: “It's like, ‘Are you dysphoric?’ ‘Have you had surgery?’ – that's a big one.” For Participant 24, “it's more grey than that,” and they would prefer “a less exclusionary T”: “The whole point is that we're all made to feel other, so wouldn't it be nice to have more solidarity there?” The participants' identities were said to be viewed differently, and less legitimately, than those who identified with the other gender:

R.E.: If your self-identification doesn't stick within the binary it's very, very, very hard to defend yourself because— they already have made a position for— more accepting people won't have a problem with trans people that self-identify as FTM but they have a problem with me saying that I'm not a female or male because when it's all binary then I become an impossibility.

Others believed (some) binary trans people did not consider them to be “really trans” (Participant 2) or “trans enough” (Michel), because they do not (always) experience anatomic dysphoria or seek gender confirmation for that reason. (Echoes of Harry Benjamin's true transsexualism re-emerge here.) As a result of experiencing such dismissal, some have felt coerced into silence, and, hence, invisibility, a common feeling among non-binary people (see also McLemore, 2015).

Invalidation was often accomplished through *intentional* misgendering. In the trans-affirmative literature, the sorts of misreadings and misattributions described throughout **The Psy Disciplines' Trans** and *Non-binary gender expressions* sections are referred to as “misgendering” and considered to be a form of “microaggression.” Unlike more overt, deliberate

acts of (physical) violence, microaggressions are vehicles through which oppressive discourses (e.g., cisgenderism) are expressed as brief, commonplace, interpersonally communicated “othering” messages related to a person’s perceived marginalized status (see Pierce, Carew, Pierce- Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978; Sue, 2010). Even if unconscious or unintentional, our facial expressions, body language, and terminology, among other representational mechanisms, often betray these messages. Some microaggressions against TGNC people are related to perceived trans-status or gender nonconformity: microaggressors might, for example, express disgust, dismissal, apprehension, confusion, disbelief, and/or agitation once alerted to a person’s status as TGNC; scrutinize, exoticize, sexualize, or fetishize that person; ask invasive questions about their genitalia; evaluate their gender presentation (against cis norms); imply that they are mentally disordered or that gender-confirming procedures constitute mutilation; express concern about them interacting with children; offer backhanded compliments such as “I would have never known” (see Balsam Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011; Nadal, Rivera, & Corpus, 2010; Nadal, Skolnik, & Wong, 2012; Nordmarken, 2014a, 2014b; Serano, 2007). Many of these microaggressions reflect erroneous, dehumanizing stereotypes about TGNC people; certain others reflect the assumption of a universal trans experience (e.g., all trans women are sex workers). In the case of the participants, the assumption was of binary trans experience – that that was the only valid (and recognized) TGNC experience – which is communicated through institutions (e.g., IDs and bathrooms; see **Quality 3**) and interpersonally, as the quotes above can attest, as well as whenever they are misgendered, which not uncommonly occurred intentionally.

Perhaps nowhere can one find better evidence of the constitutive nature of language in reifying cisgenderism than in gendered language; the third person demands reference to the gender binary (see **Pronouns**). Misreadings and misattributions, consequently, are routine; so,

too, is unintentional misgendering, or “use of gendered language that does not match how people identify themselves” (Ansara & Hegarty, 2014, p. 260). Though anyone can be misgendered, it is a particularly common experience shared by those whose self-designated genders are treated as invalid or not granted official recognition in social, medical, or legislative contexts unless typically associated with their assigned sex designations at birth (see also Ansara & Hegarty, 2012, 2013). For the participants, as we’ve seen, this usually meant being called “he” or “she,” which is sometimes referred to as “mispronouncing” (Ansara, 2010), but also could involve others using gendered greetings (e.g., ladies and gents) and other honorifics (e.g., sir or madam) or one’s “deadname” (the birth name of someone who has changed it):

Participant 6: More than gender expression, I think what validates my identity is more other people (.) showing acceptance to it.

Alex: Okay. How do they do that? Do you have examples?

Participant 6: It’s mostly, the use of pronouns and when someone, you know, if I’m dressing very masculine and someone calls me a she, or being like, “Oh but that person is biologically female.” That’s invalidating. Happens all the time though (.) sadly.

...

Participant 21: And pronouns can be used, like, as a weapon. People misgender people on purpose or deadname people. I changed my name legally to “Participant 21” and there’s still, like, two people who call me by my old name, even though I also have a nickname that I went by for longer than that. It’s, like, they should get it by now, and it’s hard to know if it’s on purpose or like a purposeful accident. And I think pronouns are a really important way of forging your identity and being recognized in the world when the world is constantly trying to make non-binary identities invisible.

Because non-binary identities are so often dismissed, the participants found themselves vulnerable to refusals to use gender-neutral pronouns or preferred names, and continued misgendering, should they correct someone who has misgendered them: “These can be tense conflicts, arguments, and I’m usually the one de-escalating” (Participant 6). Participant 8, like many other of the AFAB participants, described “people still [calling them] girl or lady even

though [these others] know [they're] not female.” These others’ “flimsy excuse”? Gender-neutral pronouns are “apparently grammatically incorrect,” though the singular “they” had emerged “all the way to the fourteenth century” (about a century after the plural they). “Lots of people mess-up even after I’ve corrected them, but the real problem for me is when they don’t even try. They don’t seem to want to try. That’s pretty invalidating” (R.E.). Participant 10 had habituated to “other people using [incorrect pronouns]” and come to “accept that they’re going to continue to do that even if [they] say something. They don’t change!” Participant 21 considered said habituation a “survival technique” so that they “don’t feel discomfort constantly from being misgendered.” Participant 2 likened intentional misgendering to “a matter of consent”:

It’s not your choice what my pronouns are. It’s not your choice. And, if you don’t respect my pronouns, then uh don’t count on being friends with me. ... I mean, for me, uh misgendering is again, it’s a matter of education. Is that, people don’t take it seriously, they’ll still think it’s a joke. Uh but I think misgendering is just as bad as being racist. And um, it’s really difficult to explain that to people.

Acts of misgendering and mispronouncing are commonly coupled with defensiveness and/or denials, from microaggressors, that a type of cisgenderist violence had been enacted (Nadal et al., 2010). Defensiveness can take the form of excessive contrition when corrected, as Kira explained: “They do this progressive cis thing where they get really hurt and then they think they’re the worst person that’s ever existed and they start apologizing profusely, like they’re trying to get me to comfort their feelings, which is such a silly reversal, right?” Outright denials, in contrast, compound the abovementioned invalidation by minimizing the severity of the acts themselves and their consequences (see below). Sometimes, TGNC people are labelled the “defensive” ones (Nadal et al., 2012), as “oversensitive ‘snowflakes’” or “entitled Millennials” (Participant 13) too focused on “politically incorrect language” (Zucker, Drummond, Bradley, & Peterson-Badali, 2009, p. 906). Calls to not misgender are typically reframed as “excessive,”

“unreasonable” “demands” imposed upon those who reject the use of gender-neutral pronouns, positioning them(selves) as “victims” of TGNC people who are “supposedly making a hassle for everybody by forcing gender-neutral pronouns on people” (Participant 13). This is what Jordan Peterson, avowed microaggressor and notorious professor of psychology at the University of Toronto, has claimed – a then-topical example that several of the participants raised.

At the time of the interviews, Peterson had just released a YouTube video in which he criticized Bill C-16 – an act, introduced on May 17, 2016, to (1) amend the Canadian Human Rights Act to add “gender identity” and “gender expression” to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination, and (2) add “gender identity or expression” to Sections 718.2(a)(i) and 318(4) of the Criminal Code – as a “violation” of (his) free speech (Peterson, 2016). Peterson’s fallacious fearmongering – that he could go to jail for mispronouncing (which is not true<sup>22</sup>) – made non-binary students’ calls to not misgender a lightning rod for cisgenderist criticism on Canadian campuses: to him and his supporters, that “sex/gender identity/gender expression & sexual orientation vary independently” is a “proposition” of “social constructionists” (Peterson, 2017) and other “radical left-wing ideologues” (The Agenda with Steve Paikin, 2016); hence, his very public refusals to “use words made up by people” (i.e., gender-neutral pronouns), including his students (Peterson, 2017), were apparently justified. The participants who raised Peterson said they felt “unsafe” being out on campus (Participant 24) lest they be exposed to harassment or verbal violence, given their positioning within Peterson’s scheme of victimization as the perpetrators (not the victims):

Participant 21: And like, uh, now I’m feeling afraid to come out at work stuff like that, because of the things that were going on at the University of Toronto.

Alex: Yeah. You mean with Jordan Peterson?

Participant 21: Yeah. Mm, like, after that, I felt like I had to hide my identity a lot more, so I haven't even really brought it up at work. People there— the leads [managers] are more conservative and I just don't want to risk it. I know other people are feeling this way, especially those where employment is more precarious. It's not worth it. ... Like, at work now, I'd rather be misgendered than put myself at risk, but it feels like they wouldn't necessarily understand, so they perceive me in a way that feels bad.

The populist fervor against gender-neutral pronouns, including the vilification of those who use them, was experienced by these participants as yet further nullification of their feelings, thoughts, and/or experiential realities (see also Sue, 2017), stymieing the pronouns' broader acceptance and usage whilst emboldening those who prefer to keep misgendering:

Sukie: Yeah, [Peterson's] a really good example of a lack of understanding. You know, he got up on his soap box and started talking like he knows everything about gender, and the law and everything like that. And, you know it doesn't take much to show that he's wrong. About a lot of things— and I think that it's unfortunate because he's a psychologist and he should know better. And, people are kind of looking to him and saying, "Well he's a psychologist and he's saying this is bad maybe he's right, maybe he's onto something." With Bill C-16, there's nothing that is gonna force people to use certain pronouns. ... So yeah, I think it is like, a lot of bad pushback [against gender-neutral pronouns], you know? Since the interview. I can definitely see why people are resistant, it's changing their worldview, and they don't necessarily see how [misgendering] effects the day-to-day life of other people. They're now just digging their heels in.

Those who intentionally microaggress might not view themselves as aggressors, I was told, because "for them aggression is an action, like a physical act of violence" (Participant 13), executed by one rational social actor directly against another, which evinces some degree of consensus across independent observers regarding its nature and intent (see Lilienfeld, 2017). Valentine (2003), however, has argued that (transphobic or cisgenderist) violence "can come to incorporate not only physical murder, but all practices that may be perceived as impacting negatively upon life" (p. 31). Indeed, Participant 13's work as a sexual and gender diversity training facilitator had illustrated for them this "misconception about violence" that it cannot, or ought not, draw into its purview a range or practices and experiences, including the violence of representation and of emotional and physical scarring:



In trainings, we've defined violence— the violence you can do to somebody by misgendering them and that's a huge point of contention for a lot of the people that we talk to. Because they're like, "Is that violence really?" So, talking about emotional violence *as* violence has been part of that, and validation and invalidation are implicitly woven through all that. ... We try and encourage people to think less about the nature of the act or its intention and more about its impact, you know, think about what's happening for a person who hears from you and then from like fifty other people throughout the course of the day the wrong pronoun, or they hear from someone, "I don't think that's who you are and I'm not using this pronoun for you."

Though "merely" linguistic or discursive, misgendering exacts numerous forms of violence, some psychic or "emotional," as Participant 13 noted, and some, yes, physical; certain discourses and representations are linked to practices of physical and psychic violence. Besides reflecting stereotypes about TGNC people, many microaggressions are active manifestations of the cisgenderist denial of first-person authority which entitles outside others the authority "to stare, to know, to determine, to proclaim" (Nordmarken, 2014a, p. 41). This apparent omniscience, and its enforcement, can be lethal: the rhetoric of deception to which Bettcher (2007) refers has also fueled and excused anti-trans (physical) violence, sometimes even backing "trans panic defenses" (a variant of the gay panic defense): the murderer's "irrational" rage at having been "deceived" by the victim – for example, "discovering" the victim was, or "exposing" her to be, "really" a man, not a woman, often through "genital verification" – means the murderer ought not be guilty of murder, only manslaughter, or so the defense goes.

Finding oneself represented again and again in ways contrary to one's own identifications, as "really an X," can otherwise constitute a "massive gender trauma": Saketopoulou (2014), a psychoanalyst, has documented how "a particularly toxic, psychically combustible blend that shares some of the formal features of traumatic experience: dissociation, anxiety, depression" (p. 780) arises, in part, from "being misrecognized by one's primary objects as belonging to one's natal sex despite the patient's explicit articulation of a different gender

identity” (p. 779). Some common effects of feeling unseen and unknown in this way (see also Goldner, 2011a; Lemma, 2013; Silverman, 2015) include chronic health problems and persistent feelings of alienation, anxiety, anger, depression, fear, hypervigilance, fatigue, hopelessness, and/or suicidality (Nordmarken, 2014b). The participants in Nadal et al.’s (2012) study of microaggressions against TGNC people, for example, reported a range of emotional reactions, including anger, frustration, sadness, and disappointment; some had accepted microaggressions as part of their everyday lives. The mundaneness of invalidation, R.E. advised, “can be really detrimental on people’s mental health”:

Imagine what that would be like, all the time people saying one way or another, “I understand you think you’re this way but I see you as this other way and I don’t want to see you the way you want to be seen.” It’s dark, it’s like people saying, “I don’t want you to exist,” or, “You need to exist the way I want you to or else you don’t exist at all.” How could that not be detrimental? Constantly being told that you’re wrong about yourself.

Others described themselves as “exhausted” (Michel) and “beaten down” (Participant 13); Kira’s artefact, a database of all the times they had been misgendered in the past year (“323 events and counting”) addressed the “terrible pain” they said had been unfortunately so central to their experience of non-binary identification:

I was sitting there looking at this database, and I was thinking, huh, this is actually a pretty good representation of what it’s actually like to be non-binary. ... Documenting this is a way for me to cope, and to rationalize. That’s my primary coping mechanism. Otherwise I’ve dissociated, but this way I can gain some control over what’s happened.

Aside from “helping [them] to exercise a form of control over” these incidents of misgendering, Kira hoped their database would also help others to “understand that [misgendering] is a form of discrimination” and “sometimes hate” which “take their toll on [one’s] well-being”:

I think that they don’t understand that these acts of hate are, are regular, like, they occur regularly, multiple times a day on average for me and, like, they don’t understand how damaging it can be. For instance, with the Peterson debate at UofT– people don’t understand that a refusal to use pronouns not only produces violence, but it’s a violence that can cause one to relive the traumas of all of these events. And I think most cis people

just don't understand that the frequency and intensity of these acts of hate— how much can be dredged up by just being misgendered. And not only by being misgendered, but in this case by someone who willfully refuses to gender you correctly.

Several participants believed misgendering had made them and/or their (non-binary) friends vulnerable to depressive and anxious symptoms – low mood, anhedonia, fatigue, insomnia, worthlessness, difficulty concentrating, irritability, avoidance (of certain persons, places, or activities known from experience to increase the probability one would be misgendered), and panic attacks were all named – or had exacerbated co-occurring mental health issues (see **Quality 4 and Conclusions**). Participant 5, a self-described mental health advocate, wanted readers of this dissertation to “recognize and try to get what this can be like for us”: someone who is “repeatedly discouraged or dismissed whenever they ask to be called X” comes to learn “on some fundamental level” that they cannot trust their own self-knowledge and that those around them, their world, too, may not value them for who they experience themselves as.

