There's a Name for That:

A phenomenological exploration of six Spanish nonbinary individuals' experiences with hermeneutical injustice

By

Paloma Ellis Montalban

A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Human Rights

Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Deusto

Advisors: Dr.Edurne Bartolomé Peral & Dr. Kerman Calvo Borobia (University of Salamanca)

BARTOLOME PERAL EDURNE - 12772316W

Firmado digitalmente por BARTOLOME PERAL EDURNE - 12772316W
Fecha: 2024.05.18 10:02:54 +02'00'

Firmado por CALVO BOROBIA KERMAN - ***4742** el día 20/05/2024 con un certificado emitido por AC FNMT Usuarios

Bilbao 2023

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the incredible generosity of the participants: their willingness to share the most intimate details of their lives, their self-advocacy, and their resilience. For them, my most sincere gratitude.

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my thesis advisors Dr. Edurne Bartolome Peral from the University of Deusto and Dr. Kerman Calvo from the University of Salamanca for their unwavering support over the course of the last six years. It's taken me a long time to finish this work, and this journey has been full of both academic hurdles as well as personal ones as I cared for my grandmother and navigated my own journey with disability. Even when my motivation was at its lowest as I considered bowing out of this PhD program, my advisors continued to have faith in my project. Thank you for encouraging me to look after my health, and thank you for believing I could push through.

To Alberto, Ioanna, Javi, Fotis, Sarah, Greg and Magalee and all the other friends and colleagues who have been unconditionally supportive, who showed me more patience that I showed myself

Thank you to Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and the University of Deusto for the funding received in the first three years of my thesis.

Table of Contents

I. INTRODUCTION

"Who was I now—woman or man? That question could never be answered as long as those were the only choices; it could never be answered if it had to be asked."
— Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues*

In 2015, half way through my master's degree, I was listening to a podcast dedicated to sharing contemporary narratives from Latin America. This particular episode featured a young person from Mexico who had decided to begin using the neutral pronoun "elle" to refer to themselves and their personal journey in coming to understand themselves as nonbinary. This to me was revolutionary: I had never heard of the term nonbinary nor had I heard about neo-pronouns. There had been no shortage of LGBTQ people in my life: I was taught by several queer teachers, my best friend's mother was a lesbian, and over the years had had many friends transition and blossom into themselves in a way that I admired, I had read Judith Butler. Yet there I was, shaken as this term "nonbinary" entered my lexicon and profoundly altered my way of perceiving myself. I, who as an elementary school child introduced themselves as a boy Sundays at church, who had never identified comfortably with womanhood but had resigned to it for lack of a better option, had found a word that accurately described my experience. I was struck by the way a word can transform reality, and now equipped with a new framework, I quietly called my sister to come out. I was overwhelmed by questions: why was I only learning this now, what would've happened if I hadn't encountered this term, where are the rest of us and how do we find each other, and --most importantly-- how do I explain this to people who unlike myself, had no exposure to gender diversity? This work is an extension of my humble attempt to answer these questions for myself and others.

Gender identity, in most Western societies is a binary concept whereby there are only two, complementary, and essential genders: man and woman. However, historically there is evidence of a number of gender configurations which do not cleanly fit into these discrete categories. More recently, due to increased visibility, ongoing activism, and the increased popularity of post-structural and queer theories, a growing number of people have begun to identify with a nonbinary gender. However, popularly and at large, the mere concept of a nonbinary gender is foreign and unintelligible, and the

persistence of this overarching ignorance about gender diversity has resulted in misunderstanding, marginalization, and violence towards these individuals. While there has been significant scholarship on transgender identities in recent years, this research is primarily focused on trans people who identify with a binary gender. Accounting for only qualitative studies, the gap is even more evident. If we narrow this to include only studies conducted in the Spanish context, we are left with little more than a handful. Spain is a country which can provide rich content for queer and linguistic research. According to the most recent surveys by Ipsos Group S.A.--a French a multinational market research and consulting firm--72% of Spanish people believe that trans people suffer discrimination, as well as being the country with the greatest queer population with 14% identifying as LGBTQ in contrast with the worldwide 9%. (IPSOS, 2023) This study aims to capture the experience of identifying as nonbinary through phenomenological inquiry, and in doing so elucidate how these identities are constructed in the words of nonbinary people themselves, as well as how the participants cope with struggles of intelligibility and epistemic injustice.

Gender, Language, and Intelligibility

Historically sociological and psychological research has relied on an essentialist binary gender paradigm, one in which there are two opposite yet complementary genders/sexes that are categorically distinct. Following Darwin's breakthrough theories of evolution, institutions such as the American School of Anthropology in the 19th century argued that while sexual dimorphism was to a degree present in all humans, it was the clear distinction of two "mental sexes" which indicated the highest level of evolution and indeed moral high standing (Cope, 1888). It became common to depict Africans, Indigenous people, and the poor with androgynous features, while the White Aristocracy had clearly defined delicate, sensitive women and robust, rational men (Schuller, 2018). Through this interpretation, gender became naturalized. Consequently, throughout the majority of modern, Western anthropological, medical, and philosophical thought, gender was thought to be binary and immutable, dictated by a limited understanding of biological sex, and from which any deviation was pathological. However, this binary gender paradigm has only relatively recently become questioned. Beginning in the 1970s with Sandra Bem's conceptualization of gender as a spectrum,

later abandoning androgyny to claim that there are no inherently masculine or feminine psychological traits (Baker, 2016). A new paradigm was proposed, one in which gender was not binary but diverse.

Today, gender is generally understood to refer to the socially constructed set of roles and expectations attributed to an individual according to their "biological sex", most often meaning their genital presentation (Fausto-Sterling, 2012). In their 2002 book *Genderqueer*, trans author and activist Riki Wilchins provides a more nuanced definition: "Gender is primarily a system of symbols and meanings--and the rules, privileges, and punishments pertaining to their use--for power and sexuality." (p.14) Wilchin's definition of gender is particularly relevant as it speaks to the intersections between socially constructed categories such as gender or race and their utility as tools of control.

The 20th century brought about a philosophical trend questioning categories and systems previously defended as inherent and *natural* to human societies. *Post-structuralism*, a branch of thought attributed to philosopher Jacques Derrida, sought to interrogate the binary oppositions upon which traditional structuralism was erected. Writers such as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler both particularly applied post-structural analysis to themes such as sexuality and gender. Butler described a heteronormative socially constructed world that utilizes a Foucauldian understanding of decentered institutionalized power-knowledge relations to *citationally and performatively* reconstruct in perpetual ways. Indeed, if all existence is gendered, as Butler (1990) suggests, then to be unrecognized as a gendered actor is to exist in a liminal state which calls into question the existence of the individual, ultimately causing distress.

Both structuralists and post-structuralist understood that language plays a particularly important role in shaping the realities and the gender possibilities present in a given social imaginary. According to some recent theorists, language plays a reflexive role in which it not only reflects cultural conventions and patterns of thought, but as such shapes and creates the limits of our understanding (Boroditsky, 2009; Deutscher, 2010). This idea is referred to as *linguistic relativity* (Boroditsky, 2006), from which we can

deduce that different societies with different language use could conceptualize and socially interpret gender in culturally specific ways. To date there are no known languages which do not distinguish between grammatical genders at least in some way, leading researchers to believe that gender is "so fundamental to social organization and social structure that linguistic means to refer to this category are indispensable for speech communities" (Stahlberg et al. 2007, p. 163)." In other words, gender plays such an important social function, that language to describe it is necessary. With regards to using language to describe identity, our ability to choose is most often dictated by the parameters our native languages provide, defined by a series of normativities which have culturally evolved to be socially intelligible or understood (Cameron & Kulick, 2005).

According to Bucholtz and Hall (2005), identity relations are born out of interaction with others, in which a series of different indexical processes help reveal one's identity. These include: (a) overt mentions of categories and labels; (b) beliefs and assumptions about one's own or another's identity; (c) displayed evaluative and epistemic orientations to ongoing talk and (d) the use of linguistic structures ideologically associated with specific groups (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). In simpler terms, our identities are largely informed by our interactions with other people, what we know and assume about our identities and those of others, and how those identities are insinuated through interaction. Researcher Anita Liang (1999), for example, argues that for lesbians and gay men who may fear retaliation in response to openly revealing their sexual identity, may use subtle implicatures (such as referring to lovers with gender neutral speech) to convey this information to those who are privy to the interpretative resources of the group.

Problem Statement and Justification

"Nonbinary" as an *identity label* represents a large spectrum which encompasses a number of more specific identities such as bigender, pangender, agender, among many others (Richards et al., 2016). Nonbinary genders are not new social categories and have been long recognized in many non-Western and pre-colonial cultures (e.g. Two-Spirit in many Native American cultures, the Hijra in India and Pakistan, or Kathoey in

Thailand). However, *hegemonic Western* understandings of gender have limited the production of knowledge about gender diversity in many Western cultures, and the emergence of the term nonbinary has been recent, even within LGBTQ circles that are more sensitive toward sexual and gender diversity compared to mainstream cultures. Though slowly gaining visibility, existing as a *minority within a minority poses* particular challenges for nonbinary people (Monro, 2019; Stone et. al 2020,). It is particularly difficult to navigate social interactions when a large degree of these interactions are mediated by heterosexist and cisgenderist presuppositions that all people fit into two binary, strict social categories (Riggs & Treharne, 2017; Hopkins, 2019). In many cases, aside from non-verbal and symbolic forms of communication, the very language one speaks does not readily offer tools with which it would be possible to adequately express their gender identity. Even the term gender dysphoria --described as the feelings of discomfort or distress associated with gender incongruence--which has come to become almost canonical to the transgender experience, becomes muddled. Many of the common markers of *gender dysphoria* such as preferring “boy games" to “girl games” and vice versa, the desire to remove or replace gendered physical characteristics of the body, or being distressed with one’s genitals, tend to once again rely on a binary understanding of gender.

Nonbinary people are often socially unintelligible and lack a similar language of interpretative resources due to their only recent visibility. Lesbians and gay men, in large part to the tremendous efforts of the gay rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, have been largely integrated into the social spheres of many countries: we know gay and lesbian actors, politicians, we are more likely to have gay or lesbian friends, coworkers, and family. Despite much stereotyping, lingering prejudice, and the important differences between lesbian and gay communities, as a result, straight people now have access to a greater amount of information about these individuals, and indeed may be even knowledgeable about the subtle implications Liang mentions earlier. Most people, however, are either entirely unaware or only marginally informed about the existence of nonbinary people. This lack of awareness means that in an interaction there are no popular preconceptions of what nonbinary people look like, sound like, their stereotypes, and their truths, leaving a cis person confused and the nonbinary party in

the difficult position of having to not only reveal themselves but preoccupy themselves with the stress of having to explain and justify their identity.

Hence, nonbinary people who live within binary heterosexist and cisgenderist hegemonic conditions that are typical for Western societies have particular struggles with *gender intelligibility* due to a lack of visibility and knowledge about the existence of gender diversity outside of these binaries. People who are comfortable within the gender binary may not understand the meaning of the terms nonbinary, gender, or may not be familiar with the existence and use of alternative pronouns. nonbinary people themselves may be considered unintelligible in their self-presentation, their very presence and as their gender performances may disallow for being "interpreted" within the dominant normative framework. Hanks in his 1996 book *Languages and Communicative Practices* defines "communicative practices" as, "constituted by the triangulation of linguistic activity, the related semiotic code or linguistic forms, and the ideology of social and power relations." (Hanks, 1996 pg. 11) Trans and gender diverse people–including nonbinary people— experience social disenfranchisement as a gender minority, and often experience greater vulnerability to discrimination and violence in social spheres. The explanation, definition, or revelation of one's gender is an act dictated by this power imbalance, which must be constantly renegotiated depending on the context and dynamic of each encounter.

Nonbinary people thus are victims of what Miranda Fricker (2007) describes as epistemic injustice. She highlights two types of epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice is when unintelligible subjects are stripped of their credibility authority over their own experiences, and hermeneutical injustice is when there is a lack of interpretative resources–for example, lack of vocabulary for talking about queer identities and relationality) to understand themselves. This thesis primarily focuses on hermeneutical injustice. Robin Dembroff (2020) argues that:

> Without the resources for understanding nonbinary gender identities, we sustain a conceptual lacuna surrounding nonbinary persons. This lacuna does not only reflect a gap in philosophical understanding: it contributes to a hermeneutical

> injustice that arises from the failure to spread and charitably analyze the concepts and practices underlying nonbinary classifications. (p.2)

In reaction to this phenomenon, marginalized communities may engage in hermeneutical dissent, or the process by which a marginalized group produces their own ways of interpreting their experiences (Goetze, 2018). This can be seen in the popularization of new terminologies to describe diverse genders such as agender, bigender, gender fluid, demiboy, demigirl, and so on. Given the importance of visibility, recently more trans scholars have been attempting to bridge this gap in interpretative knowledge by conducting their own qualitative research on their own communities. Trans sociologist Aaron Devor (2014), for example, has produced a model of transsexual identity development described as "witnessing and mirroring" to contrast with traditional models of gender identity development. Because of the uniqueness of this model, it is referenced often in this work and many of the findings are contrasted with the steps of Devor's model. However, the model is clearly informed by Devor's experiences as a trans man, focusing primarily on a still linear transition between binary genders and with an emphasis on passing as an ultimate goal of transition. Nonbinary people often do not have passing as a feasible or desirable goal, nor am I personally convinced of the linear nature of Devor's model. As such, this work uses the witnessing and mirroring model as a starting point to compare and contrast as well as highlight the ways in which gender development models may be more inclusive, reflexive, emphasize agency, as well as better describe relationships to community and interpretative resources.

However, writers such as Arianna Falbo suggest that hermeneutical injustice cannot be resolved simply by attempting to fill the linguistic lacuna that Dembroff describes above. "Instead," she states, "hermeneutical justice is more likely to be achieved with collective social action—movements that center the voices and experiences of marginalized individuals and that aim to disrupt and expose systemic patterns of oppression and exploitation." This study aims to be part of this collective social action, by directly centering the narratives of nonbinary people and is foremost concerned with the ways in which the study participants access these hermeneutical resources, their limitations, and the ways that injustice manifests despite the existence of these

interpretative resources. To date, qualitative studies on hermeneutical injustice are scarce and non-existent in the Spanish context. This study aims to help fill this gap, present a multidisciplinary approach which highlights the intersections of gender, language, and justice in a context sorely missing these analyses.

Objectives

While phenomenological theses do not adopt hypotheses, this study does assume two core ontological premises based on the reviewed literature: that nonbinary genders exist, and that they suffer an epistemic harm which results in real-life marginalization. Having made these assumptions, this study aims to answer two questions in particular. First, it seeks to understand how one comes to identify as binary, meaning how does each individual come to access the hermeneutical resources that exist in order to have the capacity to label themselves. Secondly, it seeks to discover the ways in which nonbinary individuals negotiate language use to engage in hermeneutical dissent.