Validation of one's identity – conveyed, typically, by others using one's preferred name and pronouns, or by making efforts to do so and correct oneself without excessive contrition – was said to be “a powerful antidote to this really cruel thing we subject non-binary people to” (Participant 5): “When someone affirms you, the world opens up for you, you're less isolated, it's less alienating, disorienting, it's easier to accept yourself, too.” As a result of such affirmation, Participant 11, for example, had been able to “reclaim various aspects of their femininity” they had disavowed “in order to be taken seriously as non-binary”:

I like the way skirts feel on my body or some dresses— they just feel good to wear. Like not even necessarily what it looks like but like physically my body feels good in them. Um (.) but that comes with being, treated more heavily in gendered ways. And I think it's easier for me to do now that I've been openly non-binary for quite a while, and I get a lot of daily validation around that from people in my life. I have the strength to withstand the more gendered treatment I will get from strangers if I wear clothes that will feel good. So with validation there has been less compartmentalization or like repression and dissociating of different aspects of me and they're integrated better.

Many others also spoke of the benefits of validation, which, though tough for some to define, seemed to connote a nonjudgmental attitude, empathic understanding, “a communication of respect for [an other’s] identity” (Participant 21), some recognition that that other’s experience of the world and of themselves is valid and legitimate and that they are perhaps more knowledgeable in this regard:

Alex: Yeah so what did that feel like for you?

Participant 3: Um, it’s almost like an inner warmth and even now like years later when my friends my like– they’ll call me “Participant 3” and I can’t help but smile. I don’t know it’s just so nice. So even after years it’s still just that warm, happy feeling inside that I haven’t found with many other things. Sorry, my eye is tearing up. [crying] ... Part of it I think was just the fact that I knew my friends like respected me enough and cared about me enough ... and part of it is just, like, when someone acknowledges how you truly feel um and how you identify it, again I just keep going back to like that feeling of inner warmth and happiness. Um, I guess, like for most people if you ever called them the wrong name all the time like a name that wasn’t yours it would be weird, and wouldn’t seem right even though you knew that they were talking to you, um, it would still feel odd, and that’s what it was like with my birth name, um, so then having, like my actual name, my preferred name, um, used was just instead of feeling like this odd sense of discomfort all the time it was that um, comfort I guess.

Calling TGNC youth by their chosen names is linked to reduced depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behaviour (Russell, Pollitt, Li, & Grossman, 2018). Children who are raised by parents who validate their gender identity are likely to demonstrate a different (and in some respects healthier) life course compared with children whose parents are reluctant or unwilling to affirm gender nonconformity (Durwood et al., 2017; Olson et al., 2016). That these validated children demonstrate mental health outcomes equivalent to those of cis children is in stark contrast with the significantly increased rates of anxiety and depression, including suicide attempts, that had been found among older adolescents and adults trans who were not able to socially transition in childhood (Budge, Adelson, & Howard, 2013; Reisner et al., 2015).

Participant 13 had worked with such families and witnessed “this beautiful ability to give autonomy essentially to children about identity”:

The message is: we’re going to support you and love you regardless of how you express yourself or identify. “You build whatever wardrobe you want,” right? “Within our means and we’ll do what we can to support you however that looks and whatever you need in terms of pronouns and those things.” That was like hugely uplifting to witness. Yeah, that was one of the most sort of like positive feelings I had had about that work and my own identity and that moment is feeling like, you know, I feel like I’ve identified so much of my experience based on what I’ve internalized from past generations’ understanding of the binary. I feel so hopeful that there’s generations now that are reframing their terms of reference to be even less binary than that. That seems more just to me– it’s how you’re treating us, but also acknowledging that there are people like you who exist.

Justice, according to Participant 13, is not only or exclusively a matter of how persons are treated, but also emerges in quite consequential decisions about which “understandings” must be “reframed” in order to intelligibilize new forms of personhood. The catch, of course, is that too many of us are unwilling to reframe our understandings, to accede mutual recognition to non-binary folx, to recognize them, in Benjamin’s (2004) parlance as distinct and separate centres of feeling and perception and ideas about gender and identity. Predictably, many, though not all, had sought out other non-binary folx, online and in “real life.” Substantial research shows the benefit of social support and community belonging on the mental health of TGNC people (Barr, Budge, & Adelson, 2016; Budge et al., 2013). Non-binary folx are often rejected or invalidated by their peer group and may feel isolated if they do not have contact with others who identify similarly (Matsuno, in press). Eli, for example, had joined a program with other non-binary youth, which they said was “unlike anything [they’d] experienced before, being around people [when] everyone [is] understanding, and people who are actually trying to use your pronouns.” Others had likewise found validation from other non-binary folx and sought “to be around likeminded people” (Suki) when possible:

Participant 3: It's something that they can relate to in a way that um, people who don't identify that way just can't quite relate to and it also kind of makes me feel more validation in myself where there's other people who feel the same way that I do which is kind of selfish on my point but other people I've talked to who are non-binary feel the same way. And it's knowing that there's other people who are there who are going through the same thing where they're not really um, validated by most of society um, but when I talk to them it– we're there validating each other.

...

Participant 4: Identifying with non-binary– like that was a way for me to find my people, so to speak, right? And like, a way of um, describing a way of being or a way of seeing who has feelings that are similar to yours or like uh, experiences that like, resonate with you even if they're not the same.

Several of those who spoke of forging connections through the shared experience of knowing oneself to be somehow problematically positioned with regard to the binary in such a way that leaves the singularity of those knowings” intact shared their disappointment that these connections seemed stalled with many of the cis and some of the binary trans people they had encountered throughout the course of their lives: “If only others made the same effort” (Eli).

### **Conclusions**

With this dissertation I'd proposed to explore specifically “queer” codings of gender, a banner under which I believed genderqueer and non-binary identifications belonged: at the time of my proposal's writing, these identities named for me “a preoccupation with contesting normative expressions of gender and a desire to explore the theoretical and conceptual implications of trans for queer theory” (Elliot, 2009, p. 14). My exploration – that is, my interviews with the participants – led me to think differently about such identifications: rather than hallow their purported transgressive potential, the interviews called to attention a wide swath of epistemologies, sites of struggle, and modes of representation and embodiment by which we might challenge the categories of man and woman, and other binary-based gender terms, as ontological givens. As it turns out, this sort of attending to the logics, relations, forces,

and developments that have been productive of countless gendered and sexual discourses and practices was an early preoccupation of queer theory's originators (see Butler, 2001b): Which identities are denied intelligibility herein, they queried, and how might we seek justice for those whose psychic realities and feelings (about and of, for example, gender) our culture would rather we dismiss? Those are the (gendered) subjectivities and (experiential, first-person) knowledges the participants have sought to symbolize and de-subjugate. To tell their own stories, to talk back to a disciplinary complex that has told its own (often prejudiced, self-serving) stories about them, is what had impelled several to participate:

Participant 15: I spend a lot of my time looking for resources that talk about non-binary experiences and there's a really big gap. So, I was really happy that you were doing this academic study, and so it felt really good and it felt really validating to see the flyer initially and to participate [in their first interview]. I thought it was— um, there were questions that I had considered but not um as seriously as I thought I had— the discussions we had about intersectionality and similar topics for example were really eye-opening for me as an individual um improving my understanding of what I thought about the whole experience of being non-binary. And I hope that people will read this and also have their own understandings improved or that there will be more recognition for these identities.

...

Kira: I guess I just like the idea of what you're potentially trying to look at and maybe even achieve by doing this research. So, therefore, I thought before contacting you [about participating], I don't know, that I could give, like, I could contribute whatever thoughts and I could be helpful, even though it's just my perspective. But perhaps, how should I say, all these perspectives as a collective, this collective voice of all of us who are marginalized there might then be some recognition of our identities in the literature.

Participant 2 had “thought that with all the talk on campuses and in media about non-binary identities being a fad or whatever [they] could help complicate the narrative of gender that's usually out there and [this study] seemed like a great avenue to take advantage of” in advancing such a complication:

I do feel a responsibility to be a part of the conversation and, yes, yes I do want my story told and I want it known that we exist and I'm hopeful for this critique you're launching

against how science— psychology um has effectively like made it so it's such a struggle to be seen. I hope others will see this.

The collective that I “saw” and have presented here is one that has troubled the dimorphic logic of the many forms of gender’s policing whilst struggling for recognition and validation of *all* self-designated genders, including those one might determine for oneself to be binary and stable, if not mutable, successive, and multiple.

My PAR-inspired methods were in fact meant to offer this study up to its participants as an “avenue” to be “taken advantage of.” Many (affirmative) psychologists who have likewise sought justice through their research for oppressed individuals and communities tend to focus on the individual-level “resilience” factors that have helped these individuals and communities to thrive despite said oppression (see e.g., Breslow et al., 2015; Pflum et al., 2015; Matsuno & Israel, 2018; Singh, 2013; Singh et al., 2011; Singh & McKleroy, 2011). Given the participants’ outward-turning focus on the sociosubjective and intersubjective dynamics involved in their gender identities’ invisibilization and invalidation, I suggest we view the participants’ “struggles to be seen” as a sort of capacity to (re)name and (dis)assemble the constituent elements of contemporary gendered personhood in a manner that subtends the contingency and fraught conditions of intelligibility. Capacities become apparent only when exercised: this potentiality of the participants (and other non-binary folx), otherwise, remains imminent, such that we (affirmative researchers and clinicians) must ask what can be done about all that continues to squash its incipience. As Participant 3 remarked: “The struggle has really been just to be comfortable with myself and so much would be helped if I was just treated with respect and supported.” For that to happen, “we need to unlearn everything we’ve been taught about gender being only binary when there is potential for so much more” (Participant 5). “The responsibility” Participant 11 advised, “shouldn’t be the [non-binary] individual’s *only* to promote recognition



for [their] identities, like not every non-binary person can be visible.” “How can we get everyone in our society to be more open-minded? What are the ways? Could doing research on gender differently like this help?” (Michel). If it is the case that the affirmative among us would prefer to “help our society along toward accepting people on their own terms” (Participant 13), then we ought to direct our efforts toward producing works that promote an “unlearning” of our discipline’s history of binary-maintenance, including its pathologization of TGNC people for “violating” the binary logic of normative (cis) gender identity development, and instead support this capacity “to be autonomous and put out there in this world that it’s possible– it should be possible to be non-binary” (Participant 23).

The qualities of becoming outlined throughout this dissertation alert us to the numerous constraints to such autonomy, first-person authority and self-determination, among them: the psy disciplines’ construction, interpretation and administration of transgenderism, its wrong body model; the gender binary; gender misattributions; microaggressions, intentional misgendering, and pervasive identity invalidation; and so on. These constraints may uniquely impact TGNC people, but could cis and binary-identified trans folks not recognize (at least aspects of) themselves, their own experiences of gender, in these participants’ struggles for recognition? Participant 24 had asked:

Do you think your readers, I guess the cis ones, will they see themselves in what we’re saying here? I mean, why shouldn’t they? Even men and women– they’re also impacted by these ideas trying to decide their gender for them but maybe they don’t notice as much, I dunno. I mean, there could be common ground.

My conclusion, and answer to Participant 24, is that for us all – the imagined cis reader of this dissertation included – gender can be a site of violence and injury, but also an inventive, gratifying, defiant, though culturally mandated, idiom of the self. It offers even those less often “compelled to confront” (Stryker, 1994, p. 242) their gendered identifications in our cis-

normative culture both an indelible sense of “Yes! This is who I am” (Peter) and that sense’s opposite: policing, misrecognition, dismissal. Surely, your gender was not assigned to you fully assembled, nor do you have foreknowledge of its future expressions and embodiments. Have you ever hoped or sought to exceed the bounds of what “man” and “woman” are supposed to signify? Through emphasizing the commonality of the anxiety, pain, and tribulation each of us experience in relation to gendered norms, Malatino (2015) believes “we can link seemingly disparate experiential phenomena in ways that are not dictated by a focus on the supposed alterity of trans experience” (p. 404-405). There are always and everywhere gaps between gender ideals and our experience of them; no one is “beyond” the mimetic imbrication between individual identificatory investments and the dualistic social order through which psychic reality is recursively particularized. Subjectivity, after all, is multiply determined *and* determining, just as gender is formed and preserved, enforced, yet negotiated and transformable. Consider the possibilities that might follow if we were to produce a kind of semiotic friction within systems of gender regularity that shatters the arbitrary and inadequate illusion of a unified, stably gendered self. As opposed to invisibilizing and invalidating the non-binary-identified, let us “see ourselves” in the participants’ narratives so that it becomes even more possible to experience, if we so choose, gender’s dynamism, plurality, and expansiveness.

### **Future Directions**

Given the objectives and scope of this dissertation, certain topics deserve more sustained explication whilst others remained unexplored. In terms of the latter, the participants were all fairly young. Their lives, thus far, had been spent, in part, formulating – clarifying, differentiating, naming, expressing – unformulated gendered experience, such that their current terms of identification were freshly settled-on for most of them. Will the majority remain settled

with these terms, or might some come to identify as cis or binary trans? (The gaps between the two interviews were obviously too short to track any such changes, though some, at their second interview, did report subsequent changes to their expressions of gender and preferences for certain identificatory terms.) My posing of this question reflects no desire to predict whose identifications will persist/desist but rather curiosity regarding the elasticity of non-binary: It appealed to some for its refusal to forecast particular futures, but how much fluidity could it withstand? Might it be maintained by some in perpetuity as a stably unstable identity or will some find that a given shift in experience necessitates stepping out from under the shelter of the non-binary umbrella altogether? An account of the construction and negotiation of the ontological boundaries of non-binary, should they be erected, by those who have already identified as such for years, could prove an illuminating supplement to the work begun here.

Certain of the topics were not what I had set out to explore, so, despite their arising across a number of the interviews, some of those interviews ran over two hours, which meant I could only explore so much without neglecting my two central areas of interest and within the time limit outlined in the consent forms. The intersectionality section (**Quality 4**), for example, could make for a dissertation unto itself. That dissertation might provide a more nuanced account than the one found here of how becoming non-binary is multiply constituted through shifting matrices of racial formation, sexuality, (dis)ability, class, and more. What, for example, to make of Participant 15's quip that "[their] POC [person of colour] friends thought non-binary was a trendy White Westerner thing, so [their identity] wasn't taken seriously at first"? Grant et al.'s (2011) nationwide study of anti-transgender discrimination had found that 70% of non-binary respondents were White compared with 76% of the overall sample (see Harrison et al., 2012) – a perhaps negligible difference – yet I wonder: Would Participant 15's friends have said the same

for binary trans identities? We know from oral history and written records that humans, often in non-Western contexts, have long embraced more than two gender categories (see Stryker, 2008a), so might the contemporary (niche) popularity of non-binary, at least among White folk, strike some, like Participant 15's friends, as appropriative of these "third gender" practices? Then again, none of the White participants evinced any calculated use of a cultural form, outside their own, in their assembly of themselves as non-binary, nor did any of them invoke what Towle and Morgan (2002) have referred to as the "transgender native" (the incautious application of transgender to nonnormative gender practices "elsewhere") in order to legitimize said identifications, so "appropriation" may not apply here.<sup>23</sup> Just under half the participants were persons of colour, some of whom were immigrants from the Global South, born "elsewhere," yet they still identified as non-binary, though not without additional complexities: Participant 15's incorporation of "egalitarian" (their term) Chinese cultural traditions was said to enrich non-binary for them, whilst others' had had the effect of entangling them further into the gender binary. Future research on non-binary identifications among persons of colour and/or emigrants to the West would be well-advised to centre the hybridization (and fragmentation) of identity and of minority identificatory practices.

Other topics worthy of further explication include mental health, romantic and/or sexual relationships, and new media.

**Mental health.** The many "minority stressors" non-binary folx might face (see Testa et al., 2015) contribute to their high risk for negative mental health outcomes (Harrison et al., 2012; James et al., 2016). Budge, Rossman, and Howard (2014) found elevated rates of clinical depression, anxiety and psychological distress among their sample of genderqueer individuals, and two of the largest national (U.S.) studies of anti-transgender discrimination suggest non-

binary folx may be even more distressed than binary trans people (see Grant et al., 2011; James et al., 2016). Indeed, **Quality 5** foregrounds a form of psychic violence that may contribute to this disparity (see also Bradford et al., 2013; Chang et al., 2017; Singh & Burnes, 2009). More focused research on microaggressions against non-binary folx is needed, particularly given that counsellors and therapists often have little awareness of, or knowledge about, non-binary identities (Hendricks & Testa, 2012); I could locate only one article about non-binary-affirming psychological interventions (see Matsuno, in press), despite there being a burgeoning literature on working competently with TGNC clients (e.g., APA, 2015). Without such competence, counsellors may exhibit negative reactions to non-binary clients and/or assume all TGNC people wish to transition from one binary gender to the other through medical intervention (Matsuno & Budge, 2017; Singh & dickey, 2017), which would likely thwart positive treatment outcomes (Israel, Gorscheva, Walther, Sulzner, & Cohen, 2008). Though 70% of non-binary respondents to one survey reported desiring gender-related counselling, only 31% had actually accessed it compared with 73% of binary trans respondents (James et al., 2016), a disparity that may be due to anticipated therapist incompetence and/or stigma (Matsuno, in press; Matsuno & Budge, 2017), in addition to fewer non-binary people (approximately one-third) seeking transition-related medical care (Puckett et al., 2017). Recall that the non-binary respondents to the Canadian Trans Youth Health reported greater barriers to accessing hormones than did the binary-identified respondents (Clark et al., 2018). Some of those I interviewed cited additional barriers: most long-term therapy, centred around issues of identity, is cost-prohibitive. Some doubted they could locate a (culturally) competent therapist, and still others worried their identities would be reduced to an effect of antecedent gender-related traumatic events:

Participant 10: Oh, this is hard to talk about I'm trying— I'd want to explore whether the way I identify could also go back to like my childhood or like what— like the whole

trauma lesbian thing like it could like apply to this. But it's not just the trauma. Could I find a safe place to unpack all that?

Though they declined to elaborate as to the nature of said trauma, they were clear as to the precondition of “safety” within the clinical encounter, which could only come with the therapist’s nonjudgmental, empathic understanding and/or awareness of worries such as Participant 10’s; otherwise, as in this case, non-binary identification risks pathologization as mere post-traumatic flight from feminine identification. To provide affirming clinical care requires such an awareness, as well as knowledge and skill (Sue, 2001), much of which would entail unlearning common cisgenderist misconceptions: that everyone is cis, that there are only two genders, that gender is determined by anatomy or expression and constant over time, that non-binary identification is a phase, and so on.

*Clinical implications.* For those seeking affirmative guidelines for psychological practice with TGNC people, I direct you to the APA’s (2015); organized into five clusters (foundational knowledge and awareness; stigma, discrimination, and barriers to care; life span development; assessment, therapy, and intervention; and research, education, and training), they are accessible, thorough, and practical. The very first guideline encourages psychologists to “understand that gender is a nonbinary construct that allows for a range of gender identities” (p. 834), and a rationale for this encouragement is provided. A special section (dickey & Singh, 2016) of *Psychology of Sexual Orientation & Gender Diversity* details how to implement the APA Guidelines. In contrast to the paternalism of the old-guard gatekeepers, the SOC (Coleman et al., 2011) and others (e.g., Lev, 2004; Raj, 2002; Singh & dickey, 2017) have sought to shift the practitioner’s role to that of advocate (see Singh & Burnes, 2010). To that end, I’m partial to Singh and dickey’s (2017) definition of TGNC-affirmative practice:

Those that are culturally-relevant for TGNC clients and their multiple social identities, address the influence of social inequities on the lives of TGNC clients, enhance TGNC client resilience and coping, advocate to reduce systemic barriers to TGNC mental and physical health, and leverage TGNC client strengths. (pp. 4)

To learn more about advocating for non-binary clients *specifically*, I recommend Emmie Matsuno's (in press) article on non-binary-affirming psychological interventions, which are grouped into individual-, meso-, and macro-levels. The first grouping includes the following: empower clients (e.g., ask about clients' gender pronouns; mirror the language they use to describe their experiences of gender; if gender exploration is a therapeutic goal, do not assume a binary physical transition is desired); practice using gender-neutral pronouns; avoid binary language; recognize how the gender binary affects clients' mental health; externalize internalized stigma and challenge negative self-beliefs; and assist clients to weigh the risks and benefits of disclosure and non-disclosure. Meso-level interventions could entail, among other structural practices and procedures, updating intake forms and registration systems to include non-binary gender options (e.g., a "check all that apply" format for gender pronouns); establishing gender-inclusive restrooms (within the clinical setting); connecting clients to group-level supports and/or offering group-based interventions; and promoting family acceptance. The macro-level interventions are most attuned to larger TGNC advocacy efforts: for example, advocating for laws and policies that support the well-being of TGNC people, such as those that reduce financial barriers to gender confirming procedures, and against those that do not; and advocating for an informed consent model of trans healthcare (as opposed to the gatekeeping model), which recognizes just how varied and idiosyncratic physical transitions can be.

Many of the rationales Matsuno provides for the abovementioned interventions were raised by the participants I interviewed – that pronouns matter, that a binary transition may not be one’s “end goal,” that one may not have an “end goal,” that binary-based attributions leave one feeling invisible, that misgendering is experienced as a form of violence, that disclosure could jeopardize one’s emotional and physical safety, that gendered bathrooms risk confrontation and harassment, that one would feel isolated if not in contact with other non-binary folx, and so on. The affirming advocate implements these interventions because they appreciate these rationales, which would have required awareness of, and knowledge about, non-binary identities. For those without such competence: educate yourselves; seek trainings and other resources; read personal accounts and blogs. Ultimately, all this comes down to clinicians recognizing that non-binary people exist and that their identities are valid. Those of us who are clinicians ought to know the havoc invalidation can wreak: as but one example, we do know from Marsha M. Linehan (1993) that invalidating environments worsen emotion dysregulation dysfunction and can cause pervasive and intense identificatory, behavioural and interpersonal instability, including suicidal ideation, self-harm, and substance abuse. A core strategy of Linehan’s treatment is validation, or the communication of “accurate emotional empathy” (p. 224). Empathy, after all, is a “common factor” shared by different approaches and evidence-based practices in psychotherapy and counseling which account for much of the effectiveness of a psychological treatment (see e.g., Lambert, 1992; Laska, Gurman, & Wampold, 2014). If you find yourself unable or unwilling to validate the existence of non-binary folx, then it is your ethical duty, as a clinician, especially as a clinician treating non-binary clients, to investigate why you are so committed to a view of gender (as binary) that trumps the experiential knowledge and first-person authority of those who most require your recognition.



**Romantic and/or sexual relationships.** Eleven of the participants listed pansexual or pan-romantic as their sexual identity. Kuper et al. (2012) had likewise found this to be the most common “sexual orientation” among their sample of trans people (over half of which were non-binary), given its indication of attraction to individuals of more than two genders. Though I did not keep a record, approximately half of those who spoke of their own monogamous or polyamorous relationships said their partners were also non-binary and/or trans. These partners functioned as one vital repository of recognition and validation from which identities were consolidated with relative ease, whereas with (certain) cis partners, one had to tread more delicately:

Participant 14: Close to a year ago, I came out to my boyfriend. He’s cis and he wasn’t exactly– he was encouraging but not really? I think he didn’t quite believe me. He thought I was kind of joking. And because I didn’t change my pronouns right away nothing really changed at first. I think he was worried I immediately wanted to just uh, go through hormone therapy and become male and then what would that mean for the relationship? After I found out he was worried, I kept having to tell him like, “No, no, no that’s not really what I want. I would tell you that.” But then I’ve been trying to figure out what I really want for myself versus not doing whatever to stay in the relationship.

They took on the role of “educator,” explaining the ways their experience of gender could differ from binary trans people’s – that they might not seek a binary physical transition, that gender-neutral pronouns and titles (i.e., “Mx.”) were “important to [them] for X and Y reasons” – whilst reassuring him they “wouldn’t become a man.” They had to deal, as well, with guilt, however unjustified, about “sort of changing [their boyfriend’s] sexual identity, like him being like, ‘OK what am I now?’” and consequently with worries said change would cause them to break-up. The literature on romantic and sexual relationships involving TGNC people show they can be both “healthy”/“successful” and challenging (see e.g., Brown, 2010; Iantaffi & Bockting, 2011; Kins, Hoebeke, Heylens, Rubens, & De Cuypere, 2008; Meier, Sharp, Michonski, Babcock, &

Fitzgerald, 2013). What other challenges might be encountered when at least one partner is non-binary? One I encountered pertained to invisibility:

Participant 15: I entered a new relationship. Weirdly personal, but it's also with another person that's non-binary. Yeah, and it's been really interesting for me, mainly because most people would perceive us as a heterosexual like, male-female couple, when in reality both of us aren't gendered at all. Because only people we've told that we're non-binary know us as, you know, a non-binary couple. Um, being with someone who is also non-binary has also taught me a lot about respect for an individual's autonomy.

...

Participant 21: It's really hard to escape the temptations of falling within the binary, especially because so much of the ways adulthood is defined is by marking off boxes that fall within gender binaries. And the person I'm dating right now is a cis male guy, and, like, if I marry him, then and people perceive me as female, then it really puts expectations on what my identity should be and what I should do with my body, like as far as oh a wedding say, I should wear a wedding dress and have a baby and work at home and all this kind of thing. But I can also still do that all that if I want to, but I also don't want to. So, how do I grow up and be authentic to myself without a guide?

I was reminded by these quotes and other related statements that lesbian-identified partners of trans men have also struggled with others misperceiving them as a heterosexual couple (Califa, 1997), as have bisexual women in relationships with (cis) men (Bower, Gurevich, & Mathieson, 2002). Bisexual erasure<sup>24</sup> may be of particular relevance here: some homosexuals and heterosexuals have sought bisexuality's erasure for various reasons (see Yoshino, 2000), just as the participants' identities are dismissed by binary trans folk (among others); bisexuals tend to be misrepresented as indecisive (see Klesse, 2011), as if they will eventually come to identify as gay or straight, just as non-binary folx are misrepresented as confused, unable to pick a binary gender with which to identify (Singh & Burnes, 2009). Other misrepresentations of bisexuality, however, seem less applicable here (e.g., hypersexuality, promiscuity, untrustworthiness), just as some of the misrepresentations the participants mentioned seemed specific to non-binary folx – for example, that they are “oversensitive ‘snowflakes’” or “entitled Millennials” (Participant 13).

Future research could tease apart nuances across these misrepresentations. Other research foci within this domain could include the timing and negotiation of one's disclosure of non-binary identification; potential changes to the labelling of the partner's sexual identity as a result of said disclosure; potential relabelling or redefinitions of one's own sexual attractions; and fear of the loss of mutual sexual attraction and other potential effects of shifting gender identities.

**New media.** The Internet and, in particular, social media, was referenced by several of the participants as “a vital safety zone to find out about gender and discover people who feel the same way and make sense of yourself, all of it” (Peter) – especially in light of the hostility with which they and other TGNC people can be met in “real life,” including both private and public settings. Many had first learned about non-binary identities online:

Participant 3: It was my first resource like where I heard about something that wasn't just binary, like, “OK, interesting that's cool that people feel that way,” and then like a few months later it was something that I just kept thinking about like all the time and just kept coming back in a way that like, felt right, and I'd go back on and read about pronouns and then eventually I told one of my friends and I realized that I preferred they/them pronouns and they started using them and I was like, “Oh, this is so much better.”

In addition to consulting with non-binary-specific resources (including TGNC bloggers/vloggers, “influencers,” and “content creators”) and blogs/websites, they could seek out and meet other non-binary folx, typically through forums and social media (see also Cannon et al., 2017; McInroy & Craig, 2015; Mehra, Merkel, & Bishop, 2004). Participant 5, for example, had “unlearned a lot of how the binary socialized [them] by joining” what they described as a “social justice Reddit thread.” Online, some said, “there's a bit more control over who you talk to, so it's helpful for building connections or avoiding some people” (Suki). Meeting these folx could be normalizing and validating:

Participant 20: I have several Tumblrs and I sort of treat it like a diary and it's fun because you can add other people's things into it. Like, other people could say something that you couldn't put into words properly or, like, you could really relate to and you can

add it and also maybe that person would then follow your blog and then they would re-blog your things and you'd sort of see that, "Oh, another person thinks the same way I do," and it's sort of, like, validating and fun to get popular, like, not really popular, like, I have like 90 followers or something stupid like that, but, like, to know there are people out there who get it and I feel care about me and what's going on with me.

For them, Tumblr was "just the right amount of social-ness" ("it doesn't feel too intrusive") and their diarizing there had "helped [them] get more settled in [their] gender exploration" in other contexts, which was supported, in part, by "validating" messages and re-blogs. According to Participant 15, there is "potential to collectively organize" with those you meet:

I feel like a huge reason why online communities are so important to trans, or feminist, or gender-neutral movements, is because not that many people care so the people who do care must collectively organize and make something more powerful. Um, yeah people who share those same values and beliefs need some type of location or public space to gather and historically those places were once coffee shops, beer halls, you know, people would gather in some type of town square and discuss these philosophical or political ideas. Which then transformed into huge revolutions and movements. And I think, um, currently that public space for a lot of these movements and revolutions is the Internet.

Because "modern life is so isolating, people live far away from each other, not everyone can meet at the same location," they go online where "this unifying source" brings them together, foments "revolutions and movements" whilst "helping you refine your own values and what that means for your identity." I didn't come across any writings on the political possibilities of virtual organizing for non-binary folx, but an emerging literature has shown that all these technological advancements have enabled various forms of virtual social engagements and intimacies that in turn "influence individual and personality characteristics and the overall development of the self" (Nagy & Koles, 2014, p. 277). Indeed, many participants had turned to such digital platforms to explore, "test out" (Kira), and form their identities, and these virtual self-representations evinced, some believed, a greater degree of reflexivity than is afforded to them in spontaneous face-to-face interactions. Several had first "tested out" new preferred pronouns and names online, on message boards and through social media; they spoke of having "obtained

greater clarify about [themselves]” (Participant 8) and “figure[d themselves] out” (Eli), and of “being able to explore aspects of [themselves] without people having to hear [the sound of their] voice and then make ideas about [their] gender” (Michel) – recall that Michel had realized they were not cis from their preference for non-feminine avatars. So often this was where they “discovered the variety of what non-binary can be and what it can be for [them]” (Participant 24). (Notice, too, how many of the participants’ artefacts literally are digital technologies; see Appendix F). The TGNC participants in Kosenko, Bond, and Hurley’s (2018) study were found to have “used media to make sense of their experiences, to empower meaningful actions implicative of sensemaking processes” (p. 279), processes that had impacted, too, their “offline” lives.