Methodology

This study adopts a phenomenological approach, employing semi-structured interviews and interpretative phenomenological analysis to elucidate the meaning-making processes of nonbinary individuals. Phenomenology, according to Mark Bevan (2014) describes a qualitative approach that does not primarily draw from theory, but is instead focused on understanding an individual person's experience and the way in which that experience is lived (Bevan, 2014). Phenomenology as a methodology and analytical practice is derived from the philosophy of Edmund Husserl who in the mid 20th century introduced terms such as the *lifeworld* to describe one's consciousness of the world, *natural attitude* to describe the uncritical and unreflexive existence in the world, and *modes of appearing* which describes the way in which different ideas, thoughts, physical phenomena, events are experienced in a multitude of ways either by an individual or a collective. Mason (2002) states that this a postmodern epistemological perspective as it recognizes the complexity of human experience and the intersubjective nature of experiencing the world. The investigation of one's

experience of the lifeworld in a natural attitude and its modes of appearing is the primary objective of phenomenological research (Giorgi, 1997).

It is the philosopher who reflects on the lifeword in phenomenological philosophy. However, in phenomenological research, the reflection is given by the person who has experienced a certain phenomenon or phenomena. According to von Eckartsberg (1986), researchers gain access to knowledge of these phenomena, their modes of appearing, and their meanings through "thematized verbalization". If we understand that experience is identified and named in a consistent manner through cultural and linguistic communities, then interviewing is the most appropriate means of explaining the lifeworld (von Eckartsberg, 1986). Because one of the objectives of this study is to facilitate the participation of nonbinary people in the creation of academic queer narratives and interpretative resources, as well as to amplify marginalized voices, phenomenological study is appropriate in that it "produces knowledge with emancipatory relevance that can promote autonomy of the individual and the solidarity of the entire community" (Wals, 1993, p. 5).

Through snowball sampling, six individuals who self-identify as nonbinary were selected for two rounds of hour-long, semi-structured interviews. Three criteria were required for participation: participants must use Castilian Spanish as their primary/preferred language of communication, must have completed primary and secondary education in Spain, and must identify with a nonbinary identity. These participants were contacted through social media and interviews were either done in-person or virtually online. Interviews were transcribed and translated by the author, prior to analysis. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to analyze the texts, first by providing an in-depth account of each participant before then identifying patterns of convergence and divergence across cases.

Structure

This study aims to capture and describe the experiences of nonbinary people throughout the process of identity discovery through a phenomenological lens, with a focus on the

intersections of language and meaning creation. This has been addressed in two sections with a total of six chapters. The first part of this thesis covers the theoretical background which informed this work. Chapter 1 discusses several historical theories on identity, social identity, how queer theory intersects with these theories and ultimately honed in on the literature–and lack of literature–regarding trans identity development, especially regarding nonbinary genders. Chapter 2 discusses language and identity, discussing linguistic relativity, the relationships between power and language, and the intersections of language and queer theory to elucidate the role of labels and language availability in identity development. Chapter 3 focuses specifically on trans and nonbinary genders, outlining first key terminology and concepts such as social construction, gender essentialism, and later describing historical examples of nonbinary people as well as the current status of nonbinary people. Part two of this work details the methodology and the results of this study in two separate chapters. The former describes why a phenomenological approach was appropriate for the work by linking phenomenology to queer theory as well as the operationalization of the research questions, sampling and interviewing procedures, as well as analysis techniques. The latter presents the participants and analyzes the content of the interviews. The last chapter reviews the key themes that emerged from the data and align these themes with the original research questions and contextualizing them within the literature discussed in part one, also discuss the broader implications of findings, suggestions for future research, as well as an exploration of the limitations of this study.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following several chapters will describe in detail the theoretical foundation of this work as well as link various fields of study to provide an interdisciplinary perspective on gender identity and hermeneutical injustice. The first chapter will cover the concept of "identity", providing different conceptualizations of individual vs. social identities, relevant terminology, and a special focus on categorization: how categories are created, maintained and how they relate to each other. Following this brief introduction to the concept of "identity", this first chapter will then describe Queer Theory as a framework through which to observe and analyze identity theory, as well as describe how Queer Theory has contributed to post-identity thought. Following this more philosophical introduction to trans and gender diverse identities, this chapter will conclude with a description and problematization of existing models of gender identity development, with a focus on historical pathologization of these identities in biomedical models.

Having established an understanding of identity development and categorization, chapter 2 will explore the relationship between language and gender identity specifically, discussing key concepts such as linguistic relativity, how language informs and replicates power structures, as well as describe the relevance of queer linguistics. This chapter will shed light on the social, historical, and political forces that drive the creation of labels and categories: who gets labeled, who labels them, and why. To illustrate these relationships and their relationship to gender and sexuality, this chapter will provide historical examples such as the invention of key terminology (i.e: heterosexuality, homosexuality). Finally, this chapter introduces the two types of epistemic injustice–testimonial and hermeneutical injustice–and to elucidate the harms caused by one's lack of language to contextualize and express their identities.

Chapters 3 and 4 will apply the concepts of gender identity, language, and epistemic injustice to the target study population: nonbinary people. In chapter 3, I will begin defining and contextualizing key concepts such as gender essentialism,

heteronormativity, and social construction, and through this discussion come to understand the primary critiques and harms of the gender binary. This chapter will then introduce the question of intelligibility of nonbinary genders in order to illustrate how nonbinary people suffer concrete hermeneutical harms. Following the more philosophical discussion, this chapter will ground itself in the current realities of nonbinary people by providing historical and non-western examples of gender diversity, discuss the unique status of nonbinary people as a minority within the LGBT community, as well as discuss the current status of nonbinary people internationally. Chapter 4 will be even more specific in focus by contextualizing all of the previous theory in the Spanish context, providing a history of gender dissidence in Spain, providing an overview of the state of contemporary attitudes towards trans and nonbinary people, and discuss the state of language and hermeneutical injustice

CHAPTER 1: IDENTITY

It is perhaps a trope repeated in every fictional and nonfictional existential crisis documented in film, literature, etc. that the character suffering said crisis exclaims "this isn't me!" and ultimately the film concludes with a reflection and action returning to that which is true and substantial of that particular individual. A close second is the phrase "people don't change," perhaps referring to a transgressor whose bad habits have persisted in some way in which they have fused with their personhood: their badness is too, a part of *who they are* and is thus unable to change. Most individuals in Western cultures, when conceptualizing or defining identity, have a fairly uniform and specific understanding of this concept, namely, that one's identity is semiotically synonymous with the immutable Aristotelian "self" (Janicki, 1990). Within this conceptualization, we as people are born with a core self which defines us individually, and in its inflexibility, creates anxiety if we are to divert from what is "true" to ourselves.

Identity in itself is an unstable concept with various iterations since the Aristotelian philosophical tradition. The past 15 years of identity studies has primarily tackled the challenge of dismantling classical essentialism, or the notion that there is one true, core self to every individual which can only be limitedly swayed by external factors and

contexts (Cameron, 1990; Janicki, 1990). Said (1993) describes Essentialism as the Aristotelian, and generally reductive use of a specific characteristic of a person or group (their "essence") to explain that person or group's behavior: the "essence" of what it means to be Asian, a woman, etc (Canakis, 2016). It is important to highlight that this tendency in analysis is indeed reductive, as it ignores the complex relationships people and collectives have towards social constructs and their own agency. Identity studies in the past few decades resemble more a constant negotiation and renegotiation of a number of factors. Indeed, the concept of identity has been dismantled into various subcategories with which an individual can identify according to the context in which that identification is elicited. One may have a professional identity ("I am a teacher"), political identity ("I am a leftist"), an interpersonal identity ("I am a parent"), gender identity ("I am a woman") and any number of labels one can apply themselves over the course of a lifetime. By separating these different categories of identity, we see that each of these parts of a whole (the unified "self") we can see that all of these categories can individually change. One might change career paths thus changing professional identity. One is not born a parent, and so this identity is acquired. Political views can also evolve and change over time. If these subcategories of identity change, then it can only be assumed that the whole changes as well, and that changes in each category can sway or change the others as well, ultimately creating a different "whole". This refutes this idea of the immutable identity, but also validates the authenticity of each of the following iterations of identity.

Among the multiple iterations of academic approaches toward identity we find both Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory. Both of these theories have many commonalities and aim to explain the social basis of "self-concept", both rejecting the idea of a preexisting self conceptualization that exists prior to one's social life, emphasizing the multiplicity of identities which compose "the self" confined within certain practices (Hogg et al., 1995). In brief, Identity Theory, a theory based in psychology, (Burke, 1980; McCall & Simmons, 1978) seeks to describe the role-related behaviors of individuals at a microsociological level, while Social Identity Theory, based in sociology (Turner, 1985; Hogg & Abrams, 2006) is focused on the description of intergroup relations and the processes of social groups. The root of many of the differences between the two concepts lies in the difference between the academic and methodological traditions from which each is derived.

1.1 IDENTITY THEORY

Identity theory arose in part to provide an empirically testable interpretation of what early identity work coined as symbolic interactionism. George Herbert Mead (1934) laid the foundation for the framework known as *symbolic interactionism* as a way of providing a socio-psychological theoretical perspective to explain the ways in which social identity is created (Blumer, 1986). Based on three premises, SI proposes that:

> 1) Human beings act toward 'things' (including other people, objects, institutions, etc.) on the basis of the meaning that they ascribe to those things;
> 2) The meaning of such things is derived from social interaction that one has with others and with society; and
> 3) These meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretive process used by the person dealing with the things they encounter.

In summary, symbolic interactionism posits that people come to know who they are as a direct result of social interaction. The term *Identity Theory* was actually coined by Stryker (1968) and diverges from the original tenets of symbolic interactionism on the basis that society is relatively differentiated rather than undifferentiated as Mead and disciples such as Blumer originally posed. The *self*, thus as a reflection of society, is composed of differentiated (multifaceted) and organized identities or *role-identities*. Since identity theory is still grounded in Mead's symbolic interactionism, Stryker (1968, 1980) proposes that since an identity is formed based on an interaction with a social group, the number of identities one possesses could be logically equivalent to the number of social groups or environments in which the individual participates . Role identities are self-ascribed, auto-imposed definitions or labels that one takes on which not only describe their explicit social role, but also become critical in defining their position in contrast to complementary social roles or *counterrole* (Lindesmith & Strauss 1956), eg: Father in contrast to Mother, Doctor in contrast to Nurse, Man in contrast to Woman.

1.1.1 Identity Salience

Role identities are hierarchical and certain role identities are more relevant than others based on the probability that they will be useful in accomplishing a particular action (Hoggs et al. 1995). Stryker (1987) describes this as *identity salience*, or the probability that an identity will be utilized in diverse social situations and encounters, and is defined *behaviorally* rather than *psychologically*, focusing on the social significance of an identity rather on the individual's perception of that same identity. Hoggs et al. (1995) present an example in which for two individuals who have assumed the label of "parent", the "parent" identity may have a lower identity salience in a working parent who is often not at home than in a parent who stays at home with their children. In this example, the parent who remains at home with their child may enact the behaviors assumed with the label of "parent" to a greater extent than the working parent--that is to participate actively in the direct care of a child, playing with the child, educating the child, etc.-- thus increasing its salience. However, aside from the behavioral implications of identity salience, it is important to recognize the affective consequences of identity salience. Within the individual's hierarchy of identities, the enactment of more salient (thus nearer to the top of the identity hierarchy) identities often results in the bolstering and reinforcement of one's self-esteem, sense of purpose, and fulfillment (Callero 1985; Thoits, 1991).

1.1.2 Commitment

Within Identity Theory, the concept of *commitment* postulates that an identity's salience is influenced in great part by the individual's commitment to that identity. Stryker and Stratham (1985) define *commitment* as, "the degree to which the individual's relationships to particular others are dependent on being a given kind of person," (pg. 354). Here the authors pose that the label an individual has assumed for themselves has a socially relevant definition and series of constructs, rules, and behaviors to which they must adhere in order for that role to be "fulfilled" in a socially meaningful way. Stryker (1980) specifies that there are two forms of commitment: *interactional commitment* and *affective commitment*. The former refers to the extensivity of that commitment, or the number of roles associated with a particular identity . The latter refers to the intensity of

the commitment, or rather the degree to which the relationships with a particular identity are important. The greater an individual's interactional and affective commitment to an identity, the greater the salience of that identity will be.

1.2 SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

While identity theory is more interested in the individual outcomes of social interaction and the consequent development of identity, Social Identity Theory--as previously mentioned-- is more greatly focused on the study of intergroup relationships, group process, and the self as a social unit. Henri Tajfel, a British social psychologist is credited with the origination of Social Identity theory in his early works on social perceptions and cognitive beliefs on social phenomena such as racism, prejudice, and discrimination and later developing these theories in a collaboration with John Turner at the University of Bristol (Tajfel, 1959; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Hoggs et al. (1995) summarize this theoretical concept as the idea that any group with which an individual identifies with--political party, religion, gender, race, etc.-- has a series of defining characteristic upon which the belonging of each member of the group is contingent and thus provides a definition of who one is: how one should think, behave, or feel. Once these social identities become salient, the perceptions of members inside the group become stereotypical and normative while simultaneously perceptions of those non-members belonging to a socially relevant other group become stereotypical and normative as well. As a result, Hoggs et al. (1995) state that there is an encouragement to conform to the normativity of the group in order to protect both the coherency of the group and consequently the self.

1.2.1 Categorization

There are two fundamental socio-cognitive processes of Social Identity Theory: *categorization* and *self-enhancement. Categorization* refers to the perception of idiosyncrasies, normativities, and stereotypes that render the group and, thus the self, socially and contextually relevant, illuminating as well the actions and experiences that are considered meaningful (Turner, 1985). The process of categorization highlights both

the perceived similarities among members belonging to the same category (in-group) and the differences between those who belong to another (out-group). The perceived similarities in-group which are believed by members to form the defining features of the group make up the group's *prototypicality,* also referred to as a group's normativity (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). Prototypicality and in-group belonging requires a certain extent of depersonalization--not to be confused with dehumanization-- in which the individual is perceived as representing, reacting to, or embodying qualities descriptive of the group as opposed to a unique person. In essence, this requires the individual to align themselves with the prototype as a requisite of group membership. However, it is important to contextualize the prototype as a concrete set of characteristics; but rather a more fluid ideal based on context and dynamic, often in the form of "exemplary members" of the group (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995, p.261). Finally, categorization is incredibly responsive, adjusting its model to maximize the group's meaning and relevance within specific sociocultural contexts.