The Internet is usually championed in this way for its “tremendous potential to achieve greater social equity and empowerment and improve everyday life for those on the margins of society” (Mehra et al., 2004, p. 782), though more recent work has begun to examine the disadvantages of social media for TGNC people (e.g., Cannon et al., 2017), including concerns about privacy and maintaining boundaries, receiving hateful messages, and profile gender options that offer only binary gender selections. The participants, likewise, were not uniformly techno-optimists either. Participant 15, who had raised its revolutionary potential, went on to detail the “many downsides to the Internet, almost more downsides than good”:

I feel like at the same time as giving everyone an equal voice and a platform, it is still a public space. Which anyone can enter or exit, and anyone has the same like type of leverage I guess. Oftentimes that can be abused, in the sense that people would post misinformation, or spread hateful or violent messages, and like discrediting or disqualifying someone’s genuine experiences as a gender-neutral individual.

What happens offline can happen online – the line of demarcation between the two is enigmatic (see Slater, 2002) – including identity invalidation: “There are the Internet trolls who just wanna use these platforms to draw attention away from the actual conversation that they don’t wanna

have. You know, on Twitter or whatever, saying negative things about pronouns and all these kinds of things you already heard in person” (Participant 23). Their Twitter handle contained their pronouns, and on International Transgender Day of Visibility, “of all days” (among many others), they said, “someone wrote these horrible anti-trans things and it was so triggering.” Participant 11 told me about a “friend group” that had refused to use their pronouns when asked in person and then continued to intentionally misgender them on social media before they “blocked these so-called friends from everywhere.” Participant 21, who had “liked to hang out on Reddit,” would have never disclosed their gender identity there, because “even though this is not a conservative environment, [they’d] immediately get disregarded.” They said “it was isolating. [They] stopped hanging out there.” Some of the most popular TGNC YouTube personalities, Participant 2 noted, are White or represent “only a sliver of the trans umbrella”: “For example you rarely ever see on YouTube a trans woman dating a trans woman. You never see that. There’s lots about us you’ll never see there.” Furthermore, the Internet may not be as democratized of a platform as Participant 15 suggested: for someone as well-educated and computer-literate as them (and many of the other participants) it seems to be, but, for others, especially those with little to no access to such technologies, perhaps it is not. Whose (virtual) voices, then, get heard?

Finally, I’d like us to imagine what participating in this study was like for the participants. During our conversation about Internet trolls, which we had during their second interview, Participant 23 addressed the “fear [they] feel in so many situations when this comes up,” a trepidation “about how the conversation is going to go,” on- and offline:

[Meeting other non-binary people online] was good I mean I felt like I could finally say stuff that was like mostly unsaid for a long time? It’s now less like every second thinking like, “Oh like something’s wrong with me.” And then this interview the last time was the first time that I was actually vocalizing some of these things. Rather openly without like I

don't know some sort of filter that you can have online. Online it was scary to say anything, but in person it was maybe even more and I was so nervous before the interview. Who am I gonna get? Like at work I make myself a little bit invisible because I'm scared about being invalidated I just— would rather not deal with that.

Others also said they were nervous about their first interview: “I feel a lot of anxiety around this subject honestly, which makes sense, given my previous history of trauma and social complications, I guess, or expectations. So I was nervous earlier” (Kira). Of course, there are potential risks/discomforts associated with answering questions like the ones I asked, as outlined in the consent forms, as well as benefits (Kira: “It felt good to be able to talk about these things, because we honestly don't really have a lot of space to do it.”), but it seemed the first interview had effects besides the “potential” (e.g., discomfort) or intended (i.e., participatory action), which became apparent to me during the second interviews. The minimum one-month-gap between the two was meant to permit time for reflection (on the first interview) and artefact creation. The majority, at their second interview, said they had “thought a lot about Interview 1 since it happened” (Participant 2). These reflections ranged in content – from the dissonances among gender identity and expression to the psychic repercussions of identity invalidation to their own upbringings to “why pronouns matter” (Ray Feinberg). Participant 13's response was representative in this regard:

I guess it's been a while since I had the opportunity to have that much sort of cause for introspection around those elements of my identity. I've appreciated that opportunity in some ways. It's allowed me to reflect on bits and pieces of that um, throughout the last couple of weeks essentially. Um, and so it's kind of made me feel more comfortable bringing in elements of my own story in different ways I guess into my [diversity training] work. Some elements that I haven't always talked about with people I'm starting to bring a little bit more into those discussions because I see them as being relevant but also because it feels powerful to me to be able to speak from my own experience, and I'm leaning into the vulnerability I feel in those moments.

Usually, personally meaningful ideas or arguments they had begun to formulate at their first interview were reiterated, sometimes expanded upon, and many of their reiterations and

expansions have been incorporated throughout what you've already read; those interviews were said to have prompted intervening reflections on said ideas or arguments. Several shared that their first interview was the first time they had ever spoken with someone – anyone – at such length about their experience of gender, which some had found “surprisingly impactful,” as Kira recalled: “I mean, on a personal level beyond you asking me if I’ve been reflecting on anything.” I’d expected most of the participants would provide routine updates in response to my question, “So, has anything changed (about gender) since the last time we spoke?” such as Participant 4 informing me of the outcome of their chest surgery (many did provide such updates), so it came as a mild surprise that 14 of the 22 participants who returned for their second interview reported something had changed *as a result of* their first interview:

Participant 6: It felt easier maybe 'cause it's finally put into words without it being a tense situation. Having to put it into words, just kinda like casual conversation. So I've been kinda more able to shape and put into words how I reflect my identity a bit easier now as a result of this.

...

Participant 10: I never really had to like talk about it or explain myself so I kind of did notice that I was kind of like trying to process it myself or like after I left I was thinking about it more, it's like how do I explain this to people 'cause I've never really done that before, like understanding how difficult it was– that's what I got from the first meeting. But it was good practice in a way. Maybe I'd be more comfortable now?

Suki “began to have more conversations around gender with people,” as they had felt emboldened “to get more political about invalidation when they're like, ‘I don't really understand, it's either you're a boy or a girl. Genitalia. Blah, blah, blah.’” From Eli:

It [first interview] was pretty interesting because it's something that I've been trying to do, trying to put in words. But then, like it made me more or less understand more things like at least in the sense of how I explain gender to others whenever they ask me that question. Instead of avoiding those conversations, I'm like, “OK you did this before!”



Others noted effects on their identifications and/or understandings therein. Kira had been contemplating possible differences in how “trans and non-binary relate to the potential of gender,” as they called it, and they left their first interview with greater clarity for themselves:

I was considering gender as a potential, one that doesn't become realized until it is actually forwarded to a concrete expression: labels or words for example. But, second, also that it's formed through the process of observation and, like, labelling of what those, those, I should say, realizations, I guess, mean. ... And after my interview I saw a distinction, which I realized was one of my problems with trans, or like mainstream views in and of the movement, that for some it's not about recognizing the potential of gender or seeing that gender is a form of potential ... but rather seeing it primarily in like concrete, defined forms [“wrong body”], and that in some way transness is actively reproducing the binary. But, also I think it might be even more problematic in the sense that trans itself is, like, instead of moving us towards a discussion of gender on a broader level and seeing it as, like, something which doesn't need to be defined in stable categories or fixed, a static ontology, but instead as something which can be actually be fluid and simply exist without having to, like, be puzzled out, I guess.

What Kira came to realize is “why [they had] felt discomfort with the trans movement and part of the reason why [they're] enjoying the term genderqueer.” They “felt more settled” with this term they had chosen to name the potential of their own gender (“I want to identify with the fact that my gender itself is never really in a purely defined state, despite, like, the action of other institutions and individuals to try and coerce”); they positioned the first interview as supportive of this realization, not causative. Others drew more direct connections between that interview and ensuing identificatory shifts: Participant 8 had “spun a little bit afterwards, but not too much,” because they “realized [they] could be both non-binary and agender.” Prior to their interview, “it was kinda either/or so now how [they're] identifying is less black-and-white” and more both/and:

Talking with you kind of, like, made me realize more and, like, kind of work my head through everything. I don't know how to explain that part. But, uh, it made me— I guess more comfortable with the word non-binary to also describe what's going on with my gender identity and understand that, yeah, agender is part of that. Now I'm sorting out why I'd been like, “you're mutually exclusive,” but maybe who cares now?

Some used words like “realization,” “understanding,” “comfort,” and “empowerment” when detailing these shifts, though I suspected they and others might have withheld informing me that they had felt, say, untethered by said shifts; perhaps, given the fluidity of identification and embodiment non-binary indexed for so many of them, they would have been habituated to any untethered feelings or considered them positively valenced – liberatory as opposed to unsettling.

The “introspection interview one caused,” Participant 13 said, “made [them] wonder: Does me telling you or whoever else about myself, does it change the story I’ve been telling me about myself? Do I become that story?” Narrative reconstruction is an ever-present process, as Diamond (2006) asserts, through which individuals enact “self-perceptions through autobiographical reflection and recall, and it shapes the very encoding of personal experiences” (p. 478), as well as those experiences’ later recollection. Conversations we have about ourselves (with family members, friends, doctoral candidates) “are themselves important forces for developmental change” (p. 480); they guide future conversations and the self-understandings therein (see also Pasupathi, 2001). Here we come full circle to the productive nature of discourse: that language and other regulated social practices “systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Had this forming not taken shape throughout the interviews, as Participant 13 wondered? In retrospect, I wish I had explicitly asked the participants at their second interviews and would encourage this sort of self-reflexive questioning regarding the “productive impact” of the research encounter among allied researchers, especially those following a similar procedure to mine.

Even with PAR-inspired research, which is expected to “impact” – and, hopefully, empower (Singh et al., 2013) – participants, there can be unexpected impacts, some of which, like those detailed here, may not have been prompted by the interventions that were intended to

be impactful and empowering. In this case, that intervention was to be the photographic display of the participants' artefacts at an art show and subsequent collecting of feedback from the public. Given that that has yet to happen, it is difficult to assess whether the transformational possibilities I'd hoped for, as outlined in the **Affirmative practice and participatory action** section, could be realized through this specific procedure. Certainly, many of the participants "enjoyed" (Suki) creating their artefacts: some found the process "focusing" and "grounding" (Participant 11), "comforting" and "more personal and less conceptual than talking" (Michel), "less vulnerable because [they] chose some else's art for [their artefact]" (Participant 10), and "less of an intense emotional processing compared with what ended up happening in the first interview because [the artefact] sort of like contained these feelings" (Participant 4). Though I found the participants quite articulate, as the quotes throughout this dissertation I'm sure have demonstrated, several said "it was hard to put [their] feelings into words" (Participant 19), so the artefact, in contrast to talking, "was better for expressing something [they] find hard in language to put out there, like [they] didn't get stuck in [their] head but could talk from [their] heart" (Participant 8). A few spoke of the artefact as a kind of "conversational piece with deep meaning" (R.E.): Participant 18 "liked that [they] could show [their] friends the [artefact], it's more relational and that's how [they] view gender"; Participant 23 said "it opened dialogues with people who've seen [their artefact], like through it [these people] got it, got what [they were] trying to convey." A minority seemed less enthused, and Kira actually penned a critique of this arts-based method which is appended here (Appendix G). Ultimately, the second interviews, as I conducted them, were most focused on the participants' reflections and explanations of their artefacts such that I'm unable to provide a richer accounting of the relative pros and cons of these two approaches (i.e., interviews vs. arts-based method) vis-à-vis social transformation – at

least not until these findings are disseminated and the participants' artefacts displayed. To that end, I invite you to have a look at their artefacts, and to read their descriptions of them, as displayed in Appendix F.

Appendix A

## **Non-Binary Study: Telephone Recruitment Script**

PI:

**Hello, my name is Alex Vasilovsky and I'm a PhD Candidate in Psychology at Ryerson University. I'm currently recruiting participants for my dissertation study, which is about non-binary gender identity. Specifically, the purpose of my study is to explore the experiences of people whose gender identities do not fit within the binary of male and female, as well as ways we might resist the gender binary.**

**I received an email from you indicating that you're interested in participating. Before we can schedule the first interview, I need to know whether you're eligible to participate.**

**How did you hear about the study?**

---

**How old are you?**

---

**How do you self-identify in terms of your gender?**

---

**Which pronouns do you use?**

---

**In a couple sentences, please describe what [gender self-identification] means to you?**

*Include description:*

**Do you speak English fluently?**

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No

*If the prospective participant does not meet inclusion criteria:*

**Unfortunately, you don't meet the inclusion criteria for this study. I'm recruiting people who identify as "non-binary," "genderqueer," or some version of those labels and who speak English fluently. Thank-you very much for your time and interest in this study.**

*If the prospective participant does meet inclusion criteria:*

**You meet the inclusion criteria for this study. Now, I'd like to give you with a fuller description of this study. If you decide to participate, you'll be asked to read and sign a consent form and then to complete the first of two interviews. During the first interview, I'll ask questions about what your gender identity means to you and different strategies for resisting the gender binary. I'll also ask you to bring to the second interview an object that represents what "non-binary" means to you. During the second interview, we'll discuss the object and what might've changed since the first interview. To capture the accuracy of your answers, the interviews will be digitally recorded with your permission. The first interview will last about one to two hours and the second about half-an-hour. Both will take place on the Ryerson campus at the SHiFT Lab, 105 Bond Street, SSB269.**

**Your responses will be completely confidential. Your name or any other identifying information will not appear on any of the transcribed digitally-recorded materials, written notes, or presented findings. You'll be given a random, pre-assigned ID number. Recorded responses will be transcribed and these, along with written notes, will be stored separately from the consent forms. All data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and only I'll have access to the data.**

**To thank you for your participation, for the first interview, your name will be entered into a draw for one cash prize of \$50. If you participate in the second interview your name will be entered into a second draw for two cash prizes of \$100. The draws will take place once all the interviews are completed and the winners will be notified by telephone or email. You'll then be informed about where and when you can receive the prize.**

**If you decide to withdraw from the study at any point or omit some of the questions, you will not lose your eligibility for the draws.**

**Due to the personal nature of some of the questions asked, you may experience some embarrassment or reflect on unpleasant memories while participating in the interviews. If you begin to feel uncomfortable, you can always discontinue participation, or skip any questions without penalty, or losing your eligibility to participate in the cash draws. I'll also have a list of counselling referrals, just in case you find you need them.**

**Given all this information, do you have any questions?**

*If applicable, answer the prospective participant's questions*

**Let's schedule a time that's convenient for you to be interviewed for this study.**

*Schedule interview with prospective participant. Confirm time, date, location, and length of interviews*

**Thanks for your time. I look forward to meeting you on [date] at [time].**

## **Non-Binary Study: Written Consent Form**

You are being asked to participate in a research study, which is being conducted for the Primary Investigator's PhD dissertation. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

### **Investigator:**

Alex Vasilovsky, MA, Department of Psychology, Ryerson University.