1.2.2 Self-Enhancement

Self-Enhancement builds upon the concept of categorization defining to the extent which the normativities of the group favor the group and its members, highlighting the importance for one's self conceptualization and coherence to see themselves in a positive light (Hogg & Abrams, 1993). Despite having apparent similarities and having developed in tandem during the same period of time in the social sciences, both series were initially linked solely through their synchronicity and not through any attempt to find concordance between the two (Deaux, 1992; Stets & Burke, 1996). However, this is not to say both cannot be theorized as complementary schools of thought, and indeed, a simultaneous study of Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory is useful in developing a more holistic understanding of identities. It is important to highlight that both Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory assume the existence of an existing social structure in which a personal identity is developed: in identity theory we see this in the concept of the "role" which one adopts according to those available within a specific social context, and in social identity theory we see these manifest in the form of "groups". Both theories require a significant amount of reflexive thought on behalf of the individual and the personal adjustment to a standard, whether this is to conform to the role or conform to the category and negotiate personhood often in opposition to an

"other" be it the counterrole (identity theory) or out-group (social identity theory). In fact, it is often that an individual occupies both a role and a category simultaneously, despite the important nuances differentiating the two terms. Stets and Burke (2000) provide a useful example. A teacher for example can occupy the role "teacher" in a school environment in which the identity of the teacher is informed by its relationships to other roles, as would be the counterrole of "student". However, the teacher "category" includes this teacher and all other teachers--irrespective of them knowing each other individually--whose relationship is based on similarities such as training, goals, and values.

1.3 QUEER THEORY AS AN APPROACH TO IDENTITY STUDIES

1.3.1 Defining Queer Theory

The term "Queer Theory" was originally coined by Teresa de Lauretis, preeminent Italian professor and scholar of feminist studies, semiotics, where it serves as the title of a conference that she held in February of 1990 at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Halperin (2003), provides us with a curious and telling anecdote about the selection of this particular term:

> She had heard the word "queer" being tossed about in a gay-affirmative sense by activists, street kids, and members of the art world in New York during the late 1980s. She had the courage, and the conviction, to pair that scurrilous term with the academic holy word, "theory." Her usage was scandalously offensive. Sympathetic faculty at UCSC asked, in wounded tones, "Why do they have to call it that?" But the conjunction was more than merely mischievous: it was deliberately disruptive. (p.339-40)

"Queer Theory" was a child of the 1970s and 1980s, born as a reaction to the US's early LGBT movements, whose agenda at the time focused almost exclusively on sexuality and highlighting the political relevance and agency of (almost exclusively cis) gay men and lesbian women. Many activists began to question existence of a coherent lesbian woman or gay male subject, ultimately feeling unsatisfied with simplistic, essentialist conceptualizations of identity based solely on sexuality. The 1970s and 1980s were a

time of growth in many activist and academic movements which sought to draw attention to systemic injustices regarding racism, classism, American Imperialism, and gender (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). To early queer activists, an analysis of identity which did not take into account the intersections of the various axes of one's personhood was a deficient one, especially considering that much of street activism which took hold of the late 60s and 70s was spearheaded by trans, black, and latino sex workers such as Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera. However, Teresa de Lauretis's "Queer Theory" was merely a placeholder for an academic discipline which had yet to be created; there was no cohesive, theoretical base for "Queer Theory" as there is in with Marxist Theory for example. Because no one really knew what "Queer Theory" the moment it took the stage following de Lauretis's conference, the theoretical foundations of Queer Theory had to be constructed after the fact (Halperin, 2003).

More than simply a paradigm or framework, Queer Theory can be conceptualized as an academic movement based on the purposeful disruption of heteronormative modes of understanding and ontologies in various academic fields of study. It is intrinsically rooted in the scandalous and the political. While its definition has changed over time#, according to Jagose & Genschel (1996) *queer* describes the modes of analysis which through exaggeration and gesture reveal the inconsistencies between sex, gender, and desire; ultimately resisting and destabilizing the assumed coherence of heterosexuality. The Queer analytic framework is broad and covers subjects from gender-affirming surgery, gender ambiguity, drag, intersex persons, and heterosexuality itself (in stark contrast to gay and lesbian studies) maintaining its goal of problematizing the concept of a "natural" gender or sexuality and reconceptualizing dominant discourses regarding sex, gender, and desire (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). Queer studies does not seek to answer the question of what is queer (*gatekeeping*), but to adopt the perspective of those marginalized by heterosexuality. While there may be some differences in how different authors have conceptualized "queer" as a framework, they hold in common the belief that *queer* is an intervention of normative sexual politics and categories, and the analysis of their capacity for marginalization (Cameron & Kulik, 2003).

1.3.2 Applying Queer Theory to Identity and Social Identity Theory

Gender, viewed through identity theory, with its roles and counterroles, provides an easy model in which the binary gender system adapts well. The two most broadly recognized genders "man" and "woman" each serve as a counterroles to each other in which a large part of the characteristics of "man" and "woman" are defined in contrast with what the other is not. In fact, many of these attributes are often interpreted as inherent contradictions such as that ultimately the roles "man" and "woman" negate each other, in turn negating any possibility of overlap or intermediate experiences and identities (Fdez-Llebrez, 2015). A "man" is defined as being strong as much as he is defined by being not-weak. Likewise a "man" is not only because he has a penis but because he does not have a vagina, because he could *never* have a vagina: if he did, he would be a "woman". So rigid are these categories that they persist despite decades of research defending the reality that biological sex is much more nuanced than the popular notion of dimorphism would seem to indicate (Roughgarden, 2004).

If we frame gender as a social category in accordance with Social Identity Theory, the viability of only having two genders also becomes complicated. If we assume "woman", for example, to be a social category must have a series of criteria which define belonging to the in-group (in this case woman).The instability of this category becomes evident when one begins to analyze what these criteria may entail; not every woman has the same social expectations, has faced inequality or misogyny in the same way, has the same definition of a family, or views their roles in the same way. In fact, common discourse about women defends that physical reproductive capacity (specifically the capacity to bear and birth children) is the common thread that determines womanhood: one of the pillars of second-wave feminism is the recognition that "women" are oppressed because of their reproductive capacity. This has driven much of the necessary work to increase the quality of maternal care, family planning, and abortion access. However, It could be successfully argued that a middle class German woman shares much more in common with a German man of the same middle class with regards to cultural, religious, or moral values than she would with an Indigenous woman living in extreme poverty.

1.3.3 Post-Structuralism

This instability and lack of coherence in categories "woman" and "man" has led more recent theorists to question the utility of identity-based social and political organization. Post-structuralism, which with Derrida is often credited as spearheading as a branch of philosophical thought (Wilkins, 2002), converged with gender theory with works such as the aforementioned *Gender Trouble* by Judith Butler and her theory of performativity. This convergence aimed to draw feminist, gender, and identity theory away from the idea that there is a core "essential woman" that unites all (cis)women together in the struggle to recognize female equality. In turn this has given birth to a number of different theories which are ultimately united by a trend towards a more fluid, subjective account of gender and identity (McQueen, 2016; Lloyd, 2005), based primarily on the idea that previous demands for recognition reinforce existing gender inequalities and exclusions and idealize an unrealistic uniformity among women (Grosz, 2005; McNay, 2008; Oliver, 2001). Post- identity theory draws its theoretical grounding primarily from Nietzsche's theory of becoming and Foucault's critique of modern subjectivity. Post-identity writers critique the use of identity as the primary pillar of political praxis as often debates about identity get stuck in preoccupations with defining that identity rather than imagining and acting towards a future social imaginary. Bonnie Honig (1992) interprets and applies Hannah Arendt--known for her writings on political domain--to gender theory, claiming that in order to achieve the goals of freedom and self-creation one's praxis must unhitch itself from concerns of identity recognition to characterize the social realm.

As noted earlier, the dominant discourses in identity theory require that an identity have in-group and out-group criteria to define it and contextualize it within the social sphere. As also noted above, this defining work is messy and calls into question whose definition is accepted as fact and for what purpose. Feminist writer Linda Zerilli (2005) critiques Butler's theory of performativity arguing that despite her work's importance in undoing gender essentialism, it still operates within a framework that does not imagine freedom beyond the assertion of one's identity and agency. Zerilli (2005) describes this as "the subject question" in which feminist thought becomes stagnated in the "I can" rather than the "I will". She suggests that as a world-building practice feminism should

move away from the "what of identity" to the "who of politics": "that which cannot be proved like a truth or possessed like a substance, but only practiced or enacted by present and future generations of feminists" (p. 37).

1.3.4 Social Weightlessness

Despite the theoretical advances in gender theory stemming from the resistance to gender essentialism and the promotion of post-identity thinkers, there are researchers and contemporary theorists who believe that this work is pragmatically unrealistic to adopt as it fails to recognize the importance of a viable and cohesive gender identity, or that queer and gender theory possesses *social weightlessness* (McNay 2014; McQueen, 2016). This term, as defined by McNay (2014) refers to the discourse on subjectivity and agency which have over time become divorced from the lived realities of the subjects they discuss, thus losing the viability of their potential political impact. This parallels which the concept of the Ivory Tower of academia, where the echo chamber of theory among academics and its consequent abstraction of theory make its content not only inaccessible to the subjects of that research, but others the subject as being interesting to study without involving them as agents in the creation of theory. This is not a new critique, as Riki Wilchins (2011) notes how the significant Foucaultian impact of language and queerness deconstructs yet offers no practical solutions or recommendations for progress in queer and gender studies.

Indeed, while post-modernist thinkers such as Judith Butler have provided numerous contributions to gender theory such as the idea that gender is socially constructed, gender pluralism beyond the binary, and the commodification of the body (particularly referring to medical transition and body modification among others, there is a tendency towards abstraction and theory rather than the material realities of gender and trans*ness (Monro, 2005). While gender is indeed socially constructed, this does not mean it is fictitious, and postmodernist gender theory has an inclination to deny the limitations of the body, the subjective experience of gender diversity, as well as the usefulness of gender as a political identity. Additionally, the anti-essentialist nature of post-structuralism overlooks that there are various transgender people who do describe their

gender experience as one based in an essential self. This notion of "self-essentialism" (Monro, 2005) is poorly addressed within poststructuralist gender theory, as the notion of any sort of essential identity--when approached with existing psychoanalytic frameworks--tends to devolve into bio-essentialist, sexist and homophobic (Segal, 1994).

1.4 GENDER IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

1.4.1 Pathologizing Difference

As complex as the concept of gender is, it is only logical that there are a number of theories hypotheses as to how gender identity is formed, often adopting a two-dimensional analytical approach: 1) biological, psychological, and psychosocial determinants in a number of combinations and to varying degrees, and 2) transmission and behavioral models. Early theorization about gender identity development was spearheaded by Freud's theories of psychosexual development. Freud's theory concretely posits that psychosexual development begins in infancy during which both male and female children identify with the mother, and ultimately develops into erotic fascination or competition between the mother and child at around three years of age depending on the sex of the child. The child then adopts the gender and sexual identification of the same-sex parent. This has by and large been discredited and rejected by contemporary theorist due to the fact that there has been no empirical evidence to confirm these models of attachment, and children are more likely to model behavior after nurturing or socially powerful models rather than ones with which they have sexually rivalrous relationships as Freud would suggest (Payne & Mussen, 1956; Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963; Kagan, 1964).Similarly, Freud's theories are often interpreted as prohibitive for women's progress as it is lacking in its interpretations of women's relational needs particularly with their mothers and is at odds with feminism's goal of greater independence and gender equality (Sayers, 1986). For these reasons, I will not delve further into Freud's theories, however they are historically relevant as a predecessor for future gender development theory and the refutation of Freudian theory by theorists who followed.

The scientific history of attempting to understand gender identity development has been murky at best, and can be described as violent at worst.There has been a long tradition

of pathologizing gender diversity in development by cis authors who certainly find transgender individuals fascinating, othered subjects as opposed to the stewards of their own academic narratives. The prominent lack of transgender academics who could provide a more complete and representative understanding of transgender identity development indubitably contributes to the limited cis-normative interpretations of the transgender experience. Early German sexologist Magnus Hirschfield (1923) coined the term "transsexual" as a clinical category and--quite progressively- recommended sexual reassignment surgery (SRS) as an intervention for transsexuality, a view shared by other early sexologists who believed that SRS and later feminizing or masculinizing hormones (Benjamin, 1966; Cauldwell, 1949; KrafftEbing, 1947). It is important to note that much of the early work on transgender people was lost following the rise of the Third Reich and it is impossible to calculate exactly how work on gender and sex would have advanced without this major conservative regression.

However, later theorists moved on to attempt to identify neuropathological reasons for gender dissonance and transgenderism: to discover the concrete regions in the brain where one's transgender identity could be identified. Studies of this sort have parted from a base understanding that there is one "normal" way in which a brain develops and that following alterations in hormone exposure or sex-differentiated nuclei. An often cited study by those who believe in a strictly biological origin of transgenderism by Kruijver & colleagues (2000), aimed to compare these sex-differentiated nuclei claimed the hypothalamic area of the brain and found that in transgender women, the size of this neuron was found to be in the same range as the female controls. This study is to be taken with a grain of salt as it only used 7 transwomen and 13 ciswomen as controls, which can hardly be considered a generalizable sample. While I will delve deeper into the fallacies of the biological binary later, it is important to note that ranges of sex-differentiated physiological differences based on averages will always be imperfect representations of the general population particularly in small sample sizes. The average of 100 and 0 is 50, and yet 50 does not accurately describe either of the samples. More importantly. I fundamentally question models based on a working framework in which there is one "normal" or normative development of the brain, especially with the recent academic and activist work regarding neurodiversity.

1.4.2 Cognitive-Developmental Models

One of the core conundrums that the various gender development theorists have attempted to answer is whether Cognitive-Developmental theory provides a more complete conceptualization of gender identity development. In 1966, two scholars from two different disciplines developed very different ways of conceptualizing gender identity development: social learning theorist Walter Mischel and cognitive theorist Lawrence Kohlberg. Mischel (1966) posits that behavior precedes cognition and highlights the importance of environmental determinants of gender development (ex. "I have been rewarded for doing girl things, I must be a girl"). In contrast, Kohlberg (1966), however, that cognition--one's growing understanding of gender categories in early development and their categorization into a gender--precedes behavior (ex. "I am a boy, so I like to do boy things"). According to Kohlberg (1966), children form a sense of their own gender through their environment, adopting gender stereotypes based on what they see modeled around them. Kohlberg's cognitive– developmental model represented a bold departure from the psychoanalytic and learning theories popular in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. Furthermore, Kohlberg relied heavily on biologist and epistemologist Jean Piaget's constructivist models of development at a time when developmental psychologists were showing great interest in his work, thus increasing likelihood that Kohlberg's theory would gain influence in the field of gender development (Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002). However, over the course of time, both perspectives have been incorporated into a more integrated view of gender development, in which biology, environment, and cognition all are considered determinant factors in one's gender identity. It is important to note that these studies focus primarily on cisgender identity development and research in trans identity development has been (and continues to be) poor.

My contention with the above mentioned theories of gender development is two-fold. First, all of these conceptualizations of gender have a linear transition marked with a concrete end, which does not recognize the potential for gender identities to shift over time, nor does it see transition as an ongoing process of adaptation according to the individual's identity needs. Furthermore, these theories become destabilized when considering non-binary gender identities. From a psychoanalytic perspective, non-binary people likely do not have non-binary parents with whom to identify. From a

behavioral perspective, there are no behaviors labeled as “non-binary” which can be rewarded accordingly. From a cognitive perspective, most non-binary people who do not belong to a collective which culturally recognizes a non-binary gender category also do not have the language or cultural perspective to first categorize one’s self as non-binary and thus cannot act accordingly. There is no theory surrounding non-binary gender development, indicating a significant epistemological lacuna in the research on trans identities. However, I question the utility of having a specific model of non-binary gender development as standardization often comes at the expense of a broader gender inclusivity, and risks the invalidation of identities which do not strictly follow the development model. Above all, all theories developed regarding non-binary identities should allow for the flexibility to change, flow, and adapt to biological, environmental, and social circumstances.

One notable exception is trans academic Aaron Devor’s (2004) “Witnessing and Mirroring” fourteen stage model of transsexual identity formation, unique in social psychology in that it is based on various non-clinical settings. Devor’s status as a transman adds additional salience to his model, as he provides one of the few models of transgender identity development which is informed by their personal experience with transition, thus avoiding the “othered” lens through which most work on trans people is conducted. Devor (2004) suggests that “in order for persons to legitimate their gender identity claims, they must ultimately have bodies which match their gender claims in socially expected ways" (p. 45). As the name model he presents implies, this model is two fold based on “witnessing”--the need for trans people to be seen by others as who they are-- and “mirroring”--the need to be seen as who they are by people with inside knowledge of what it means to be trans#. The 14 stages include: 1) Abiding anxiety; 2) Identity confusion about originally assigned gender and sex; 3) Identity comparisons about originally assigned gender and sex; 4) Discovery of transexualism; 5) Identity confusion about transexualism; 6) Identity comparisons about transexualism; 7) Tolerance of transsexual identity; 8) Delay before acceptance of transsexual identity; 9) Acceptance of transexualism identity; 10) Delay before transition; 11) Transition; 12) Acceptance of post-transition gender and sex identities; 13) Integration; and 14) Pride (Devor, 2004).

Where I find Devor's model to be particularly useful is in its emphasis on a non-linear development, where there is doubt, questioning, and an extensive process of seeking meaning and redefining one's self, and--perhaps obviously--includes transitioning towards affirming one's true gender. Devor (2004) does specify in his article that he recognizes multiple forms of transition, both social and medical, which different individuals may choose to undertake or not, specifying also that transitions do not have a specific time frame in which they must be completed. While Devor does go into greater depth about hormonal and surgical transitions--mostly because this is most closely reflected by the author's own experience as a female-to-male (FTM) trans person--more recently, trends in discussing trans identities have more recently diverged from discussing medical transition as a prerequisite for identifying as trans. This is notable in reading older generation books by trans authors on the trans experience such as Julia Serrano (2007) who will often distinguish between transsexuals who pursue sex-confirmation surgery or hormone replacement and transgender individuals who do not. Serrano highlights in the introduction to her book *Whipping Girl* how this perspective has indeed been nuanced and does not take into account non-binary genders with as much as if the book had been published today. Indeed, my primary contention with Devor's work is that in his 13th step "integration" Devor explicitly states that "most people who have undergone gender and sex transitions become seamlessly integrated into society at large," (p. 63). This statement seems to imply that "passing" as cisgender is not only achievable in all cases of transition, but that it is in fact desirable to do so. Considering non-binary gender identities, there is no standard for which to "pass" as there is no culturally understood "non-binary" gender roles that one could aspire to fit into outside of a vague masculine-centerd androgyny. Nor does it consider that non-binary can seek some medical intervention to ease gender dysphoria without desiring to resemble a binary gender and indeed can seek to create ambiguity in their presentation as opposed to being easily categorizable.

1.4.3 Quantifying Trans-ness

In recent years, as the interest and recognition of gender diversity and heterogeneity within trans identity formation and embodiment has increased, some scholars have attempted to develop tools to capture the nuances of trans experience. Non-binary

people are often classified under LGBTQ umbrellas, with little to no focus on nuances specific genderqueer identity development (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007; Harrison, Grant, & Herman, 2012). Gender identity researchers have identified gaps in non-binary approaches to gender identity development and have made recommendations for the development of tools to address these lacunas, recommending for example that tool measure multiple aspects of gender and offering response options that not only specifically focused on trans identities (dickey, Hendricks, & Bockting, 2016) but go beyond binary categories (Reisner et al. 2015). Additionally Based off these recommendations McGuire et al. (2019) created the Genderqueer Identity scale (GQI), a tool based in biopsychosocial, evolutionary, intersectional, feminist, communication, social learning, and queer theory with four subscales describing different features of genderqueerness. The development of this scale used both US participants and Dutch participants. The first of these subscales is *challenge the binary*, which describes the extent to which a genderqueer individual challenges binary expressions of gender both intentionally and unintentionally, thus attempting to isolate to what extent to someone feels that their nonbinary presentation and behavior is intentionally transgressive. The second feature is *socially constructed gender*, which seeks to describe the tension between feeling that one's gender is socially constructed or innate, as recent studies have shown that in gender nonconforming individuals, the extent to which one feels their gender is socially constructed is quite varied. The past several decades of gender scholarship have been centered on the notion that gender is socially constructed (West & Zimmerman, 1987;Butler, 1990), however trans authors such as Julia Serano (2007) this scholarship fails to recognize and problematize the fact that many trans people feel as though their gender is internally felt despite socialization efforts.

The scale additionally measures the *theoretical awareness* of one's identity, based on the concept of *embodiment,* as well as *fluidity*. Embodiment, as described by Judith Butler (1988), refers to the idea that our physical selves are marked in some way to represent our political or social identities. Trans academic Susan Stryker (2008) contends that when this embodiment is active, one uses the alteration of the body and presentation to meet social and political goals. This subscale of theoretical awareness aims to address people who may be cis gender or "cis-appearing" but may still intellectually align with genderqueer political domains and how they contextualize their own personal identity in political systems of cis-oppression such as transphobia,

heterosexism, and misogyny (Serano, 2007; Bauer, 2009). Fluidity, the final measure, refers to the frequency of moving between different gender expressions, identities, and experiences. Fluidity stands in contrast to the popular idea of a one-time process of transition, and rather focuses on the intentional negotiation and blurring of boundaries between different gender identities (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Diamond, 2020). All iterations of fluidity are likely predominately non-binary, although iterations of non-binary identities may not be fluid (e.g., stable gender neutral presentation). McGuire et al. (2019) emphasizes that all manifestations of this fluidity are predominantly non-binary, however not all non-binary identities, ie: a demiboy (one who primarily identifies with being a man, but not entirely) may feel stable in their demiboy identity.

What is noticeably absent from these analyses on identity development is the function of language in these processes of self-definition. In fact, existing models on gender development take for granted the definitions of "man" and "woman" and do not bother to define them explicitly; this makes sense given how embedded these categories are in the fabric of Western societies. Whether one identifies with the categories of woman/man or not, there is an existing–albeit vague and unstable–language available to describe and contextualize one's identity and lived experiences. As scholarship and research on these new identities has developed in the past decades, there has also been a need to develop the language to discuss and study gender diversity.

CHAPTER 2: LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

An English-language children's rhyme first documented in 1862 in *The Christian Recorder,* a publication by the African Methodist Episcopal Church states, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never break me," in an attempt to encourage young children to brush off name-calling with their head held high. The phrase is incredibly optimistic, however, anyone who has been verbally abused by a parent or partner, called a racial slur, taunted for their sexuality or gender representation, etc. can attest that not only can words cause immediate harm and long-term trauma. This is precisely why words are used as a common form of abuse; were they innocuous verbal

abuse would not be such a widely implemented method of control. Consciously or not, most individuals understand that words are important: they convey meaning (explicitly or implicitly); they provide an articulation for the labels we give people, places, things, and ideas; and reflect cultural idiosyncrasies critical to contextual understanding, and--most importantly--they create and reinforce power structures. In doing so has inspired a number of sociolinguistic theories throughout the twentieth century examining these dynamics.

2.1 LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY

The first half of the 20th century brought to the forefront of linguistic thought the concept of *Linguistic Relativity* also known as the *Sapir-Whorf* hypothesis (a misnomer, considering Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf never co-authored anyworks). While the roots of linguistic relativity reach back into the linguistic tradition of 19th century Europe, the works of these two theorists brought new life and significance into the way in which language and culture intermesh and iteratively relate to one another (Lucy, 1997). Linguistic relativity, or the idea that the language we speak shapes our lived realities and that those realities iteratively shapes the way in which we speak is controversial: language has consequences for *thought* and *reality*. According to Lucy (1997) *thought* relates to immediate perception, conditioned by memory, inference, personal judgment, and socio-cultural classification systems; while *reality* refers to the everyday lived experience and specific contexts. Since Sapir's 1929 publication, has been the subject of a number of criticisms and reformulations. However, their influence remains significant in that both Sapir and Whorf rejected hierarchical rankings of languages and cultures as Europea biological anthropologists had done so previously to justify the superiority--and consequent supposed mental advancement--of European inflectional languages (Gumpers & Levinson, 1991). This last point is of paramount importance with regards to this thesis is that in Sapir (1929) and Whorf (1944), the diversion away from Eurocentricity to language superiority and thus cultural superiority emphasizes the validity of languages spoken by an Other and in turn the elevation of those culturals to one worthy of equal analysis and weight.

2.2 LANGUAGE AND POWER

Throughout the 1980s, linguists and philosophers sought to further develop theory on the relationship between language and power. Michel Foucault famously adopted an anti-humanist approach, rejecting traditional humanist critiques in which "man" is invoked as the basis of any moral or political judgments; Foucault claims that this essential "man" does not exists and is instead a reflection of each individual's relationship to "historical regimes of truth" (Patton, 1994, p. 61). In this sense, we can describe Foucault's critique as anti-essentialist in nature. If we define power as the capacity to do things, the human subject is a subject of power only insofar as it is expressed through a diverse range of human capabilities and subjectivities (Foucault, 1982).

Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist influential in education, media studies, and anthropology among other disciplines, rose to prominence due to his theories on the dynamics of power. His book *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991) posits that language and words are not simply a means of purely relaying information, but in fact utterances are imbued with symbolic power. Increasingly frustrated with the state of modern linguistics, he became critical of the Levi-Strauss method and Saussirian linguistics and their tendency to universalize their linguistic models, pushing an imperialist sort of intellectualism. Beyond the literal content of speech, one must take into consideration who speaks, in what language, and how are groups defined within the specific context, ultimately depending on the power dynamics between the participants. Bourdieu frequently uses accents and minority languages as an example as it lends itself to a fairly digestible analysis: an accent in a speaker has the capacity to transmit geographical information about the speaker, class, race/ethnicity and by virtue of these characteristics, the corresponding speaker will subconsciously understand the power dynamic of the exchange accordingly. Participants in a speech exchange must consider what Bourdieu calls the symbolic profit, that is we aim to use the symbolic power of speech in order to maximize its impact on the recipient. Consequently those who find themselves on the lower hierarchical rung during an exchange often resort to self-censorship, that is the modification of their speech in order to appeal or have the most symbolic profit. These modifications can be the manner of saying, "code-switching",

the "level" of language (i.e: formality or complexity of vocabulary), and of course content (what can and cannot be said).

Following the writings of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, the late twentieth century brought about a series of revolutionary breakthroughs in the field of linguistic anthropology, in which interest and study that was historically reserved for communicative codes and manners of speaking but also with an understanding of semiotics (meaning-making) (Jacquemet, 2005). William Hanks in his 1996 book *Languages and Communicative Practices* gives name to this mode of linguistic interaction by coining the term "communicative practices" as, "constituted by the triangulation of linguistic activity, the related semiotic code or linguistic forms, and the ideology of social and power relations." (Hanks, 1996). In simpler terms, later twentieth century linguistic anthropology sought to investigate not only who was saying what when, but how the relationships between the actor, recipient, and context result in the capacity for a meaning to be understood or "intelligible" (Cameron & Kulick, 2005). This question of "intelligibility" is crucial when discussing sociolinguistics, human interaction, and any sort of meaningful identity studies centered around language use. The term "intelligible" meaning "understandable" poses the central thesis that a word or speech act is problematic in its capacity for communication if the meaning behind that word cannot be understood by the recipient. This understanding is conditioned by a number of factors such as the language spoken, the demographics (race, class, nationality, etc.) of the speaker, context in which it is spoken, and the power dynamics between the parties. In other words, the identity of the persons on either end of the communication (Canakis, 2015; Cameron & Kulick, 2005).

2.3 LANGUAGE AND QUEER THEORY

> *Queer theory is an exercise in discourse analysis. It takes very seriously the significance of words and the power of language. (Giffney, 2009: 7)*

Queer Theory as a theoretical framework has also produced several new approaches towards language, in particular how it serves to uphold and reinforce heteronormativity,

resulting in a branch known as Queer Linguistics. Motschenbacher & Stegu (2013) define queer linguistics as a paradigm which provides analyses of language informed by Queer Theory, having become today's most prevalent paradigm in language and sexuality studies. Additionally, Queer Linguistics--like most queer approaches to different fields of study--seeks not only to analyze and describe language through a queer lens, but ultimately bears the motivation to challenge the status quo. Thus, Motschenbacher & Stegu (1993) also describe Queer Linguistics as "critical heteronormativity research from a linguistic point of view" (p. 522). Two of the primary dominant discourses which are addressed by critical analyses of Queer Linguistics are heteronormativity (previously defined) and gender binarism (also previously defined) and all the linguistic mechanisms which maintain these in place; queer Linguistics can be defined as a critical analysis of heteronormativity through a linguistics theoretical framework. Indeed, what Butler and other sociologists of their time contributed to linguistic research was the shift from a focus on gender-based differences to the ways in which gender is constructed through language (Livia & Hall, 1997). Barrett (2002) describes the importance of a queer perspective in sociolinguistic research insofar as it can aid in understanding the role of language in society without falling into the trap of reproducing exclusionary and hegemonic discourses:

> Queer theory is important, if not for sociolinguistic theory, at least for understanding sociolinguistic practice. If we, as sociolinguists, are content with a research paradigm that places individuals in exclusionary categories that simply reinscribe prejudiced cultural assumptions about appropriate and 'normal' behavior, then queer theory is not important at all. If, on the other hand, our desire is to truly understand the role of language in society without simply reproducing cultural ideology (and the prejudice, exclusionary practices, and methods of social domination inherent in that ideology) then queer theory might indeed prove to be very important. (p.39)

While there are similarities between social constructionists and poststructuralist approaches to language and gender in that both schools of thought characterize identities as performed rather than inherent, their differences are significant. Poststructuralist approaches, such as those predominant in Queer linguistics, do not conceptualize identity as prediscursive and stable; speakers' identities are not merely

reflected in language use, but that those speakers–through language use–construct their identities in fluid and contextual ways (Stauntson & Morrish, 2012). Poststructuralist authors such as Judith Butler and Michel Foucault have described the discrimination and harms associated with categories and indexation, and caution against assuming the legitimacy of categories as meaningful constructs categories. While social constructionist language and gender research may question the naturalness of gendered practices, it maintains a biological sex vs social gender division which remains uncritical of the biological foundation of "man" and "woman" categories (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). Indeed, according to Motschenbacher & Stegu, (2013), all identity categories are problematic in that they inherently exclude people who do not meet in-group normative requirements.