Maria Gurevich, PhD, Department of Psychology, Ryerson University.

### **Purpose of the Study:**

The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences of people who identify as non-binary in terms of gender identity. Currently, psychology has a poor understanding of genders that are not binary. This research relies on the experiences of non-binary participants in order to update psychology's understanding of gender identity. Anyone who identifies as "non-binary," "genderqueer," or with a related label, is at least 18 years of age, and speaks English fluently is eligible to participate.

### **Description of the Study:**

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to complete two one-on-one interviews. Questions about gender identity and the gender binary will be asked (e.g., How did you come to self-identify as non-binary? How would you describe the gender binary?). For the second interview, you will be asked to bring an object that represents what non-binary is to you. You will be compensated for any expenses associated with the creation of this object, up to \$20.00, upon provision of receipt(s) at the second interview. In order to capture your responses accurately, the interviews will be digitally-recorded and the object photographed, both with your permission, and the interviewer will take some written notes. The first interview will last about 1-2 hours and the second about 45 minutes or less. Both interviews will take place on the Ryerson campus (SHiFT Lab – 105 Bond Street, SBB269).

### **What is Experimental in this Study:**

None of the interview questions used in this study are experimental in nature. We are simply gathering information for the purpose of analysis.

### **Risks or Discomforts:**

Because of the personal nature of some of the questions asked, you may experience some embarrassment or reflect on unpleasant memories while participating in the interview. If you begin to feel uncomfortable, you can always discontinue participation (including not bringing in an object), either temporarily or permanently, without incurring a penalty or losing your eligibility for the cash draws. The Investigator will provide you with a list of support referrals to take home with you, in case you decide that you would like to speak with someone about this discomfort.

Participation in this study is completely confidential (please see the "Confidentiality" section below for more detail regarding how your information and responses are secured). No one other than the Investigator knows why you are visiting the lab, unless you choose to share that information. However, although the risk is low, there is the possibility that someone you know

may discover that you participated in a research study at the SHiFT Lab, which could result in you feeling embarrassed or uncomfortable. The lab studies various issues related to gender and sexuality. Should someone discover that you participated in a lab study, your specific reasons for participating would still remain entirely confidential.

**Benefits of the Study:**

Although we cannot guarantee that you will receive any personal benefits from participating in this study, we anticipate that you may learn more about your own gender as well as contribute to challenging dominant models of gender in psychology, which currently present binary gender identity development as the “norm.” Once the data has been analyzed, you are welcome to view the overall group findings and ask further questions.

**Confidentiality:**

Your responses in the interviews will be completely confidential; names and other identifying information will not appear in any of the transcribed digitally-recorded material, written notes, or presented findings. A trained SHiFT Lab research assistant (RA) will be transcribing the digitally-recorded material. Only the PI and RA will have access to the data. Transcripts will only be identified by a pre-assigned ID number. In publications and conference and other presentations, some direct quotes from participants (for accuracy) or photographs of the objects (for the public to view and potentially have their ideas about gender identity transformed) may be used, but these will never be associated with any identifying information, as indicated above. All data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Electronic data will be password protected and encrypted on USB keys and computers. Digitally-recorded responses will be transcribed and these, along with written notes and photographs, will be stored separately from the consent forms. All raw data (including transcripts, written notes and digital-recordings) will be destroyed within five (5) years of completion of the study.

**Incentives to Participate:**

To thank you for your participation, for the first interview, your name will be entered into a draw to be eligible to win one cash prize of \$50.00. If you participate in the second interview, your name will be entered into a draw to be eligible to win one of two cash prizes of \$100.00. If you decide to withdraw from the study at any point or omit some of the questions, you will not lose your eligibility for the cash draws; however, you will only be eligible for the second prize draw if you complete the first interview.

**Costs and/or Compensation for Participation:**

There are no costs associated with participation.

**Voluntary Nature of Participation:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University, the researchers, and/or your academic standing. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of the draw benefits to which you are entitled.

At any particular point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether.



**Questions about the Study:**

If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact:

Alex Vasilovsky, MA  
[alexander.vasilovsky@psych.ryerson.ca](mailto:alexander.vasilovsky@psych.ryerson.ca)  
416-979-5000 X2191

Maria Gurevich, PhD  
[mgurevic@psych.ryerson.ca](mailto:mgurevic@psych.ryerson.ca)  
416-979-5000 X7570

**This study meets the ethical requirements of the Ryerson Research Ethics Board.**

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information:

Research Ethics  
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation  
Research Ethics Coordinator  
Ryerson University  
1 Dundas Street West  
11th Floor, Suite YDI 1100  
Toronto, Ontario M5G 1Z3  
Phone: 416-979-5000 X7112  
Email: [rebchair@ryerson.ca](mailto:rebchair@ryerson.ca)

**Agreement to Participate:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time, without a penalty or losing your eligibility for the cash draws. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Agreement for Digital-Recording and Photographing of Object:**

Your signature below indicates that you have agreed to have the two interviews digitally-recorded and your object photographed during the second interview. If you become uncomfortable with the recording at any point and/or decide to not have your object photographed, the researcher will turn the digital-recorder off and/or not photograph your object, without a penalty or losing your eligibility for the cash draws.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Non-Binary Study: Telephone or Skype-Video Consent Form**

“You’re being asked to participate in a research study, which is being conducted for my PhD dissertation. It involves two interviews, during which you’d be asked questions about non-binary gender identity and the gender binary. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it’s important that we go through the following information together and that you ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you’ll be asked to do.”

### **Investigator:**

“The Investigator for this study is, me, Alex Vasilovsky, MA, PhD Candidate in the Department of Psychology at Ryerson University. My PhD supervisor is Dr. Maria Gurevich, Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at Ryerson University.”

### **Purpose of the Study:**

“The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences of people who identify as non-binary in terms of gender identity. Currently, psychology has a poor understanding of genders that are not binary. This research relies on the experiences of non-binary participants in order to update psychology’s understanding of gender identity. Anyone who identifies as ‘non-binary,’ ‘genderqueer,’ or with a related label, is at least 18 years of age, and speaks English fluently is eligible to participate.”

“Do you have any questions about this?”

### **(ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS)**

### **Description of the Study:**

“If you decide to participate in this research, you’ll be asked to complete two one-on-one interviews. Questions about gender identity and the gender binary will be asked (e.g., How did you come to self-identify as non-binary? How would you describe the gender binary?). For the second interview, you’ll be asked to bring an object that represents what non-binary is to you. You will be compensated for any expenses associated with the creation of this object, up to \$20.00, upon provision of receipt(s) at the second interview. In order to capture your responses accurately, the interviews will be digitally-recorded and the object photographed, both with your permission, and the interviewer will take some written notes. The first interview will last about 1-2 hours and the second about 45 minutes or less.”

“Are you still interested in participating in this study at this point?” \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

**IF NO:** “Thank you for your time.”

**\*\*END OF CONSENT PROCESS\*\***

**IF YES:** “Great.” [Continue with consent process]

**What is Experimental in this Study:**

"None of the interview questions used in this study are experimental in nature. I'm simply gathering information for the purpose of analysis."

**Risks or Discomforts:**

"Because of the personal nature of some of the questions asked, you may experience some embarrassment or reflect on unpleasant memories while participating in the interviews. If you begin to feel uncomfortable, you can always discontinue participation (including not bringing in an object), either temporarily or permanently, without incurring a penalty or losing your eligibility for the cash draws. I'll provide you with a list of support referrals to take home with you, in case you decide that you'd like to speak with someone about this discomfort."

"Participation in this study is completely confidential. No one other than me will know why you're visiting the lab, unless you choose to share that information. However, although the risk is low, there's the possibility that someone you know may discover that you participated in a research study at the SHiFT Lab, which could result in you feeling embarrassed or uncomfortable. The lab studies various issues related to gender and sexuality. Should someone discover that you participated in a lab study, your specific reasons for participating would still remain entirely confidential."

**Benefits of the Study:**

"Although we cannot guarantee that you'll receive any personal benefits from participating in this study, we anticipate that you may learn more about your own gender as well as contribute to challenging dominant models of gender in psychology, which currently present binary gender identity development as the 'norm.' Once the data has been analyzed, you're welcome to view the overall group findings and ask further questions."

**Confidentiality:**

"Your responses in the interviews will be completely confidential; names and other identifying information will not appear in any of the transcribed digitally-recorded material, written notes, or presented findings. A trained SHiFT Lab research assistant will be transcribing the digitally-recorded material. Only I and the research assistant will have access to the data. Transcripts will only be identified by a pre-assigned ID number. In publications and conference and other presentations, some direct quotes from participants (for accuracy) or photographs of the objects (for the public to view and potentially have their ideas about gender identity transformed) may be used, but these will never be associated with any identifying information. All data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Electronic data will be password protected and encrypted on USB keys and computers. Digitally-recorded responses will be transcribed and these, along with written notes and photographs, will be stored separately from the consent forms. All raw data (including transcripts, written notes and digital-recordings) will be destroyed within five (5) years of completion of the study."

"Do you have any questions about this?"

**(ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS)**

**Incentives to Participate:**

"To thank you for your participation, for the first interview, your name will be entered into a draw to be eligible to win one cash prize of \$50.00. If you participate in the second interview, your name will be entered into a draw to be eligible to win one of two cash prizes of \$100.00. If you decide to withdraw from the study at any point or omit some of the questions, you won't lose your eligibility for the cash draws; however, you'll only be eligible for the second prize draw if you begin the second interview."

**Costs and/or Compensation for Participation:**

"There are no costs associated with participation."

**Voluntary Nature of Participation:**

"Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate won't influence your future relations with Ryerson University, the researchers, and/or your academic standing. If you decide to participate, you're free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of the draw benefits to which you are entitled."

"At any particular point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether."

"Do you have any questions about this?"

**(ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS)****Questions about the Study:**

"If you have questions later about the research, you may contact me, the lead investigator. Do you have a pen and paper handy?"

Alex Vasilovsky  
[alexander.vasilovsky@psych.ryerson.ca](mailto:alexander.vasilovsky@psych.ryerson.ca)  
416-979-5000 X2191

"My PhD supervisor is Dr. Maria Gurevich, and here is her contact information":

Maria Gurevich  
[mgurevic@psych.ryerson.ca](mailto:mgurevic@psych.ryerson.ca)  
416-979-5000 X7570

"Alternatively, if you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, you're welcome to contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board at [rebchair@ryerson.ca](mailto:rebchair@ryerson.ca), 416-979-5042."

**Agreement to Participate:**

"Okay, now I'd like to get your verbal consent for participation in this study. This study meets the ethical requirements of the Ryerson Research Ethics Board. By consenting to participate you're not waiving any of your legal rights as a research participant. Please confirm that you have been informed regarding the information about this study and are giving your consent to be a part of it."

☐ VERBAL CONSENT

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant providing consent (Printed)

Time \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Person Obtaining Consent (Printed)

**Agreement for Digital-Recording:**

"Do you consent to having your participation in the interview digitally-recorded? If you become uncomfortable with the recording at any point, the researcher will turn the digital-recorder off, without penalty or losing your eligibility for the cash draws."

☐ VERBAL CONSENT

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant providing consent for audiotaping of interview

Time \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

"Thank you so much for your time and attention. Let's proceed with the interview."

## Appendix C

### Interview Schedule 1

#### **Demographics**

How old are you?

What are your living arrangements?

What was the first language you spoke? *(Prompt: Now speak? When learned English?)*

What is your cultural background?

Are you religious? *(Prompt: Type?)*

What is your highest level of education? *(Prompt: Degree, dates, location, specialization)*

How would you describe your employment? *(Prompt: If unemployed, most recent)*

Are you in relationships/a relationship? How would you describe it? *(Prompt: Casual? Long-term? Committed?)*

Were you born in Canada? *(Prompt: If not, where born? How long lived in Canada?)*

Have you lived outside of Canada at any time? *(Prompt: If so, where? How long?)*

How do you describe your sexual identity?

#### **Becoming Non-Binary**

You self-identify as “non-binary”? *(Prompt: Any other gender identifications? Genderqueer? Trans? Cis?)*

Could you tell be more about that [identifying as non-binary]? *(Prompt: In all situations/contexts? Why not some other term? And, if non-binary and some other term, then which ones and why? Now?)*

What does “non-binary” mean to you? *(Prompt: How account for sense of self as non-binary? Psychic? Social? Subjectivity? Identity? Both? How expressed/manifested/realized/etc.?)*

How did you come to self-identify as non-binary? *(Prompt: Then? Now? Future?)*



## **The Gender Binary and Resistance**

How would you describe the gender binary?

*If unclear:* What is your relation to it?

Do you understand yourself as resisting the gender binary? (*Prompt: If so, how? “Resist” or some other term? What gets in the way, if anything? What keeps you going?*)

Where do you think of that resistance as coming from? (*Prompt: “Inside”? “Outside”? Both?*)

What is your relation to masculinity and femininity?

What is your relation to other non-binary people?

**END**

Do you think there is anything else I should know about your experiences of gender?

Is there anything else you want to add that was not discussed today? (*Prompt: Other identities*)

*Schedule second interview:* When can you come in next?

*Discuss possibility of artefact:* The artefact is meant to show to an audience what “non-binary” is to you.

***Interested in results?***

***NOTES:***

*NOTES:*

## Appendix D

### Interview Schedule 2

**So, has anything changed (about gender) since the last time we spoke?**

(Any reflection on Interview 1?)

(What was the experience like?)

(Anything they want to follow-up on?)

*Retrieve “artefact” and description (to be displayed with “artefact”)*

**How did you settle on this object?**

**What was the process of selecting this object like?**

**Could you contrast this with the first interview?**

*End recording*

*Photograph artefact*

*If no description, co-write description (or instruct the participant to submit within the week)*

*Discuss potential “art show”*

**NOTES:**

*NOTES:*

## Appendix E

### Non-Binary Study: Consent Addendum Email

Hi “Participant Name,”

Thank you again for your participation in the SHiFT Lab's Non-Binary Study.

As a brief update, all the interviews have been completed and the three cash prizes have been awarded. I'm emailing because, over the course of the interviews, some participants expressed interest in having their first name associated with any direct quotes that may appear in the presentation of study results, which includes the photographs of the objects. Also, some participants expressed interest in being contacted by me in the future to recommend ways to disseminate results of the study and to potentially participate in disseminating results.

If want to (1) have your first name (as opposed to a pseudonym) associated with any direct quotes that may appear in academic publications, non-academic publications, academic conference presentations, and/or other presentations; (2) have your first name (as opposed to a pseudonym) associated with the photograph of your “artefact,” if it were to be displayed at the proposed art exhibition; and/or (3) be contacted by me to discuss the dissemination of study results, then please respond to this email, confirming your consent to (1), (2), and/or (3).