However, it is very difficult to find a context completely devoid of heteronormative influences. Same-sex identities in particular have reproduced their own internal normative structures, having improved their visibility and acceptability in mainstream society–at least in many Western societies. Greco (2012) posits: "How do gender norms – demands for essentialization, difference, and binarity, that is, 'what a woman must be like', 'what a man must be like' – emerge in the discourse of communities located on the fringes of heteronormativity?" (p.568) This phenomenon can be broadly called *homonormativity*. Trans activist Susan Stryker (2008) highlights how homonormativity originally arose in the 1990s and referred to the neglect of trans experiences within LGBTQ spaces whereby a sub–group is marginalized within a larger group of marginalized persons for the purpose of gaining greater political power. Lisa Duggan (2002) provides an alternative definition of homonormativity, using the term to describe the assimilationist practices adopted by some gay and lesbian couples which mirror heteronormativity:

> . . . a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption. (p.179)

Motschenbacher & Stegu (2013) however, believe that the former two definitions of homonormativity are highly limited, and that focusing on the reproduction of

heteronormative concepts in same-sex dynamics ignores the development of contextual notions of what "correct" same-sex identities should be or look like.

Moreover, despite the constraints imposed by categories, categorization is dynamic, as evidenced by the changing indexical relations that accompany the appropriation and rehabilitation of erstwhile stigmatized categories (e.g., QUEER, FAG, DYKE) in specific contexts. (canakis)

2.3.1 Contextualizing Queer

The rise of globalization and the consequent popularization of English as an international *lingua franca* is rooted in an all too often invisibilized history of violence, colonization, and cultural imposition. Neoliberalism, arguably the predominant Western economic and social model in countries where the most of the renowned linguists of the 20th century have produced their work, has taken to euphemizing this history popularizing the idea that language "flows" (Jaquemet, 2005). Capitalizing on the generally positive semantics of the word, those who are unaware of English language hegemony (through innocent or willful ignorance) may take for granted that English is the most spoken language in the world and perceive this fact as innocuous, much less analyze how it came to be so. To flow evokes rivers: they are natural, they are healthy, and most certainly they are passive. The river does not choose to flow; it flows simply because it is a river. Jaquemet (2005) however invites us to consider using the word "spread" instead. To spread is active and is much more explicit about the relationship between two entities. Much like cancer spreads throughout the body, or panic spreads among a populace, the imagery evoked is one of consumption where all available space is completely enveloped by that which spreads. There is the threat that the space which is being spread into will eventually disappear. Jaquemet (2005) describes this approach to language as utopian and myopic, and that there is a significant lack of attention to the language question within globalization literature, which over time have come to divorce language and culture to its detriment.

One of the most critical systematic challenges to address concerning language, gender identity, and queer identity in particular is the global trend of homogenization of

queerness. This is most prominently evident in that many of the major cultural models for queerness have been born and promulgated in English, produced both within and without English-Speaking countries. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* can be expected to form an integral part of the curriculum of any gender or queer studies course internationally. The same can be said for the global mainstreaming of Pride month and its roots in the Stonewall Riots of 1969--a critical event in the American gay liberation movement. The word queer, while now widespread at least in academic settings, truly only holds weight in English speaking countries (as I will develop further). All in all, we have come to the unspoken understanding that when we speak of non-normative gender and sexual identities, we must follow an American model of identity construction defined with English words. History is in part to blame: aside from the hegemonic takeover as the language of academia, socio-political conditions in English-speaking countries (the USA being the most prominent example) allowed for conditions which could foster the articulation of questions of gender earlier than in other countries (Pavlidou 2015;Cameron & Kulick, 2003; Binnie, 2004). Europe, for example, was host to a number of military dictatorships and domestically fought wars in the 20th century: Portugal, Spain, and Greece were under dictatorships well into the 1970s, years after the Stonewall riots had already taken place and second wave feminism had been in stride for nearly a decade.

The word "queer" in and of itself is a problematic term when we are discussing LGBTQIA movements globally and embodies an ideal example illustrating the inanity of globalizing the movement for gender diversity visibility and inclusion. The word "queer" in the English language literally means "strange" or "odd" and has been used as a derogatory term to describe homosexuals (in particular) beginning in Great Britain. This usage persists today--albeit outdated and one might hear it more prominently among older English speakers--and while the word has been widely reclaimed as a term of empowerment in LGBTQ communities, spoken in the right tone still can be used pejoratively. "Queer"--whose definition remains contested and unclear to many outside of queer studies--was a slur reclaimed by the anarcho-activist group Queer Nation in the mid-80s amidst the AIDS epidemic and initiated and entire academic and social movement against heteronormativity (Stryker, 2009). "Queer" arrived in Spain in the 90s, divorced from its original reclamation, often written as "cuir", and resounding much less powerfully than in English-speaking movements. The words with which one

chooses to identify themselves are not frivolous, instead indicating moments in time, place, movements, sociopolitical transformations, and reflections taken in the forming of both individual selves and communal selves. Professor Bradd Epps from Harvard University wrote in 2008 that it is this particular, lingering "sting" to the word "queer" which ultimately makes its reclamation by queer people so meaningful. However, like many words, queer has generally been accepted with a positive connotation in some LGBT-friendly contexts, and the subsequent use in academic circles as the capitalized Queer Theory has granted the term greater legitimacy.

The subsequent globalization of queer identities ultimately still resulted in the erasure of culturally and linguistically specific diverse gender identities, that in many cases had existed prior to the political disasters of the mid twentieth century. Cultural erasure in all its forms is an extension of the long legacy of colonialist powers, and creates a significant detachment from spatial, temporal, and ethnic ties to what would otherwise be a more whole identity. Cultural erasure is a consequence of an attempt to homogenize different movements--whether it be the LGBTQ movement, the working class, or feminism, for example--often on the basis that a unified, cohesive moment is a more useful social or political move for advancement. The problem here is that this search for global commonalities is often enacted by those who lead the discourse and hold a certain amount of power: citizens of a Western developed nation, English-speaking, white, cisgender, and heterosexual with a certain amount of political and economic clout. This is often because these individuals have the most access and resources to proliferate their ideas. While this is not to discount that thinkers from this particular demographic have produced useful discourse, and that inspiration or solidarity with mainstream queer narratives is detrimental. However, the assumption that all narratives follow patterns of development and are essentially comparable experiences is at best inaccurate and at worst harmful to the advancement and recognition of nuanced queer experiences elsewhere. How can this word then be used to describe any of the plural identities outside of the binary while still respecting their spatial, linguistic, and cultural contexts? (Baril, 2016; Carrera et. al, 2012).

Authors such as Epps (2008) question the legitimacy of incorporating this term into Spanish (and other) linguistic spaces, stating that his contention is not so much with linguistic imperialism (as Spanish is also guilty of such actions) but that it lacks the

fundamental aspects of connection to memory and familiarity; "[The word queer] reveals and obscures at the same time." (p.898) What makes queer powerful in English is its resignification from a verbal weapon; this requires a prior significance–in this case as an insult–which is not present in non-anglophone contexts. Likewise, in anglophone contexts this resignification surged organically–or as Epps states"on the streets" (p.900)–while in non-anglophone contexts the word is foreign, imposed, and almost exclusively used in an academic or theoretical way. The exportation of this term and its consequent stripping of historical and contextual meaning ultimately works against the radical, vindicative power it originally held. Despite its claims of generalized inclusivity, the use of the word "queer"–like all other words–ultimately becomes normalized and institutionalized through reiterated an ritual use (Epps. 2008):

> It can be summed up as, rather cynically, the failure of success: as the word and concept "queer" increase in circulation, the more that people identify with it, the more its conformist nature is revealed, and its limitations as a tool of resignification and radical questioning become more evident. (p.900)

Even writers such as Judith Butler–who has over the years become synonymous with the advancement of queer theory–is wary and cautions us to reflect upon the tendency to assume a utopian vision of the resignification of queer in a way that is incorrectly weightless. This subjectivity and fluidity of power relations and language are particularly important when discussing the development of queer identities and the development of queer labels and categories (and resulting visibility) can often be traced back to important transitional periods in history and shifting social and economic dynamics.

2.3.2 Inventing Heterosexuality

The language we use to refer to sexual orientations is one such example of how shifting social, political, and economic values contribute to the creation of new identities. "Heterosexual" and "homosexual" identities, while now taken for granted as fixed and intelligible forms of categorization, did not exist prior to the end of the 19th century in the United States and Germany and coincided with the rise of a Middle Class, consumer

culture, and pleasure ethic (Katz, 2007). For many centuries, Christian marital tradition had provided the architecture for understanding human sexuality and this was eventually replaced with the rise of industrialization and modern psychological thought towards a more taxonomic categorization (Hannon, 2014). Prior to the 19th century, sexuality was primarily embedded in a fixed moral order, by which sexuality did not have a distinct existence, but was instead integrated into social structures such as marriage, reproduction, kinship, and gender roles (Oosterhuis, 2015). Sexual morality ultimately was based in a reproductive imperative, the crucial distinction between sex acts being whether or not they interfered with reproductive capacity, with sex acts in this latter category (such as sodomy, masturbation, adultery etc.) being deemed sinful and criminal. While certain sex acts have been described and categorized for most of human history, and the stigmatization of certain sex acts is certainly not new, these acts were not descriptive of type of person. Early definitions of sodomy, for example, included all non- reproductive sexual practices irrespective of the sex, gender, or identity of the perpetrator: a "sodomite" is not a *type* of person, but a person who has committed a particular type of sin. According to queer historian Hanne Blank (2012):

> Part of the Catholic understanding of "sodomy" was an awareness that sexual sin was something that could happen to anyone. Simply feeling desire put one at risk. Sexual misbehavior was not a marker of some sort of constitutional difference, but merely evidence of temptation unsuccessfully resisted. This sensibility is largely why, prior to the 19th century, Western culture did not include the concept that all people were split into two sexual camps." (p.26)

However, the world changed, and with the rise of industrialization, urbanization, and the middle class came the need for new categories to describe modes of being and interaction within these new contexts. The spread of the scientific and philosophical Enlightenment ideals had, by the 19th century, promoted science as the primary and most accurate means of describing the natural world; in doing so, the rationalizations for sexual and reproductive control shifted away from the "moral" to the "natural". In his book, "The Invention of Heterosexuality," Jonathan Katz (2007) describes how the late 19th century saw a transformation of the family from producer to consumer, and in doing so transformed the individual's relationship to their body; the body was not merely an instrument for work and production, but the body as an instrument of

consumption and desire. It is at this period in the Late Victorian that we see the introduction of the commercialization of erotic desire: erotic books, plays, and establishments catered to the new sexual consumer (Katz, 2007). This occurred in tandem with the mass exodus from the countryside to urban centers resulting in an unprecedented amassing of people: London reached a population of one million in 1835, with Paris following close behind reaching one million in 1846. Increased population density made evident sexual behavior that had often gone unnoticed, restrained, or hidden in more remote and smaller communities. Unorthodox–yet common–sexual activities such as prostitution, same-sex eroticism, and sexual violence had certainly existed in the rural sphere. However the agglomeration of people made these acts suddenly seem rampant, more frequent, random, and out of control. Blank (2012) notes how not only did it seem as though sexual misconduct was more prevalent, but also that it often went unpunished: city populations often lacked the types of social unity and interdependence that allowed for more efficient community enforcement behavior in villages. The fastests-growing demographic groups in this new city were the working class and the poor, and quickly the apparent rise of sexual misconduct was blamed on these lower economic classes rather than the complications of nascent urbanism. Indeed, it became of popular opinion among the upper classes that sexual deviancy was an innate characteristic of the poor.

Among these upper classes were a new class of professionalized physicians who had in the 19th become holders of significant social and political power, who within this new sexual economy developed a new model of "normal sexuality." The basic concept of a hetero-homosexual dichotomy was originally introduced in 1862 by German Lawyer Karl Heinrich Ulrichs who coined two terms: *Urning* referring to a man who is sexually attracted to men and *Dioning* referring to a man who is exclusively attracted towards women. A few years later in 1869, Hungarian writer Karl Maria Kertbeny introduced the terms heterosexual and homosexual to refer to the same dichotomy. Interestingly, both of these authors coined these terms in response to the passing of a Prussian law which severely punished sexual activities between men. In fact, following the suicide of a colleague and friend who was threatened with the exposure of his "perversion", Kertbeny became acutely aware of the dangers of criminalizing sexual activity between two men (Blank, 2012). The medical and psychiatric communities adopted these terms in the years following 1870 in an attempt to categorize sexual deviancy not in sinful or

criminal terms, but in abnormal and pathological terms (Oosterhuis, 2015). During this time a number of "perversions" were defined clinically including homosexuality, exhibitionism, sadism, masochism, necrophilia, etc. It was not until 1890, however, that the term heterosexual was defined as a separate sexual category, and one with a very different meaning to the one we deem canonical today. Originally, heterosexual was used to refer to an individual who felt a perverse erotic desire for both sexes (similar to what we would call today bisexuality) and who pursued pleasure without reproduction (Katz, 2007; Oosterhuis, 2015). In the words of Hanne Blank (2012):

> "This new concept [of heterosexuality], gussied up in a mangled mix of impressive-sounding dead languages, gave old orthodoxies a new and vibrant lease on life by suggesting, in authoritative tones, that science had effectively pronounced them natural, inevitable, and innate." (p.11)

By 1890, the word heterosexual had become synonymous with normality. According to Katz (2007), the new heterosexual model provided "the pivotal term for the modern regulation of eros", paralleling the widespread standardization of masculinity and femininity, manufacturing, and intelligence (p.235). Words, categories, terms and identities are products of their time and contexts, and are created according to social, economic, and political needs and motivations. Bakhtin (1981) explains:

> There are no neutral words. All words have the 'taste' of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life (p. 293)

When discussing the development of new sexual and gender identities it is important to identify who is doing the naming and why, who has the power to label, and to question the ontological basis of these naming processes. Importantly, we must question and investigate what happens when a subject or marginalized group is excluded from processes of meaning production and language.

2.4 EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE

According to Miranda Fricker (2007) epistemic injustice is "when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences" (p.1). Fricker identifies two types of epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice is when unintelligible subjects are stripped of their credibility authority over their own experiences, and hermeneutical injustice is when there is a lack of interpretative resources (i.e.:. lack of vocabulary for talking about queer identities and relationality) to understand and contextualize social phenomena. Morten Fibieger Byskov (2021) describes epistemic injustice in simpler terms: "Epistemic injustice is the idea that we can be unfairly discriminated against in our capacity as a knower based on prejudices about the speaker, such as gender, social background, ethnicity, race, sexuality, tone of voice, accent, and so on." (p. 114) If an individual were to accuse another of a crime, for example, what would need to be true of the speaker in order for their testimony to have credibility? What aspects about the language used, the tone, the background of the speaker, etc. make a testimony more likely to be believed?

Testimonial injustice centers on prejudice in that a speaker's credibility is unduly influenced by prejudices that have no bearing on whether or not they should be believed. The injustice here is that speakers who are not subject to these prejudices have an unfair advantage when communicating their knowledge (Byskov, 2021). Fricker (2007) describes this as a *credibility deficit.* In Fricker's original work on epistemic justice, she uses the novel "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee as a prime example. The novel centers around the trial of a Black man (Tom) who has been falsely accused of raping the White woman whose house he helped repair. During the trial, Tom is questioned as to why he helped the woman for free, he states that he felt sorry for her. Set in the American South in the 1930s, the novel discusses the deeply racist society which is charged with determining the fate of an innocent man. Tom, by stating that he felt sorry for a White woman, inadvertently suffers a credibility deficit: it is inconceivable to the White judge and jury that a Black man of inferior status could ever feel pity for a White woman. Tom thus suffers a testimonial injustice. To propose an

example topical to this thesis, trans and gender diverse individuals are often questioned with regards to how they know they are "sure" about their sexual orientation or gender:

How do you know you're a woman?
Maybe you just haven't found the right man.

These metaphysical questions regarding how one *truly* knows their gender or sexuality are questions exclusively posed to those who fall outside the limits of cisheterosexuality. A cis heterosexual man is rarely asked to justify why he is a man, and is certainly not questioned as to how he knows he is exclusively attracted to women. Trans and gender diverse persons are treated as unreliable narrators of their own lived experiences and are thus subject to testimonial injustice.

According to Fricker (2007) testimonial injustice may lead to hermeneutical injustice because testimonial injustice influences what is included in the collective of knowledge in a structural way. When certain marginalized subjects are deemed not credible, their experiences are underrepresented in the collective hermeneutical resource and thus affecting the capacity of members of this marginalized group to make sense of their experiences. Fricker considered this lack of a conceptual framework with which to understand one's experiences unfairly benefits those who are able to see their experiences reflected in this collective body of knowledge and thus constitutes an injustice: "the powerful have an unfair advantage in structuring collective social understandings." (p.147) Fricker poses a historical example: the phrase "sexual harassment" did not exist socially or legally until the 1970s and before then women may not have had the language to adequately describe their experience , a fact which Fricker (2007) stresses is not coincidental, but indeed due to the historical exclusion of women from equal opportunity in journalism, publishing, academia, law, and the other institutions which allow people to contextualize their experiences. The lack of participation of women in the construction of language to describe experiences rendered many women unintelligible, and thus victims of epistemic injustice. According to Butler (1999) a subject that is unintelligible is considered abject, unnatural, and less or not fully human and consequently are robbed of their legal, social, or political legitimacy. Cultural unintelligibility creates and perpetuates epistemic injustice, a wrong

perpetrated against minoritarian subjects in their capacity as knower and legitimate author of their own experiences (Medina, 2013).

A number of writers have expanded upon Fricker's theories of epistemic injustice. For example, Rebecca Mason (2011) states that hermeneutical injustice results in two forms of ignorance: while the marginalized subject may not have the hermeneutical resources to understand their experiences of oppression, so does the dominant subject who remains ignorant of the oppression of the marginalized subject. Mason describes these two states of "unknowing": "an unknowing to which members of nondominant social groups are subject by virtue of their systematic hermeneutical marginalization and an unknowing to which members of dominant groups are subject by virtue of their ethically bad knowledge practices"(p. 17). This is significant in that structural oppression is in part maintained by the ignorance of the dominant group, who is neither aware of the oppression nor the way in which they perpetuate or participate in it (McKinnon, 2016). Collins (2000) additionally reflects on what happens when a marginalized group has developed their own hermeneutical resources to make sense of their experiences, while the dominant group remains ignorant of these resources and in fact, delegitimizes them. Using the example of Black women, Collins (2000) reflects upon the long history of rejecting Black women's knowledge by (primarily) White men deeming it unfit or unacceptable. Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. (2012) expands upon this phenomenon, and refers to it as *willful hermeneutical ignorance*: "dominantly situated knowers refuse to acknowledge epistemic tools developed from the experienced world of those situated marginally. Such refusals allow dominantly situated knowers to misunderstand, misinterpret, and/or ignore whole parts of the world." (p. 715).

While Fricker's work primarily focuses on individual interactions between persons, authors such as Elizabeth Anderson (2012) highlight how this is equally applicable to systems as well; inevitably, knowledge systems are social systems imbued with their own implicit biases, prejudices, and power dynamics. Anderson critiques Fricker's individualist approach, stating that it provides two problematic conclusions: identity-based epistemic injustice must ultimately be justified by an unequal transaction rooted in prejudice, and that to heal this harm an individual prejudice must be ultimately resolved. This consequently negates the complexity of how social systems interact to maintain this epistemic injustice: that is, they consist of multiple moving components

with distributed interactions that are emergent, dynamic, adaptive, history dependent, contingent on context, and shot through with power relationships." (p.1465) Authors Bhakuni and Abimbola (2021) for example link epistemic injustices to knowledge practices in global health privilege dominant groups, particularly through the disregard and dismissal of indigenous and local health practices of a given population. However this does not mean that we should abandon the examination and correction of individual biases or that it has no value, but that ultimately structural remedies must also be applied. For example, in the context of employment, some such remedies include institutional requirements around hiring, evaluation, and accountability for discriminatory practices (Reskin, 2000). In the case of trans and gender diverse individuals, their testimonies and individual understandings of their experiences are deemed not credible when compared to the much larger hegemonic medical and social systems which have since the 19th century defined categories such as gender and sex. In the following chapters, we will discuss many of the terminologies, theoretical models, dynamics, and structures which have shaped our 20th century, Western gender models and their respective impact on the lives of trans and gender diverse individuals.

CHAPTER 3: TRANS AND NONBINARY GENDERS

3.1 GENDER: KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

3.1.1 Gender Identity vs Role vs Expression

A baby is born and their genitals are assessed by a physician, doula, parent, etc. If they are born within a Western society, then they are assigned a label of "boy" or "girl" and from that moment on (though in many cases even prior while the baby is in-utero) a series of ascriptions and expectations are placed on the child to conform to said label, ultimately iteratively naturalize these traits according to one's sex (Bem, 1993). These attributes and expectations are what we have come to theorize as gender. In their 2002 book *Genderqueer*, author and activist Riki Wilchins provides a more complex definition of gender, writing, "Gender is primarily a system of symbols and meanings--and the rules, privileges, and punishments pertaining to their use--for power and sexuality." (p.14) They emphasize that gender is not merely laws and practices but also modalities of thinking and perceiving the way one moves through the world. Gender as

a verb is to impose these modalities onto objects or bodies either explicitly as we see in Spanish (f. *la flor* or m. *el coche*) or implicitly as in English (ships are often referred to with feminine pronouns). When we speak of gender, we usually see it accompanied in the literature with other terms adding additional specificity to the term: gender *role*, gender *expression,* gender *identity*. Gender *role* refers to the social and societal functions (roles) assigned to one gender and the fulfillment of those functions. Gender *presentation* refers to the outward appearance (presentation) which an individual projects, oftentimes in accordance with certain guidelines of dress, mannerisms, and speech which have been assigned to each gender so that others may perceive and therefore understand the gender of another. Presentation is particularly important when discussing *passing*, a term describing the phenomenon in which a person who is trans, homosexual, or otherwise not heteronormative "passes" as cis or heterosexual (this will be discussed in greater depth later on). This dissertation is focused on Gender *identity*, or the innate *feeling* of being a certain gender (or conversely not being a certain or any gender). This last category is by virtue of its definition intangible, and in being so it is destabilizing as that which cannot be measured cannot be either standardized or categorized cleanly and requires a certain amount of trust in and respect for the valid, informed lived experience of the individual who claims a given gender identity.

3.1.2 Heteronormativity

The original coining of the term 'heteronormativity' is often attributed to Berlant and Warner (1998), who use the term to define a set of practices and assumptions which serve to render heterosexuality not only coherent but also privileged. In their article "Sex in Public" (1998), Berlant and Warner bluntly declare early on in their that "heterosexuality is not a thing", in this case referring to the fact that there is no monolithic representation or practice of sexuality, instead--as with all hegemonic practices--is a series of varied and contradictory strategies for self-maintenance and reproduction. The use of the word "norm" began to form part of the key language of sociology as an academic discipline in the 1950s and 1960s, along with the conceptualization of "social systems", "norms" forming the building blocks of those systems, and which could be either externally enforced or consequently internalized.

(Dawe, 1970). Kitzinger (2005) elaborate upon this definition, stating that "heteronormativity" is this particular collection of hegemonic cultural, legal, and institutional practice that not only privileges heterosexuality, but also maintains the belief that there are only two *opposite* genders, that these genders are determined by one's sex, and that the attraction between the two *opposite* genders is *natural*. Schilt and Westbrook (2009) state that these two schemas are constituted by what he calls the gender order: "the patterns of power relations between men and women that shape norms for femininity and masculinity by defining what is gender-appropriate in arenas such as romantic partner selection, occupational choice, and parental roles." (p.442) These normative expectations maintain and reproduce hierarchical gender inequality more broadly, as men are pushed to "do dominance" and women to "do submission" (West & Fenstermaker, 1995). The fundamental assumption that there are two, opposite types of bodies which are naturally attracted to each other means that heterosexuality inherently requires a binary gender system. Heteronormativity is produced from the expectation that heterosexuality and gender identities are determined by genitalia, despite genitalia not being visible during the vast majority of social interactions (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). Most people will assume that a gendered appearance reflects a particular biological reality.

Heteronormativity considers heterosexuality–much like the categories man and woman–as the natural product of biological sex, and is weaved into the fabric of social and political institutions: "guarantee [ing] that some people will have more class status, power, and privilege than others" (Ingraham, 1994, p. 212). Van der Toorn, Pliskin, and Morgenroth (2020) explain the extent to which heteronormativity is structurally relevant:

> Its ever-present, descriptive nature is evident first-and-foremost in marriage, pregnancy, adoption, and related socio-legal practices that in most societies are beholden to different-sex couples only. Encountering heteronormative assumptions is a daily affair, with people routinely forced to pick one of two options when asked to indicate their gender or sex in systems and on forms, and with their shopping experiences generally organized along gender lines (e.g., with women's and men's clothing and girls' and boys' toy sections). (p.161)

Van der Toorn, Pliskin, and Morgenroth (2020) state that part of why heteronormativity is so pervasive is that it incorporates "various important and central aspects of the self" such as gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, and sexual orientation. Not only are these core aspects of the self, but they are also assumed to be systematically and meaningfully around the gender/sex binary.The pervasiveness of heteronormativity means that in many ways functions as the lens through which the world is seen, analyzed, and judged and–more importantly–the harms attributed to the enforcement of heteronormativity are far and widespread. These harms range from the bullying of gender nonconforming children, to the unfortunate reality that at least 76 countries legally restrict criminalizing consensual, adult same-sex relationships, cross-dressing, and cross-gender behavior (UNHCR, 2015)

3.1.3 Social Construction

The emphasis on social construction is both the most crucial aspect of gender's definition as well as that which gives it the most complexity and presents a challenge to its broader intelligibility. Because gender is given to be socially constructed, this means that there could be infinite variations on the iterations of gender depending on a variety of factors ranging from time period, to country, to religion, or to ethnicity. And indeed, even a superficial observation of trends illuminates the inherent instability of gender. Body hair on women which is today seen as a gender transgression so severe, women sporting leg or armpit hair receive death and rape threats#, only became part of the feminine aesthetic imaginary in the first few decades of the twentieth century. High heels, which now are deeply associated with feminine presentation and slimming calves were worn by Napoleon Bonaparte and other powerful men as a means of adopting a taller and more domineering posture as well as to be able to have the privilege to step over the filth that covered many European streets of the time. Transfeminist author and trans woman herself Julia Serrano provides some nuance to the phrase "socially constructed" explaining that :

> Once we start thinking about gender as being socially exaggerated (rather than socially constructed), we can finally tackle the issue of sexism in our society

> without having to dismiss or undermine biological sex in the process. While biological gender differences are very real, most of the connotations, values, and assumptions we associate with female and male biology are not.

In response to this imposition of a gender dichotomy historically accepted as fact within Western Cultures, gender theorists have attempted to redefine our conception of gender from a binary to a broader spectrum of possible gender experiences. Gender can be described as a continuum between male and female (and in many cases, neither) and whose manifestations are grouped with regards to their frequency and probability, and therefore reinforced with medical, legal, and social criteria (Halberstam ,2002; Roughgarden, 2004).

Even in cases where the attribute is positively connotated, it is always important to note that false dichotomies are almost always false in that they enforce exclusion from the group upon absence of that attribute while simultaneously discouraging deviation from that attribute for those included in the group with the threat of exclusion. This is dehumanizing and this is systemically violent in the way that it prohibits individuals from the rights to a full and complex identity and self-realization as well as promotes physical violence against those who deviate from this dichotomy. Indeed, not only are gender-nonconforming persons at an exponentially higher likelihood of experiencing violence (Scott-Dixon, 2006; Wilchins in Nestle, 2002) gender-aligned persons also face aggression and social punishment when not conforming to the expectations of their gender. Societal constructions of gender restrict bodies and well-being, as well promotes the legal, medical, and religious intolerance that perpetuates a culture in which individuals do not have a right to their own bodies (Koyama, 2003). In this respect, the dismantling of a dichotomous gender binary would be beneficial for the liberties of all irrespective of gender identity.

However, if we assume there to be a potential for a multitude of genders, it is important to ask oneself: why the binary? There are a number of theories as to why the establishment of a male/female became so critically important and such a fundamental fixture of Western Culture ranging from the Judeo-Christian belief in a monotheistic God creating only man and woman (Wilchins, 2002) to the philosophical writings of the ancient Greek philosophers as well (Valdes, 1996). Valdes (1996) attempts to answer

this question through a historical retrospective of the factors influencing the Euro-American sex/gender system. He defines the Euro-American sex/gender system as one that is at its foundation both androsexist--defined by a series of biases and structures favoring maleness and male identified persons--and heterosexist--favoring heterosexual relationships--and quite importantly *rigidly* so. While the Euro-American sex/gender system is not the sole system which derives gender from sex, Valdes (1996) argues that it is the only which derives gender solely from sex and retains this derivation immutably. The Euro-American system additionally has sustained its essentialism drawing links between androsexism and heterosexism through claims to the "naturalness" of this configuration in addition to its supposed "morality" (West and Zimmerman, 1987). At the core of this immutable configuration is the conflation between sex and gender, where in their rigid relationship they are often deemed interchangeable both in language and concept. The sex-gender conflation exists as an axis of a larger, triangular conflation between sex. gender, and sexual orientation. As opposed to the other legs of this conflation--sex/sexual orientation or gender/sexual orientation--Valdes emphasizes the weight of this axis stating how this conflation is the only of the three to be legally (in addition to socially) enforced.