If you don't consent any of the above, then no further action is required. Your confidentiality will continue to be maintained, as outlined in the original consent form.

Lastly, if you want to choose your own pseudonym, then please respond to this email with your chosen pseudonym. I'll then be able to associate it with any quotes that I may use, such as in my dissertation itself or any other presentations/publications.

More information can be found in the attached “**Consent Addendum Form**,” including information about risks and benefits to all these options.

Please let me know if you have any questions about the consent addendum procedure.

Warmly,

Alex

A. T. Vasilovsky, MA  
PhD Candidate  
Department of Psychology, Ryerson University  
350 Victoria Street, Toronto, ON M5B 2K3  
Phone: 416-979-5000 X2191

## Non-Binary Study: Consent Addendum Form

Thank you, again, for your participation in the SHiFT Lab's Non-Binary Study.

This form is an addendum to the consent form you signed at your first interview.

### **Purpose of Consent Addendum:**

Throughout the interview process, some participants expressed interest in:

- (1) having their first name (as opposed to a pseudonym) associated with any direct quotes that may appear in academic publications, non-academic publications, academic conference presentations, and/or other presentations;
- (2) having their first name (as opposed to a pseudonym) associated with the photograph of their "artefact," if it were to be displayed at the proposed art exhibition; and/or
- (3) being contacted by the Primary Investigator (PI), **Alex Vasilovsky**, to solicit their potential participation in knowledge transfer and exchange (KTE) activities, which could include recommending potential sites of non-academic data dissemination, reviewing non-academic data dissemination materials (e.g., fact sheets, detailing study results) and/or disseminating the said materials at predetermined sites of data dissemination.

### **How to Complete Consent Addendum:**

If you wish to consent to one, two, or all of the above, then you must either:

- (i) sign the relevant sections of this consent addendum form (see: **Complete Consent Addendum**), and then email the signed form to the PI at [alexander.vasilovsky@psych.ryerson.ca](mailto:alexander.vasilovsky@psych.ryerson.ca); OR
- (ii) confirm your consent to (1), (2), and/or (3) by replying to the email containing this attachment (e.g., "I consent to (1)," "I consent to (1) and (2)," etc.).

If you do not wish to consent any of the above, then no further action is required. Your confidentiality will continue to be maintained, as outlined in the original consent form. However, if you wish, you could choose your own pseudonym (see: **Choose Your Own Pseudonym**).

**Risks and Benefits to (1), (2), and (3):**

There is the possibility that someone you know may discover that you participated in the Non-Binary Study, by recognizing your name and/or through your participation in KTE activities. Should someone discover that you participated in the study, your specific reasons for participating would remain confidential.

Consequently, risks include potential identification and potential loss of privacy. Furthermore, you may decide that you no longer wish to use your first *after* it has appeared in dissemination materials. If you no longer wish to use your first name, you can email the PI and it would not appear in any future dissemination materials. You are under no obligation to use your first name nor to participate in KTE activities.

The main benefit is that you may feel more engaged in the research process and the political aims of the Non-Binary Study (e.g., to challenge problematic conceptualizations of non-binary identities).

**Questions:**

If you have any questions about the consent addendum, before you sign, please email the PI at [alexander.vasilovsky@psych.ryerson.ca](mailto:alexander.vasilovsky@psych.ryerson.ca).

**This study meets the ethical requirements of the Ryerson Research Ethics Board.**

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information:

Research Ethics  
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation  
Research Ethics Coordinator  
Ryerson University  
1 Dundas Street West  
11th Floor, Suite YDI 1100  
Toronto, Ontario M5G 1Z3  
Phone: 416-979-5000 X7112  
Email: [rebchair@ryerson.ca](mailto:rebchair@ryerson.ca)

**Complete Consent Addendum:**

- (1) Your signature below indicates that you agree to have your first name (as opposed to a pseudonym) associated with any direct quotes that may appear in academic publications, non-academic publications, academic conference presentations, and/or other presentations.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

- (2) Your signature below indicates that you agree to have your first name (as opposed to a pseudonym) associated with the photograph of your “artefact,” if it were to be displayed at the proposed art exhibition.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

- (3) Your signature below indicates that you agreed to be contacted by the PI, **Alex Vasilovsky**, to solicit your potential participation in KTE activities.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



**Choosing Your Pseudonym:**

If you wish to choose your own pseudonym, then you must either:

- (i) print below and then email this form to the PI at [alexander.vasilovsky@psych.ryerson.ca](mailto:alexander.vasilovsky@psych.ryerson.ca); OR
- (ii) confirm your chosen pseudonym by replying to the email containing this attachment (e.g., "My pseudonym is \_\_\_\_\_").

If you do not wish to choose your own pseudonym, then no further action is required. The PI will choose a pseudonym for you.

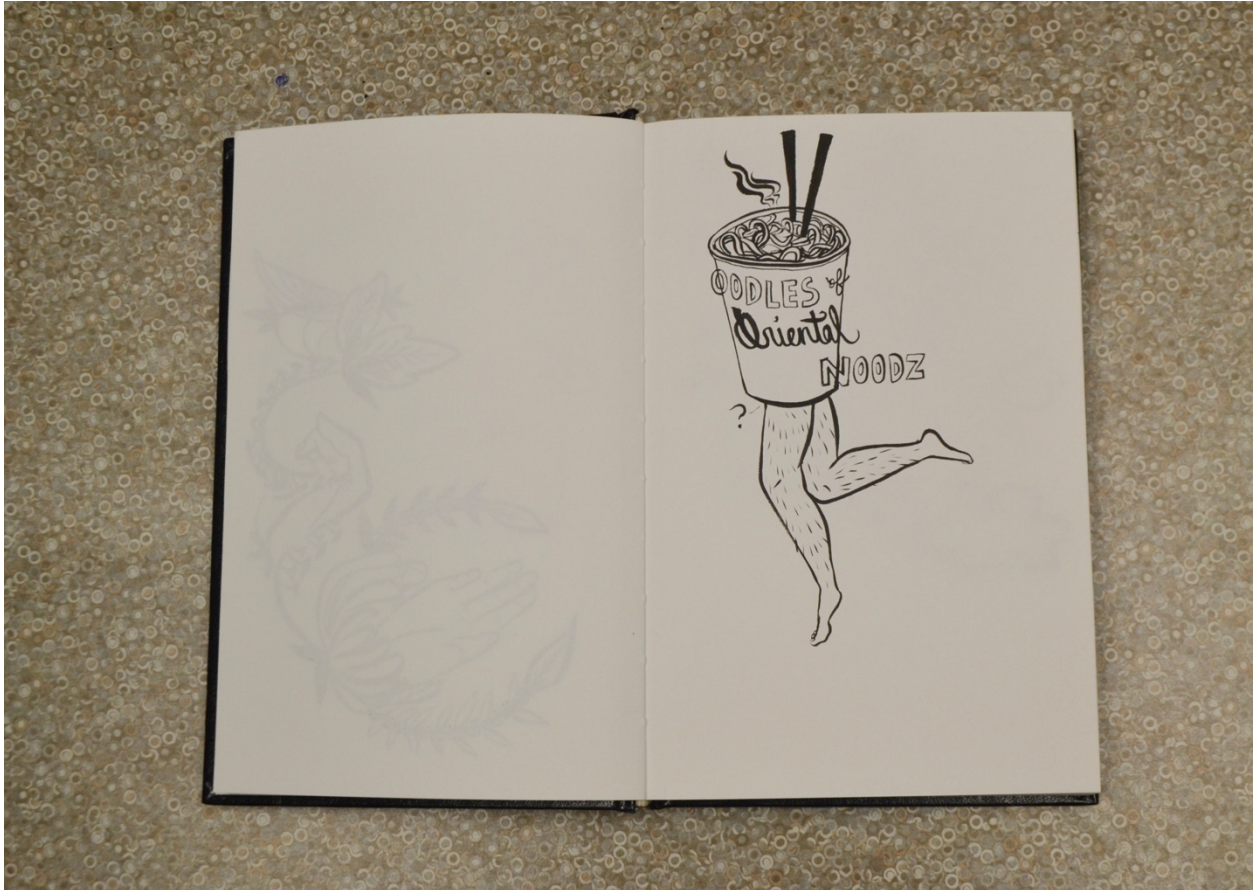
---

Pseudonym (please print)

## Appendix F

### Participants' Artefacts and Descriptions

#### Sukie



I think it's hard not to feel exposed to the world and the identity labels that get projected. When my gender, race, and sexuality intersect at the forefront of seemingly every spontaneous conversation I've shared, I feel like this cup noodle monster. (Remember the last time you had instant noodles? Did you ask yourself what kind of Asian "oriental" meant?) It doesn't matter what genitals I hide; my head can't rest knowing that I can't fully grasp my own racialized gender firmly, especially compared with what the world tells me is real. I don't want to wait or ask for validation to feel better, but I also feel lonely when I think that I'm fighting in isolation.

## Participant 2



There is evidence to support that historically Western and/or Eastern culture have visually hypothesized the future to be grey, shiny, functional. Neutral. Even I have thought about what true functionalism could look like. At quick glance, it is just a watch, a tablet, a laptop which encompass some of the technological achievements of our current time period. Though pink in its colour doesn't per se imply a different future but implies an alternative, a different perspective. Technology is different than the technology of things. I think so at least. To me is a clear sign that these are the only tools needed to manifest an idea from philosophy. To write, to type, to compute. As Alan Watts put it, "Language is a by-product of philosophy." The article [I wrote, explaining a non-binary transition] is a second result, the design is a second result, I am a second result and the result I want is just a little more colour.



#### Participant 4



I like to carry my toy slingshot in the back pocket of my shorts in the summer and use it to propel pompoms and wadded-up notes and other tiny tokens of affection. Like a slingshot, my gender has an echo of a weapon which has since been repurposed into a plaything. It's not separable from its origins as a potential means of violence, but there's also something about it that is deeply humorous and gentle. Its evocation of childhood, adventure, and exploration also reflects the process of reclaiming and redefining my relationship to gender.

## Participant 5



I like it because all shells of a certain sort kind of look the same on the surface, it's like, usually you can point to some and be like, "that's a clam, or that's an oyster, or whatever," right? But you can't tend to differentiate like, if I gave you 12 oyster shells, you can't be like, "That's the girl and that's the boy," right? Or like, ... you kind of have to take the time to investigate. So, like, this one has a bit of a crack in it. But you can't actually really see it. You can feel it. But it's pretty invisible. Um, so it's like there are indicators and there are signs but you really have to pay attention in order to find them and to look, and I feel like, especially people who aren't intentionally trying to like, dress provocatively, or [don't] feel very dysphoric, I feel like that's sort of how society expects them to be, is like ... "you're all going to look like this." Anyway, you can't ask a shell how it identifies [laughter] but you can ask a person, too, you know?  
*[transcribed from their second interview]*



## Participant 6



The colours of the handwoven friendship bracelet represent the colours of the commonly used non-binary flag. What it means to me is a symbol of my identity. I'm literally wearing my pride on my wrist. It's the flag that embodies my strength and how far I have come. The bracelet means to me what the strength of being non-binary means – that within four colours there lies something good and positive about my identity, not just simply someone trying to be “special.” It's a reminder that I am not alone, and I have a community with me to back me up.

**Ray Feinberg**



This is the binder I have worn for a few years now, which shows from the wear and staining. I feel this represents my gender because it is what I put on all day, every day in order to feel at peace with my body and carry on with my normal life. Without it, my chest becomes a source of distraction from anything I want to do. I feel like myself with a flat chest.



## Participant 8



This pillow encompasses not only my gender, but my whole existence. I've had the original since I was born (the stuffing and case have been replaced over the years), and it's been beside me ever since. Like me, it's gone through so many changes and it's looked so many ways throughout the years, but deep down it's still a pillow. It's changed colours and has had frills and lace, but...it's always just stuffing and fabric. Throughout the years I've changed how I've presented myself, and it's never-ending, but I know I'm always here.

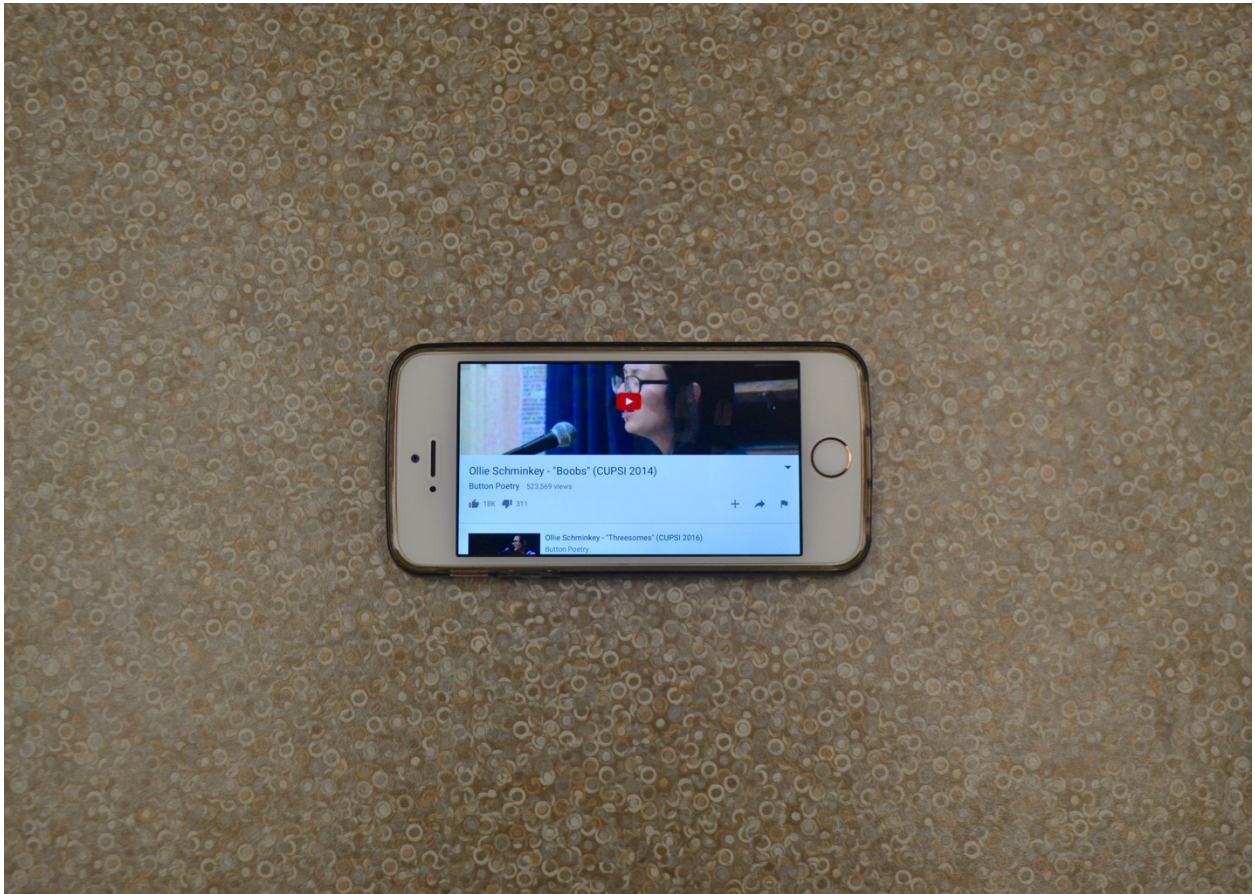


## Participant 9



This is a swatch of the selection of nail polish colours I have (which are also displayed in rainbow order over the mirror in my room). Nail polish was one of the first ways I actualised my genderfuckery before I had the language to say as much, while still just a confused, weird kid trying to stay under the radar in a place that wasn't too welcoming of difference. I still use nail polish to express my gender, and rarely leave the house without some on. I use the colours, patterns, contrasts, and state-of-upkeep to send a range of messages: from "just because I otherwise had to dress conservatively doesn't mean I'm gender-normative" to "these are chipped to shit to match my grimy punk look" to "I'm flagging for a hookup at a dance party." Wherever I am, however I have to dress, and whatever my appearance is otherwise, I can and will use my nails to fuck with people's perceptions, reinforce or destabilise their assumptions.