While the idea that gender is socially constructed is generally and popularly accepted by gender and sexuality academics to some extent, there are an increasing number of authors who are questioning how useful or clear the distinction between gender and sex really is. These scholars have suggested that much like gender, sex is a social construction as well, one that is defined many times in different, contradictory ways, according to different disciplines (Mol, 2015). In her article *Who Knows What a Woman is*, Annemarie Mol (2015) describes how the concept of a "woman" significantly predates many of the biological markers with which we "define" womanhood today—such as chromosomes or hormone levels–as well as the way in which different sciences define woman:

> Genetics knows what a woman is. Out of a total of forty-six, a woman has two X-chromosomes…Anatomy knows what a woman is: a body with a uterus, broad hips, breasts, labia,and a clitoris…Psychoanalysis knows that a woman is a product of identifications and complexes…Endocrinology knows what a woman is by studying hormones. (p.64-65)

According to the binary gender/sex system, one would assume that each science would illuminate one aspect of womanhood. However the supposed collaborative nature of these sciences come into question when these definitions of womanhood contradict each other: what happens when a person's anatomical definition is that of a woman (ie: having a vagina) but their endocrinological definition (ie: has high levels of testosterone) or genetic definition (ie: having XXY chromosomes) is not? In fact, more often than not science cannot provide a consistent definition of binary sex. While critiques certainly do not attempt to deny the reality that bodies have biological differences, authors such as Butler (1990) argue that it is culture which determines how these physical realities are perceived, interpreted, and categorized to define man and woman as two distinct sexes: "perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all" (p. 9)

3.1.4 The Naturalization of Gender

The configuration and enforcement of the gender binary as we know it today has relatively recent origins. For over a century, any studies related to sex and gender adopted an overwhelmingly biological essentialist framework. Russet (1998) describes that closely following the revolution in biological sciences spearheaded by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Darwin's novel model of classification prompted an interest, if not a complete turn towards, the classification of human beings into discrete, precise categories determined primarily on difference. The importance of categories and their linguistic and social purposes will be discussed in a later chapter. Biological essentialist research about sex and gender has thus primarily focused on establishing measurable differences between the men and women. It is important to highlight that "man" and "woman" existed as bio-social categories for millenia predating Darwin's initial theories of evolution and natural selection without a comprehensive understanding of human sexual characteristics. While I do not attempt to disprove the validity of the differences observed over years of

sex and gender research, it is important to acknowledge that the presupposition of difference between men and women preceding the research ultimately can lead to an overemphasis on such differences. Thus, one must contextualize the early research of sex differences as science seeking to validate and reinforce a social mode in which men and women are not only strictly and distinctly different from each other, but that the reason for this difference is biological and measurable. Research in this tradition has argued for the differentiation between two sexes whose classification in one sex or another is dependent on genitalia (primarily), chromosome, and hormones; that these produce "masculine" and "feminine" bodies which reproduce "masculine" and "feminine" behavior.

Perhaps one of the most toxic effects of a binary gender system for gender conforming and gender non-conforming people alike is the easy jump--one that has already been made within Western Culture's existing gender system--from *binary* to *dichotomy*. If there are only two options for gender, it becomes a logical conclusion that the two gender options are dichotomous, that is implying that they are in contrast or opposite to each other (Bem, 1993). We must remember that for something to be dichotomous, the two categories must be mutually exclusive and thus have no overlapping characteristics. Men are masculine, and women are feminine. Men are dominant, and women are passive. Men are impervious and women are sensitive. Men are polygamous, and women are monogamous. Men work (belonging to the public sphere), and women are domestic (belonging to the private sphere). However, an empirical observation of the natural world reveals that no such dichotomies exist, and that organisms and systems are constantly in a state of change: matters change state, living things die, and all humans produce both testosterone and estrogen. So if most of nature, human beings included, are not dichotomous upon observation then we must question what purpose applying a dichotomous structure serves. Hartsock (1990) attributes this model of categorization to the Enlightenment and the formalization of logic and the (specifically male and White) fetishization of order in which there is The Theorizer who is logical and rational, and devalued Other represents chaos, disorder, and--most definitely--irrational. These *principles of order* rooted in formal logic typically manifest in three ways: the principle of identity (if anything is A, it is A), the principle of contradiction (nothing can be both A and not-A), and the principle of the excluded middle (everything must be either A or not-A) (Jay, 1981). It is of little surprise that with the rise of

liberation movements over the past several decades, women, Black people, youth, the Indigenous and other chaotic and irrational "Others" have rejected such a basis for social categorization.

When we speak about the naturalization of gender, we are referring to the assumption that the cultural forms imposed upon a person contingent on their body are inherent or *natural*. It goes without saying that there are biological differences between the sexes. While there are arguments that the binary distinction between the sexes and the criteria which need to be met in order to fit into discrete categories of "man" and "woman" are insufficient, it is not a typical feminist or queer objective to disprove that there are tendencies in hormone level, chromosomal organization, or genital development that result in physiological differences (Crompton & Lyonette, 2005). What characterizes gender essentialism, however, is that these physiological variations typically found between men and women are in some way meaningful and inherent, and thus can be used to justify inequalities between men and women on the premise that these are "natural" distinctions. This conservative essentialist view of gender is quite popular, as evident by the pop-culturally ubiquitous phrase "Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus" still holding relevance as means to emphasize the emotional and interpersonal differences between women and men (Gray, 1992).

3.1.5 Gender Essentialism

Feminist theory of the 1970s and 1980s gravitated strongly toward an *essentialist* view of gender and women's studies which by its definition excluded the nuances of experiences between cisheterosexual women, lesbians, and transwomen, particularly the latter group. *Gender Essentialism* covers a broad spectrum of philosophical and epistemological beliefs including realism vs. nominalism, nature vs. nurture, and different conceptualizations of the self (Witt, 2011). Discussing essentialism requires a definition or understanding of what we mean by "essence". Witt (2011) provides us with two different interpretations of "essence". *Kind Essentialism* employe a definition in which "essence" refers to the unique properties which define the membership of a "kind", or a collection of individual all possessing unifying properties, and according to

some theorists these properties must have an explanatory power thus creating "natural kinds" as often seen in animal classification (Witt, 2011). It is easy to see how this sort of manifestation of essentialism was greatly present during the sexual revolution where some of the main goals of feminism was to gain bodily autonomy in a patriarchal and paternalistic system which almost unilaterally controlled aspects of the "female" body, namely the reproductive system: the right to access contraceptives and the access to safe abortions, for example. Many feminists reject this essentialism on the basis that as gender is social, men and women form social kinds as opposed to natural kinds, thus cannot be unified by a single collection of properties. Feminist who advocate for gender "kind" essentialism mistakes that which is social and thus variable for that which is natural (biological) and immutable. Essentialism refers to the (Aristotelian) reductive tendency to designate a particular aspect of a person or group as explanations for their behavior: the "essence" of what it means, for instance, to be Asian, or Indian, or female, etc. (Said 1993),

However, based on the distinction of gender and sex, and if we assume that gender succumbs to the often arbitrary and culturally specific necessities of a person in society, then there viability of values associated with one's gender as *natural* falls apart: gender is by definition *unnatural* (Butler, 1986). The naturalization of gender has been one of the most historically important rhetorical tools for the maintenance of the gender nonbinary, tying function neatly with relevant applications of science. It is critically important to recognize naturalization is a means of social control which provides justification under the guise of science for the enactment of social and political policies that maintain the status quo. This is not a new phenomenon and has been used throughout social and biological sciences throughout centuries as a justification for the subordination of peoples in the West and abroad, and indeed was one of the most important weapons employed by the legacy of colonialism. In the same way that the subjugation of non-white races was backed by racial and biological anthropology in the 18th century--citing skull shape, musculature, and genital size, among other characteristics to make "evident" the inferiority of races (Campbell 1972; Schuller, 2018) --gender has been used to limit individuals to certain behaviors, roles, and capabilities based on what is deemed natural. Extrapolations of this sort include the inherent motherly nature of women based on their reproductive capacity, permissiveness with male aggression citing testosterone.

Joan Roughgarden--an evolutionary biologist and transgender woman herself--questions and dismantles the broadly assumed strict sexual dimorphism of humans and other species in the animal kingdom, and adds unique perspective to the biology of gender. She suggests the widening of the term gender to refer to "the morphology, behavior, and life history of a sexed body" (Roughgarden, 2004, pg. 288) In animal species, she explains, "male" and "female" functions are determined with regards to gamete size, which in nearly all sexually reproducing species is limited to two sizes of gametes: male function means making small gametes, and female function large gametes (Roughgarden, 2004). The human body is particularly to classify as male or female, as most bodies produce gametes of both sizes either at the same or at different times throughout the life of an organism; most importantly, a gametic binary does not correspond with a binary body morphology or a binary range of behaviors. The word "sexed" in Roughgarden's definition of gender refers to the categorization of a body with regards to these gametes. Darwin's theory of sexual selection, much like many other of his theories, was revolutionary for the time and set the foundation for much of modern evolutionary biology. However, Roughgarden points out that the strictness of sexual dimorphism as established by Darwin is limiting and not representative of the wide variety of sexual presentations which occur in the wild. Should gender exist, it has no true binary basis in biology.

3.1.6 Agency and Choice

Feminist and writer Simone de Beauvoir famously wrote in her 1949 book *Second Sex*, "one is not born, but rather, becomes a woman," and in doing so marked for what many feminist and queer theorists consider among the first articulations of the difference between sex and gender, the latter being an identity which is acquired as opposed to innate. Sex here is the biological, immutable fact of the body whereas gender is the consequent acculturation of that body. This ultimately became the beginning premise of gender as an action, or a series of actions reinforced through mimicking and repetition which render the concept of gender meaningful. This interpretation of gender as a verb was spearheaded by the seminal--and often misquoted-- works of Judith Butler who

gave rise to the idea that gender is *performance*. In an analysis of de Beauvoir's work, Butler dissects this use of the word "become" which the French author used to describe this process of acquiring womanhood, and the implications of this verb in particular when it comes to conceptualizing gender and gender identity, particularly in terms of its ambiguity (Butler, 1986). For one *become* can imply both active and passive becoming depending on the reading. Butler describes the first "active" reading of *become* as a purposive act which emphasizes the agency of the individual in the construction of the identity of *woman* which is "voluntaristic" and thus gender is *chosen.* However this does not fully integrate the notion of the societal construction of gender in which it is imposed and passively assumed through the act of living within a phallocentric and heteropatriarchal society (Butler, 1986).

Toward the end of the 1960s, Marxist scholars displaced the concepts of an externally imposed set of norms which "ideology"(in this case referring more concretely to the organization of society around a core class struggle, but ultimately coincided in being oppressive, externally enforced, and positioned the individual as a subject rather than an actor. The question of agency when it comes to gender identity poses what Butler (1986) describes as an "ontological puzzle" (pg. 37). In what she describes as a Cartesian view identity in which the self and identity are prenatal identities which exist prior to language or cultural life, one presupposes that gender identity can be chosen independently of the culture and language from which we are immersed throughout our natural lives. However, this is in stark contrast to what language and identity theorists have come to postulate regarding agency and its definitions. Like most terms in the social sciences the question of how to define *agency* has been subjected to a number of postulations as to whether it can even exist given the perpetual embodiment of the socially imbued life. Historically, philosophy has drawn synonymy between *agency* and *free will.* To help understand a provisional definition of agency, Karp (1986) makes a distinction between an *actor* and an *agent*. The distinction between the two lies in the focus of power, the former being one who is governed by rule while the latter is actively engaged in the exercise of power with regards to creating an "effect", noting importantly in Karp's view, and *actor* and an *agent* can be the two aspects of the same individual (Karp, 1986). Likewise, the same act can be interpreted as having agency depending on the lens through which it is viewed. Based on this distinction Ahearn

(2001) develops a definition stating that, “agency refers to the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (pg. 112).

It is thus important to analyze this question of *choice* when discussing gender or any other socially constructed role one might assume. De Beauvoir’s concept of choice is greatly influenced by her partner Jean-Paul Sartre’s concept of the *pre-reflective choice*, that is a choice--typically not wholly conscious--which one realizes they have made after they have made it. (Miguens, Preyer, & Morando, 2015) Regarding gender, “choosing” one’s gender is not a completely radical act, but instead is the personal interpretation of a series of omnipresent cultural symbols and meanings. As Butler (1986) comments in her analysis of De Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*, choosing to enact a gender, to embody a style of dress, speak in a certain way, adopt certain mannerisms, etc. assumes the prior existence of corporeal styles which are contextually meaningful and established. Based on this theory our ability to “choose” is truly only as creative and agent insofar as we choose from a series of normativities which have been previously “chosen” for us through the cultural evolutions of the semiotics of gender and are socially intelligible.

3.1.7 Intelligibility

This intelligibility is crucial as it is ultimately what renders gender socially meaningful , and from which deviation can result in a significant damage to the cohesiveness of the self as a social actor. As Butler (1986) suggests, if all existence is gendered, then to be unrecognized as a gendered actor is to exist in a liminal state which calls into question the existence of the individual, ultimately causing distress and limiting gender freedom. To be liminal is to be socially invisible, thus it is logical that visibility would be used to combat this marginalization. Visibility as a tool for revindication and social change has formed a central pillar of the Western LGTBQ + movement, increasing in popularity since the 1990s with the rise of identity-based political strategies (Fraser, 1999; Richardson, 2000; Valentine , 2003). Berger (1972) elucidates the link in Western cultures between what is "seen" and what is "known", which results in an identification of "truth" based on the certainty of being "visible." In her article “How to Recognize Lesbian”, Lisa Walker (1993) reiterates this approach, stating that demanding social justice through the celebration of difference through visual indicators has been a

fundamental component of identity politics. The experience of an LGBTQ person "leaving the closet" is likely the most ubiquitous, and intelligible metaphor for visibility: to stop living in a submerged way and to the margins and begin to claim a position in public life, as it is manifested literally in events such as the Pride parades. Although queer visibility has typically focused on the visibility of the body, especially in public spaces, this visibility can be expanded to include the inclusion of gender diversity linguistically as well as through formal recognition from power structures. The inclusion of a third gender option would form a small but significant strategy to increase public visibility. Even if no one were to use non-binary gender indicators, for the rest of the cisgender population it would provide the opportunity to publicize the existence of these genders and open the social imaginary to new possibilities of conceptualizing gender.