## Participant 10



“I am not trapped in my body. I am trapped in other people’s perceptions of my body” (Schminkey, 2014). Although this poem is directed towards the transgender community, it speaks a lot about not allowing ourselves to be labeled by other people’s expectations which is what I am trying to do right now. Often, non-binary people are trapped by other people’s perceptions of us and find it difficult to escape since we live in a world that loves to categorize us and when we don’t fit those expectations we are ridiculed for not following societal norms and that should not be the case. Currently, I describe myself as being masculine and feminine but also not being those two things. I used the word currently because gender has been a struggle for me and so many other people. Reassuring yourself that it is okay for you to change your identity or not be sure what it is is important.



## Participant 11



This is one of the first cross-stitch projects I ever designed myself from start to finish, and my feelings around this and the cross-stitch projects I've made since relate strongly to many of the feelings I've had surrounding the process by which I came to (and came out about) my genderqueerness. Realizing that I was non-binary caused me to explore new forms of self-expression through gender expression, and crafts like this one are another new mode of self-expression for me. The sentiment of "burn shit down, queer shit up" also ties into the sort of inherently political aspect of my gender identity, as it puts me in a position of resistance against deeply ingrained social norms and assumptions, breaking down ideas of gender that many people consider to be natural and immutable, and replacing them with something new.

## Michel



This is a souvenir from the Bird Kingdom. Birds, in general, just resonate with me, and, symbolically, they're how I see myself. Outside of colouring, you can't tell what gender a bird is by looking at it – take ravens and crows, for example. When you add ornamentation, like a crown, that's what determines how it's represented. And that's how clothing operates for me. What appeals to me is being able to choose my ornamentation, my clothing, and therefore how people read my gender.

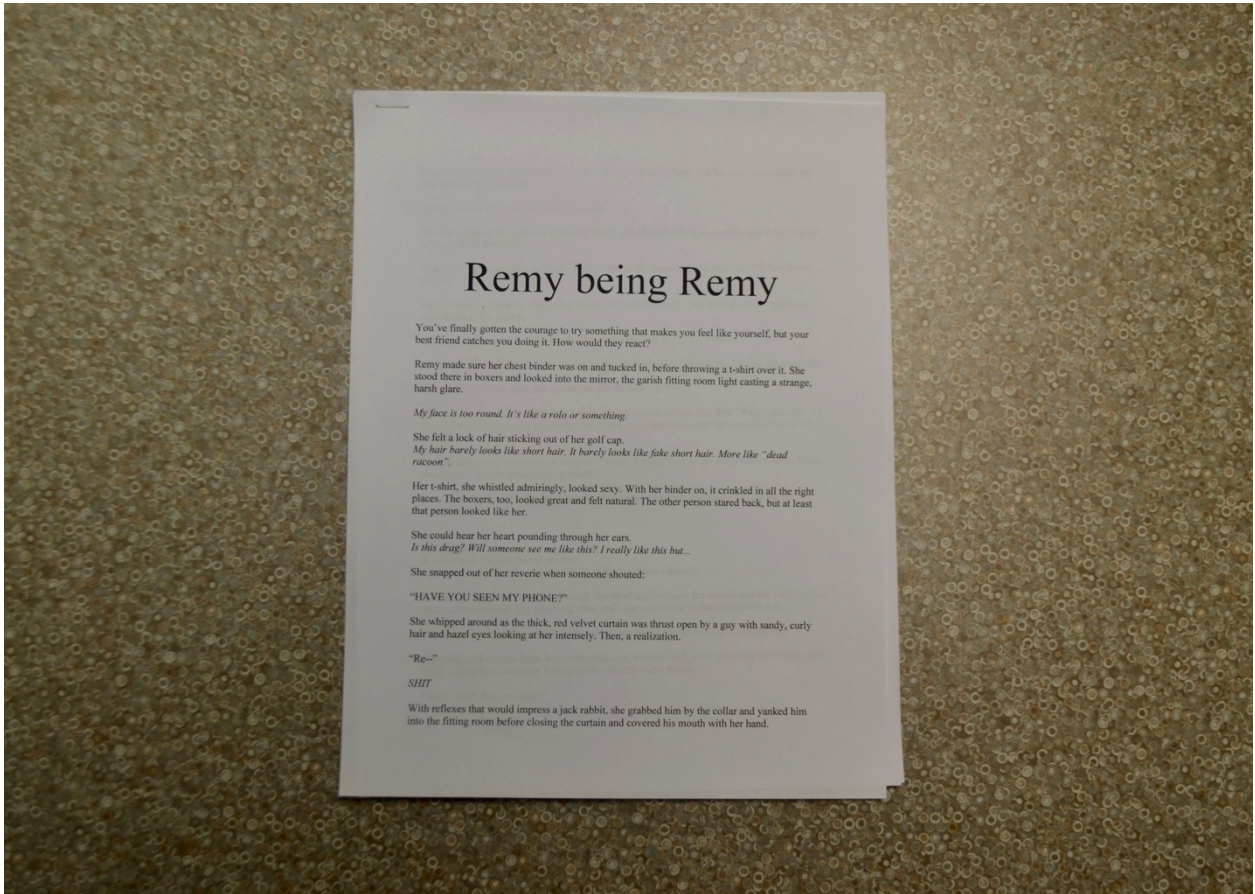


### Participant 13



On the right, I'm about 9 years old receiving a beautiful rainbow sweater knitted by my Mom. This sweater, with all its brilliantly coloured triangles caught a lot of attention in elementary school. I loved wearing it and received a lot of positive comments about its beauty and craftsmanship. Unfortunately, as I grew and graduated into a different middle school, the sweater, alongside elements of my personality, became easy targets for misogynist and homophobic bullying. At this point I learned that I had to hide certain things, which I attempted more or less successfully for the next decade. The impact of that process is something I'm still working out today each time I fumble with a tube of lipstick or remind myself that it's okay to cry in public. The photo on the left depicts me around age 17. In it I'm hanging out at a friend's house after a couple of close friends offered to do my makeup and dress me in what is understood as "feminine" clothing items. This was one of the first moments I was allowed (by myself and others) to dress in a way that outwardly reflected long-neglected elements of my being. My favorite part of this moment was that I was not made to be the centre of attention for very long and that, aside from snapping a couple of photos for me, my friends then continued to hang out and chat with me as they had before. Focus shifted away from me as a spectacle, and the world kept turning.

## Participant 14



This is the first piece of writing I created since coming out as agender. The story was written for the *NYC Midnight Flash Fiction Challenge* and depicts a young woman who is secretly trying on menswear when she is discovered by her best friend. She confesses that she might not identify as a girl. It mirrors my own feelings, metaphorically, in trying to transition for myself and the fear I had in being discovered.

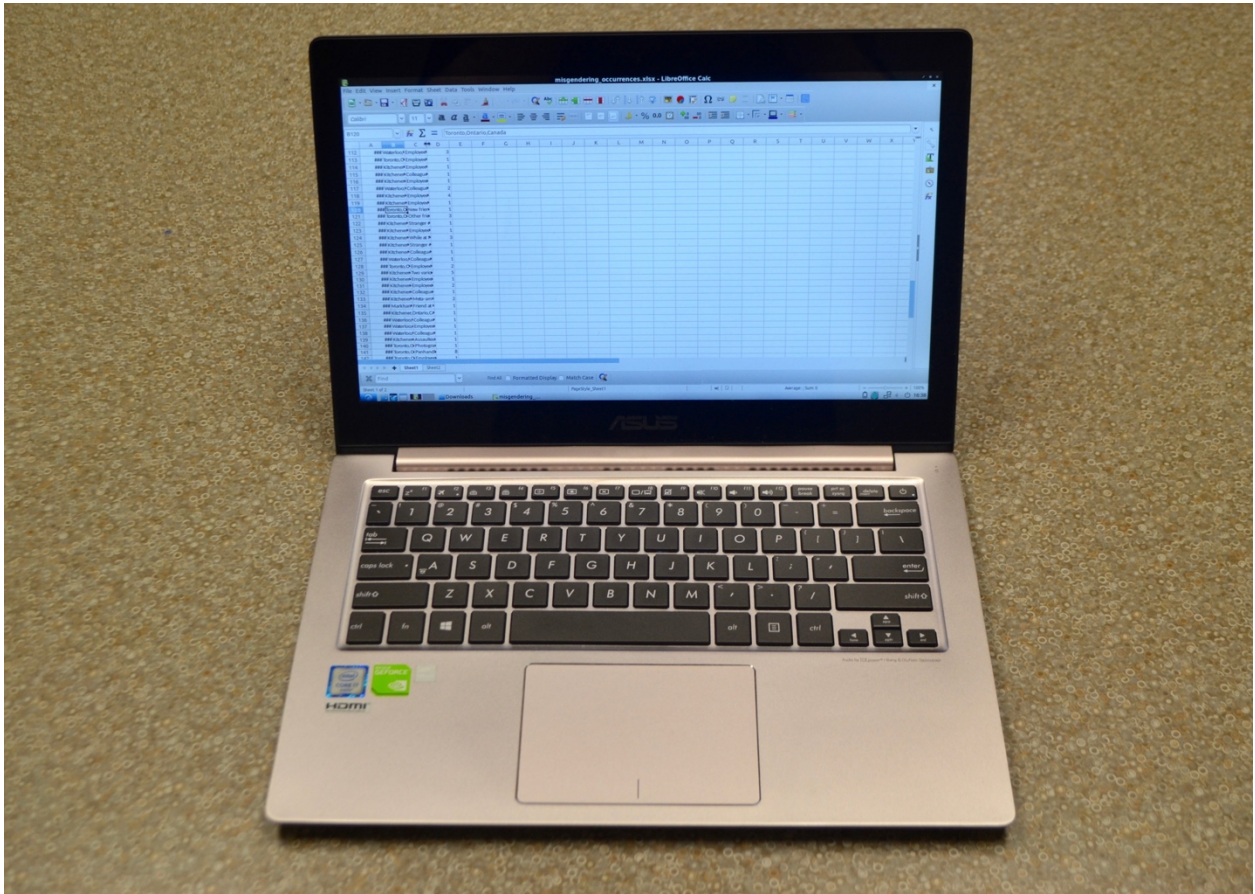


## Participant 15



Being non-binary, being outside of the societal conventionalities of a binary, is needing support outside of what typical society can give. Non-binary is not yet acceptable in North America, so people who identify this way must stick together. We support each other, we validate each other, and we protect each other. This community is able to grow stronger because of technology, and with the progression in technology, demands the progression in our societal values. Oppressed minorities no longer have to suffer alone, there are people that can relate to you all of a sudden. Nothing represents non-binary more than the idea that this movement is brought upon by change. A change in the way we live and a change in the way we think about each other.

## Kira



This database documents all incidents of misgendering that have occurred against me since 8 August 2016. I structured the data in comma-separated value format, using a series of variables to record the date, location, and description of each incident. There were a total of 323 incidents from 8 August 2016 to our interview on [REDACTED]. It's the closest I could get to representing my experiences in everyday life by combining and storing content purely about things which happen to me due to being non-binary. It also generates an electronic memory of incidents, which allows me to recall what has happened for future reference. These are important to me, since being non-binary often specifically entails destruction of memories and of self during oppression. Building and encoding a record of what has happened is a way to assert that what has happened was, in fact, real, and allows me to more readily share these details with peers.



**Eli**



Non-binary is a social blindfold. When you meet someone, you see and listen without really paying attention. You see a man or a woman and you are already expecting them to fit your own interpretation of what they must be like. Non-binary makes you struggle as is breaking your own interpretations and now you are back to zero, you realize your eyes are not reliable critics, and now you have to stop and actually listen to this human being in front of you. I give you the social blindfold while I am free to see you, and you are forced to listen to what I say and to put an effort to understand who I know myself as.

## Participant 18



Mainly I agree with their [Vi Hart, video author] view of gender, it isn't something which I think about or, in most cases, am bothered by. I do not see the point of having these labels of "woman" and "man" because to me they do not mean anything, especially given that my understanding of gender does not align with the idea of there only being these two boxes. Even when we look at gender through a more open lens, using perhaps a gradient rather than a binary definition, I do not know where to place myself. There are bits and pieces, I suppose, that align with how I feel, but even by choosing bits and pieces of different labels I have not found a way to summarize it. A lot of it simply does not make sense to me, which is not to say that I think it meaningless for someone else to proclaim, "I am a woman." I simply do not feel like it is something which I can join in on beyond saying "I do not fit." This is why I have chosen my object, while the path to reach what we believe now is different I identify with Vi Harts' feelings of gender as something which is meaningful and important, but not something which I want to involve myself with.



## Participant 19



I think clouds are a good metaphor for my gender because they are light and sparse/wispy. I identify as a trans-masculine/demiboy/agender, but I'm also a system so each one of my 4 facets have their own version of this gender. In the top left corner is "the host," whose gender is more strongly male and his personality is more simple. Top right is "white," who is a protector and whose gender is more agender and their personality is more stoic and calm. Bottom left is "blue," whose gender is more dense/dark feeling, and der [sic] personality is emotional and turbulent. Bottom right is "the child," who doesn't really have a gender at all, and whose personality is joyous and pure.

**R.E.**



An origami three-dimensional plane. The colours are reddish-pink, yellow, and blue-ish-purple because it's a combination of the non-binary flag, transgender flag, and primary colours. Primary colours can theoretically make any colour – here they can make any gender. Likewise, a person can fall anywhere within the (x, y, z) axes. The axes can represent anything, such as -x = male, x = female, -y = butch, y = femme, -z = unrefined, z = dainty. It helps show these things not inherently connected as well, as one could be any combination.



**Peter**



A Rubik's cube comes in several different colours, and I think of colours as a form of gender expression, but colours themselves aren't inherently one gender or another, any colour can be worn by any gender (or non-gender). Another aspect is the configuration options of the cube. Six sides, but can be shifted into a multitude of possible configurations, anywhere from perfectly aligned with solid colours on every side, to all 3 sections being partially twisted and each side featuring some of every colour. The sides can be shifted so they are predominantly one colour with hints of the others, or it can be split equally between 2 or 3. The cube can shift at any point, to any degree, and stay that way forever, or only for the briefest moment. It is because there is such a range of possibility and permanence that I think this is a good representation of gender as I conceive of it. Admittedly there are limitations to the cube, but the range of possible options I feel is wide enough that it is a good fit.

## Participant 23



With the hypersexualization of my Brazilian culture and being assigned female at birth there is an expectation for me to flaunt my long hair while remaining hairless on the remainder of my body in order to accentuate my femininity. Hiding my long hair in hats and accepting my other body hair (legs, armpits, facial hair) prompted a realization that I experienced less sexualization but was subsequently seen as a threat to those who were uncomfortable or confused. Though hair has allowed me to explore gender and its fluidity, which provides comfort, it also puts my safety at risk when confronted by men who begin by catcalling me but quickly feel threatened by my non-binary body.



## Participant 24



These earrings are a representation of everything I never was. I liked to play with toy cars as a child. When I was old ‘enough,’ my mother took them away and gave me earrings instead – ‘it’s time to grow up,’ ‘playing with cars is no longer acceptable.’ That’s when I realized I didn’t fit. My friends didn’t have an issue being dressed by their parents. Why did I? I didn’t want to be a girl. But I didn’t want to be a boy. I stopped feeling like myself. I felt misplaced. Now, I view these earrings as a part of my ‘old self,’ the self my parents and my world at the time thought I should be. I didn’t start to live as this me until recently. I keep the earrings, because they remind me of the skin I’ve shed in order to go back to being myself.

## Appendix G

### Kira's Critique

One critique I'd level against an arts-based method of representing non-binariness is that it reproduces objectification. For me, being non-binary entails an experience of potentiality of gender – that is, of gender being unrealized as a specific category, especially “man” or “woman.” I would argue that rhetorical, political and scientific attempts to measure or otherwise coerce non-binary into stable, defined categories may actually be contrary to its basic principles. To be more specific, non-binary is not simply a different series of genders, but a re-imagination of gender altogether, which, in my opinion, is not committed to a well-defined, static ontology. It therefore occurs to me that asking us to represent non-binariness through objects, in itself, could serve to objectify, or reify, this notion of gender, thereby negating its principles.



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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Two of these “forms and commentaries” include the “turn to affect” in critical theory scholarship (Clough, 2007) and the “antisocial thesis” (e.g., Caserio, Edelman, Halberstam, Muñoz, & Dean, 2006) in queer studies. According to Halley and Parker (2011), both evince an open-ended or exploratory trajectory, a distrust and avoidance of yes/no structures, a strict oppositional stance, an intense focus on political and psychic dysphoria, and a renewed commitment to contemporary psychoanalytic theories.

<sup>2</sup>Ongoing definitional and categorical transformations make it difficult to provide a precise, single definition of even the most ubiquitous of trans terms. The histories of “transsexual” and of “transgender” are complex and inter-implicated:

Sometimes *transgender* and *transsexual* are synonymous [and set] in opposition to *queer*, which is presented as maintaining the same relationship between gender identity and body morphology as is enforced within heteronormative culture. Sometimes, *transgender* and *queer* are synonyms whose disruptive refigurations of desires and bodies are set in opposition to (nonhomosexual) transsexuality’s surgical and hormonal recapitulation of heteronormative embodiment – its tendency to straighten the alignment between body and identity. (Halberstam, 1998, pp. 291)

Though at times they are used interchangeably, most academics and activists consider transgender to be distinct from transsexual and usually define it as an umbrella term that may include transsexuals (see Ekins & King, 1999). The history of transgender is particularly complicated, given its references to both a specific identity and a consolidation of various sex- and gender-nonconforming individuals.

<sup>3</sup>As coined by Rose (1998), psychologization refers to “the processes through which psychological discourses (and practices) infuse and come to dominate knowledge about human beings and are stretched beyond their initial borders and intents” (Teo, 2015, p. 4; see also Papadopoulos, 2008).

<sup>4</sup>Short for “cisgender,” cis is often used to refer to individuals whose gender aligns with the one assigned to them at birth and matches what others expect of its expression.

<sup>5</sup>This is to say nothing of physical interventions for adolescents, which can be fully reversible (puberty suppressing hormones), partially reversible (hormone therapy), or irreversible (surgery). Even the partially reversible options remain controversial among researcher-clinicians (Ehrensaft, 2009), some of whom have advised that no physical treatment, including hormones, be permitted before legal adulthood (de Vries, Cohen-Kettenis, & Delemarre-van de Waal, 2006), though there are now promising data in support of the puberty suppression approach (e.g., Cohen-Kettenis, Schagen, Steensma, de Vries, & Delemarre-van de Waal, 2011; de Vries et al., 2014; de Vries, Steensma, Doreleijers, & Cohen-Kettenis, 2010; Delemarre-van de Waal & Cohen-Kettenis, 2006).

<sup>6</sup>In any case, psychologists remain unsure as to what they are trying to measure with these measures: as a combination of masculinity and femininity, defined only as the two sets of qualities that distinguish men from women, androgyny tends to “reproduce[s] precisely the gender polarization that it seeks to undercut” (Bem, 1993, p. 125).

<sup>7</sup>According to Rabinow and Rose (2003), biopower incorporates “both the individualizing pole of discipline and the collectivizing pole of the politics of population, to embrace all the historical processes that have brought human life and its mechanisms into the realm of knowledge-power, and hence amenable to calculated transformation” (p. 24).



<sup>8</sup>Governmentality refers to the organized practices (mentalities, rationalities, and techniques) through which subjects are governed. The concept was first developed by Foucault roughly between 1977 and his death in 1984, particularly in his lectures at the Collège de France.

<sup>9</sup>Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) describe institutionalized individualism as a structural characteristic of late modern liberal democratic societies wherein “becoming an individual” is offered as a self-reflexive process (see also Giddens, 1991), shaped, sustained and managed by a “norm of autonomy” (Rose, 1998) according to which the subject understands itself as the consequence of its own unconstrained construction. I knew from Foucault to be suspicious of this neo-Kantian understanding of the individual as responsible for its own movement from an “immature” state toward “maturity” (see Foucault, 1994f). The norms of autonomous individualism, he had noted, require “that this individuality...be shaped in a new form and submitted to a set of very specific patterns” (Foucault, 1982, p. 783).

<sup>10</sup>Frosh (2003) details seven foundational principles for this kind of psychology-based psychosocial studies: concern with the human subject as a social entity; interest in the emergence of subjectivity in the social domain; interest in critique, defined as a concern with ideological issues in psychology; methodological pluralism, including an active assertion of the value of qualitative and theoretical research; theoretical pluralism, including interest in discourses traditionally marginalized in academic psychology; interest in inter- and transdisciplinary approaches to psychological theory and research; and interest in social change.

<sup>11</sup>These theorists support Lacan’s reading of sexuality as rooted in the polymorphous perversity of infantile sexuality and in the sexual drives that are not gender specific as well as his view that sexual positions of masculinity and femininity are taken up based on unconscious fantasy and not anatomy. Unlike Freud, he did not take reproductive genitality as the ideal model

of sexuality, whose instability and uncertainty are normalized by coming to attach itself to relations of love and gender identity that are constructed and imposed by the social (see Lacan, 1998). For Carlson (2010), a Lacanian, the only difference between transgender and cisgender subjects is that the latter claim a “false monopoly on gender certainty” (p. 65). Those who pose the questions “Am I a man, or am I a woman, and what does that mean?” (pp. 66) expose, through their suffering, what discourses of gender stability and certainty mask.

<sup>12</sup>“Object” is understood as a person who is the focus of one’s wishes and needs. The object may be internal (the individual’s mental image) or external (the actual person external to the subject), part (a body part, function, or gratifying or frustrating aspect of the object) or whole (an image of the entire object that takes into account its multiple attributes).

<sup>13</sup>I’m referencing Johnson’s (2015) definition: “‘artefact’ suggests the combination or integration of art (creativity, invention, singularity) and fact (object, form, reality) and draws attention to the idea that action research and its achievements are ‘artificially made,’ co-constructed in local contexts” (p. 173).

<sup>14</sup>Although some feminist and queer psychologists have called for the removal of “gender dysphoria” from the *DSM* altogether, certain other trans and cis academics, activists, and clinicians, with the allied goal of depathologization, notably Kelley Winters, of GID Reform Advocates (see GID Reform Advocates, n.d.), have advocated diagnostic reform in lieu of removal. The advocates of these more cautious, nuanced steps toward attaining said goal nevertheless remain critical of the diagnoses and the professional apparatuses therein (e.g., Ansara & Hegarty, 2012; Lev, 2005; Parlee, 1996; Winters, 2008). Spade (2003), for example, advocates the “strategic use of the medical model of transsexuality” (p. 30), a compromise thought to be secure provide access to vitally needed services for low-income gender

transgressive people through public healthcare systems or private insurers which require a diagnosis. Less activist quarters have been more divided (see Ehrbar, 2010).

<sup>15</sup>For Hirschfeld, the explanatory theories that invoked fetishism and masochism were inadequate: “the transvestites themselves...are surely dissatisfied with this explanation as with the tracing back of their feminine drive to homosexuality” (p. 30). Rather than an intense focus on a particular clothing item (i.e., fetishism), or dressing as a socially subordinate gender for the purposes of humiliation and self-punishment (i.e., masochism), he countered that the underlying motivation for transvestism was “the wish for effemination” (p. 32), including cross-dressing.

<sup>16</sup>The APA (2000) defines a mental disorder as “a manifestation of the behavioral, psychological, or biological dysfunction *in* [emphasis added] the individual” (p. xxxi). Conflict between the individual and society is not a mental disorder, unless it “is a symptom of a dysfunction in the individual” (p. xxxi). In the case of “gender dysphoria,” any resultant distress from such conflict is (mis)labeled as “proof of [mental disorder]” (Lev, 2005, p. 41).

<sup>17</sup>A hypersexualized version of this model garnered attention with the publication of J. Michael Bailey’s 2003 book *The Man Who Would Be Queen*, in which he refers to two types of trans women. The primary-type is “homosexual,” merely feminine men whose decision to transition arises from their desire to be intimate with men, whereas the secondary-type is “autogynephilic” – essentially men who are attracted to women and seek sex-reassignment because they are “sexually aroused by thoughts or images of [themselves] as female” (APA, 2013, p. 702). For critiques of this theory, see Moser (2010) and Serano (2010).

<sup>18</sup>The language of being and becoming had also been used by TGNC people themselves to describe their experiences of gender as doctors and scientists debated the meanings of sex and gender among themselves throughout the 1950s and 1960s (Meyerowitz, 2002).

<sup>19</sup>Their pragmatics evokes, for me, Foucault's "care for the self" precept (see **Foucault: Power and resistance**). In his various explorations of the technologies of the self through which agency is rendered possible, Foucault names two principles – "know yourself" and "care for the self" – that provide a way for individuals to formulate a relationship with themselves in relation to the norms of the time regarding what constitutes a self. That is how the self is constructed by the self; it is not an ontological given. Self-knowledge, the former precept, has taken precedence in our modern society, situated as it is as the fundamental source of being, of who one "really" is on the inside (see e.g., Heyes, 2007; Rose, 1989, 1998); it can be exploited, too, and consumerism is but one example (you are what you consume, or so we are led to believe; what you consume makes you "knowable" to yourself). According to Hanna (2013), the latter precept offers a less solipsistic (and exploitable) outlook – and, as such, a less individualized subjectivity – whereby "individuals are capable of resistance owing to the range of relationships they can form to the self and others which facilitate a critical engagement with understandings of their self" (p. 671). Much like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic networks, notions of interconnectedness, multiplicity, and relationality are likewise invoked here – both theories (Deleuze and Guattari's and Foucault's) examine subjectivity where it emerges, as well as the constraining and enabling practices or techniques therein. Becoming, for Deleuze and Guattari, names one's desire to escape the limitation of one's body and thought, whilst "care for the self" guides one's actions toward becoming the type of person one aspires to be (perhaps that aspirational being is as a person who has escaped said limitations).

<sup>20</sup>Positioning transsexualism as a "natural kind" category (i.e., inherent, immutable, universal, and biologically determined) has proven tempting for TGNC people themselves, as Salamon (2010) explained: "a single, and resolutely biological, explanation of the 'condition'

means that its sufferer cannot be thought as morally culpable for her ... transsexuality, which is a biological, and thus ostensibly immutable, 'fact'" (p. 198). Biological essentialism is drawn on in attempts to secure certain legal rights – as Hirschfeld had been doing about a century ago – though such explanations, ultimately, “appeal to the sympathies of the majority” (Johnson, 2007, p. 60) and “serve to reinstate the naturalized status of a binary gender system” (p. 60). Indeed, much the same has been attempted with homosexuality – “gay gene” and “gay brain” research abound – though the political advantageousness of this legal strategy is suspect: the belief that identity groups are fundamentally distinct from each other is positively correlated with prejudice against gay men and lesbians, and biological theories have been mobilized to support the view of gay men and lesbians as genetically defective, much like some have argued that immutability does not necessarily warrant civil rights protections for homosexuals (see Vasilovsky, 2018).

<sup>21</sup>Indeed, even before the feminist and queer-transgender theorists, trans lives had been vampirized by others seeking to advance their own theories of gender determination, most notably John Money's (see Green & Money, 1969; Money & Ehrhardt, 1972) beliefs about the gender neutrality of early childhood, the malleability of gender, and the primary role of socialization in the production of gender identity.

<sup>22</sup>The Human Rights Act applies only to federally regulated activities and business (think: banks and airlines); most of our day-to-day interactions are under provincial jurisdiction, such that provinces and territories have their own anti-discrimination legislation. “Gender identity” and “gender expression” had already been added as grounds of discrimination to the Ontario Human Rights Code back in 2012, years before Peterson began his fearmongering.

With regard to the Human Rights Act amendments, non-discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression could be interpreted to include the right to be identified by one's

preferred pronouns; accidental or occasional pronoun misuse, however, would not likely be considered as actionable by the Human Rights Commission and Tribunal. A case could be made that repeated intentional misgendering constitutes harassment, but, even if the Commission was to support such a case and grant an applicant's claim, likely consequences (for the respondent/misgenderer), should there be any, would include monetary damages and/or non-financial and public interest remedies – not jail time.

With regard to the additions to Sections 718.2(a)(i) and 318(4) of the Criminal Code: the former addresses sentencing for hate crimes (pronoun misuse alone would *not* sufficiently meet the threshold for hate speech in Canada), and prosecution pursuant to this section requires the Attorney General's approval (this would not be some run-of-the-mill prosecution against, say, a misgendering professor); the latter defines an "identifiable group" for the purposes of "advocating genocide" and "the public incitement of hatred," and intentional misgendering alone would not be considered advocating genocide against TGNC people. Given that enforcement of Bill C-16 is predicated on the time and financial access of complainants, most of whom in this scenario would not have such resources, what we ought to be concerned about is whether our laws are doing *enough* to protect TGNC people from hate, discrimination, and harassment.

<sup>23</sup>Towle and Morgan warn us of the dubious analytic utility of such "West versus the rest" formulations which lump non-Western non-binary genders together, glossing over the differences between and among them.

<sup>24</sup>Bisexual erasure refers to the tendency to ignore, remove, falsify, or re-explain evidence of bisexuality in history, academia, the news media, and elsewhere.