Intelligibility, described above, plays a critical role in the campaign for visibility. Canakis (2015) describes intelligibility as critical "coming out" narratives, that they "queer up the world" by virtue of their presence: a visual an affront to the heteronormative order. Coming out works as a chain reaction whereby the coming out of one individual emboldens others who then come out and in their growing multitudes become less strange and more intelligible to society at large. Normativity, according to Canakis (2015) is closely related to intelligibility. One must, however, consider the implications of a social movement based on achieving likeness to heteronormativity. Not only does it implicitly affirm that heteronormativity is canon and indeed synonymous with "normal" (Butler, 1990), but it also may risk muting the subjectivities that queer activists and theorists originally set out to defend (Hill, 2013) Recalling de Lauretis's original definition of the essence of "queer", queerness is essentially disruptive; it does not seek assimilation as a social or political goal. What does queerness gain becoming intelligible, palatable to heteronormative society? Is, or should, intelligibility even be considered necessary to defend and respect the existence of queerness?

Not all queer theorists find intelligibility within dominant contexts to be a desirable nor useful goal, particularly among post-identity thinkers. While post-identity theories are quite diverse, they share two common critiques of the pro-recognition/visibility politic: 1) by "normalizing" certain identities within a hegemonic framework rather than

address and challenge the social inequality and oppression these marginalized identities face and 2) maintains the inaccurate and problematic portrayal of an oppressed group as an authentic (essential), unified, and heterogeneous group (Braidotti, 2002; Noble, 2006; Grosz 2005). The hesitation to bring trans-inclusive gender kinds into the mainstream is ubiquitous among many writers, who fear that assimilation into dominant contexts and structures (i.e: legal, educational, religious) would ultimately distort or destroy queer identities. Queer theorist and transwoman Sandy Stone (1992) eloquently expresses this tension between intelligibility and deconstruction, and is unconvinced that such a distortion is avoidable:

> What is gained is acceptability in society. What is lost in the ability to authentically represent the complexities and ambiguities of lived experience… I am not suggesting a shared discourse. I am suggesting that in the transsexual's erased history we can find a story disruptive to the accepted discourses of gender…To attempt to occupy a place…within the traditional gender frame is to become complicit in the discourse that one wishes to deconstruct. (p.13)

The concern is that dominant gender systems are unable to recognize the complexity and richness of trans and nonbinary identities and experience. A fundamental characteristic of the dominant gender system is maintaining social and economic control over gender through the enforcement of conformity, thus any integration of trans identities would inevitably require simplification and reduction (Stone, 1992; Dembroff, 2018). In contrast to recognition politics, Grosz (2005) suggests the embracing unintelligibility, and argues that the struggle for recognition should be replaced with embracing that fact that many gender identities are in many ways unrecognizable within the current hegemonic framework:

> Instead of a politics of recognition, in which subjugated groups and minorities strive for a validated and affirmed place in public life, feminist politics should, I believe, now consider the affirmation of a politics of imperceptibility, leaving its traces and effects everywhere but never being able to be identified with a person, group, or organization. It is not a politics of visibility, of recognition and of self-validation, but a process of self-marking that constitutes oneself in the very model of that which oppresses and opposes the subject.

Despite the visibility of queer representations in the mainstream, many performances of gender remain misunderstood and rendered vile and monstrous. Authors Jones and Harris (2016) pose the question: "What does it mean, then, to move through the world as a monstrously unintelligible and creatively queer subject, just at the time that the majoritarian 'civilized' world congratulates itself on finally 'understanding' (LGBTIQ) experience?"

Susan Stryker is a transgender historian and activist who has written extensively on the history and politics of transgender issues in the United States and beyond. In Stryker's (2008) article "Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity", she examines the historical roots and contemporary implications of homonormativity, which she defines as "the process by which some forms of nonheterosexual desire are normalized while others are stigmatized" (p. 146). Stryker argues that homonormativity has shaped the dominant narratives of LGBT history in the United States, marginalizing or erasing the contributions and experiences of transgender people and other queer subjects who do not fit the normative categories of gay and lesbian identity and politics.

In her 1996 essay and performance piece "My words to Victor Frankenstein above the village of Chamounix: Performing transgender rage", Stryker (2022) draws parallels between trans identities and corporealities and Frankenstein's monster: "I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment; like the monster's as well, my exclusion from human community fuels a deep and abiding rage." (p.84). This perception of the trans body of monstrous replicates itself in homonormative LGB spaces as well, citing one cis lesbian's outrage at transwomen in lesbian spaces, referring to transwomen as "mutilated" men, "self-made freaks", and "deformities": an affront to the natural. Stryker (1996) however, embraces the position of the monster, and much like Frankenstein's monster: "like that creature, I assert my worth as a monster in spite of the conditions my monstrosity requires me to face, and redefine a life worth living" (p.93) She suggests some possible ways to rethink transgender history, such as using queer temporalities, spatialities, and genealogies; exploring the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation; and engaging with alternative sources and archives that document transgender lives and cultures.

However, the value of this rejection of such embodiments reveals what Butler (2014) describes as truly monstrous: the replication of the gender binary, heteronormative desire, compulsory reproduction, and straight families. According to both Stryker (1996) and Butler (2014) the monster's desire to assimilate demonstrates how the desire to perfectly replicate gender breeds monstrosity that exposes the impossibility of heteronormative demands.

Lee Edelman's controversial book, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) links queerness to the Death Drive and the rejection of futurity, embracing the negativity which queerness occupies in society along with its unintelligibility, its incongruencies, and its bold rejection of production and productivity. Edelman begins to describe his position bringing into question the paradigm of the child as the symbolic representation of the "future" used as a tool to appeal to sentimentality and push a political agenda on the basis of protecting the hypothetical Child. Campaigns against drugs, abortion, the threat (real or imaginary) of foreign invasion, have over the course of the modern history of propaganda used the Child as a means to sway the public as well as to give the purveyor of the message a stance of moral superiority in which the parallels between the purveyor and parent are clear. The Child as a tool of social manipulation and norm adherence excels in its impossibility to oppose while opposing partisanism, for who is not "on the side" of the children? Who does not want "a future"? The Child is always a product of a heterosexual relationship, pure, and most importantly obedient who in turn will grow to an adult, who then will become a parent and ensure the maintenance of the cycle of production and reproduction with his own progeny. Thus the homosexual and the queer, with their inability to reproduce and their desire to destroy the status quo, has often been framed as anti-children and thus anti-future (Edelman, 2004). Curiously enough, rarely do these defenses of the Child take into account the lives, development, and success of trans and otherwise non-conforming children.

The question then is, how does the monster make a monstrous life worth living? Indeed, according to Halberstam (1995) the transbody becomes a landscape upon which to project gendered fears and violence; the trans body is a warning of the potential dangers of a body imprisoned by desire and paints a picture of what the unconstrained, undisciplined body may become. That which is considered monstrous can be seen as

opportunity: “we must face ourselves in the dark mirror of others’ shunning of us, remembering that shunning is a reflection of how we might redefine a life worth living” (Jones & Harris, 2016, p.528). Late trans activist Leslie Feinberg (1998) reiterates the epistemic injustices faced by trans and gender diverse individuals stating:

> Greater freedom to conceive the limitless potential of human sexuality, without shame, is an important and necessary contribution to all of humanity. And we need more language than just feminine/masculine, straight/ gay, either/or …We need to refocus on defending the diversity in the world that already exists, and creating room for even more possibilities. (p.28)

In her book *The Queer Art of Failure,* Judith Halberstam also reflects on the monstrous, describing how the monstrous is made intelligible through the creative expressions of gender and sexuality and the effort to create “distinctly queer and alternative futures” which continue the disruption of heteronormativity. What Halberstam describes here can be described as *hermeneutical dissent.* Goetze (2018) describes hermeneutical dissent as the process by which “a marginalized group has successfully produced their own ways of interpreting their experiences, despite their hermeneutical marginalization” (p.2), citing examples of new terminology created within LGBTQ spaces such as “agender”. In an article for The Guardian, agender activist Tyler Ford describes an experience of hermeneutical dissent:

> People don’t know what to make of me when they see me, because they feel my features contradict one another. They see no room for the curve of my hips to coexist with my facial hair; they desperately want me to be someone they can easily categorize…Strangers are often desperate to figure out what genitalia I have, in the hope that my body holds the key to some great secret and unavoidable truth about myself and my gender. It doesn’t. My words hold my truth. My body is simply the vehicle that gives me the opportunity to express myself. (Ford, 2015)

According to Fricker’s analysis of epistemic injustice, Ford would not be subject to hermeneutical injustice as they have the tools and resources to make sense of their own identity. Indeed, in certain spaces Ford’s genderlessness may be perfectly intelligible.

Authors such as Trystan Goetze (2018), José Medina (2013), and Rebecca Mason (2011), have criticized the scope of Frcker's analysis, arguing that Fricker's analysis of hermeneutical injustice does not grapple with the possibility of being being able to express and make sense of their own experiences while still unintelligible and oppressed in dominant discourses. Goetze in particular has made an attempt to clarify epistemic and hermeneutical injustice and address criticisms of Fricker's analysis. so as to allow for the existence of hermeneutical dissent. One of the primary contentions with Fricker's theory concerns her use of the expression "the collective hermeneutical resource"or the shared tools of social interpretation. Medina (2013) argues that Fricker's work strongly implies that the collective hermeneutical research is cumulative and that this incorrectly assumes "that we can pool all the hermeneutical resources available to all groups." (Medina 2013, 103) Mason's critique is similar, stating that Fricker presents the interpretative tools of the dominant culture as the only resources available to marginalized subjects and "thus glosses over important distinctions—in particular, distinctions between dominant and non-dominant hermeneutical resources" (Mason 2011, 300). If we take Fricker's definition of a hermeneutical injustice as a result of a gap in hermeneutical resources that facilitate interpretation of one's experience, then hermeneutical injustice can only occur when there are no tools available to make an experience intelligible to anyone. As Goetze (2018) states:

> Subjects in hermeneutically dissenting communities therefore avoid hermeneutical injustice because they have produced the interpretive tools required to understand their experiences—despite the absence of those tools in the repertoire of subjects in dominant social groups. (p.5)

However, Medina (2013) elucidates how this gap between dominant interpretative resources and minority interpretative resources results in an interpretative breakdown whereby marginalized subjects are unable to communicate their lived realities to dominant subjects. .According to Goetze, it is this interpretative breakdown that constitutes hermeneutical injustice. Critically, while Medina (2013) identifies the dominant subjects in this exchange as the sufferers of an epistemic harm in that they do not have access to the resources of the dissenter's experience, he claims that the dissenter remains the sufferer of the injustice despite not being the direct recipient of epistemic harm. Goetze thus describes the primary harm of hermeneutical injustice is

that “the subject has some distinctive and important social experience that at some crucial moment lacks intelligibility” (p.10) and is thus contextual.

Goetze (2018) goes on to describe six “species” of hermeneutical injustice: effacement, isolation, separation, ghettoization, exportation, and obstruction. For the purposes of this study, I will elaborate upon the first four. *Effacement* refers to the most extreme form of hermeneutical marginalization, where neither the speaker nor the person with whom they are trying to communicate lack the interpretive tools to attain knowledge of the speaker's experience. *Isolation* describes when only the marginalized speaker has the interpretative tools to make sense of their experience. *Separation* occurs when the marginalized subject lacks interpretative tools and has not been able to engage in hermeneutical dissent, however, those interpretative tools exist within a marginalized community which the speaker does not belong to. Lastly, *Ghettoization* refers to a scenario in which the speaker belongs to a group that has the interpretative tools to engage in hermeneutical dissent, however–due to marginalization–no other communities have access to these resources and thus the marginalized communities cannot make this experience intelligible to members outside the group. With regards to an unintelligibility of trans and gender diverse experiences, we can observe how marginalized genders experience the various axes of hermeneutical injustice depending on their environment, access to resources, language and sociopolitical contexts.

3.2 NONBINARY GENDERS

3.2.1 Historical Genders

Nonbinary genders (often referred to as “third genders" as well, albeit controversially) have existed for millennia, throughout history on nearly every continent. Notable examples of individuals who exist in a gender category outside of “man” or “woman” include Two-Spirit persons in North American indigenous cultures, Hijras in India, Kathoey in Thailand, and Muxhe in Mexico Within each culture’s specific context these individuals face varying degrees of community integration, acceptance, discrimination, and social role and class that I will detail in descriptions below. As aforementioned, if we are to accept the definition that gender is socially constructed, it is critical to assess

each individually as unique, incomparable and unfit for parallels within Western conceptions of gender. It is equally as important to avoid the tendency to exoticize these genders as has often been done historically in anthropological studies that in turn have supported the colonialist, white institutions in erasing the validity of these cultures and genders. M. Kay Martin and Barbara Voorhies (1975) introduced the term *third gender* to describe and illuminate the ethnographic evidence in some cultures (namely non Western) of the existence of certain gender categories which could not be satisfactorily explained with a two-gender framework. The term *third gender* is imperfect. The term seems to imply three genders as opposed to two, which is only minimally more inclusive and does nothing to reiterate the flexibility and opportunity gender diversity affords us. Additionally, the term gender is based on a specific, Western-Imperialist model and cannot be used as a clean translation for the relationship non-Western people have between social roles and the body. I re-emphasize that gender, as a social construction, is thus context dependent. While the term *third gender* can be contested as an accurate description of the identities encompassed in Martin and Voorhies' term, the following description of examples of gender diversity is not intended to draw parallelisms, but instead to demonstrate the capacity for human societies to conceptualize gender in the social imaginary beyond the widely accepted man-woman binary. For lack of better, existing terminology, third gender will be used in a descriptive fashion where the specific identity term cannot be used:

Hijra

Perhaps the most well known members of a "third gender" category are the Hijra (in Hindustani) in India also known in Aravani/Aruvani or Jogappa in other regions of the Indian subcontinent, unique in being a legally recognized third gender as of 2014 by the Indian Supreme Court (legally "othered" as of 2009). The Hijra are devotees of the goddess Bahuchara Mata, and traditionally were members of the community with spiritual significance, often leading blessing ceremonies and collecting offerings. However, legal recognition and a historical role has not protected Hijras from modern day discrimination and oftentimes are relegated to marginalized communities and prostitution as a form of income.

Two-Spirit

Two-Spirit is an umbrella term used by many of the Native tribal communities of Turtle Island (colonially known as North America). The term was adopted in 1990 in Winnipeg, Canada at a gathering of Native Americans and First Nation people in an attempt to . The word two-spirit is now an umbrella term used for any native American or first nation individuals who aren't part of the gender binary, or who are not heterosexual.Some terms specific to individual tribes include *nadleeh* of the Navajo tribe, and *hwame* (fourth gender) and *alyha* (third gender) from the Mohave tribe.

Makkunrai, Oroané, Calalai', Calabai', and Bissu

In South Sulawesi, Indonesia, the Bugis cultures retain through language and practice a gender categorization system in which there are five recognized genders. Makkunrai and Oroané refer to a feminine woman and masculine man respectively. Calalai' however are womb-bearing individuals who choose not to bear children, often will adopt children (who call them "father", will have relationships with Makkunrai and will participate in Oroané labor. Calabai' are assigned male at birth but will present as Makkunrai, wearing dresses and often performing as entertainers in a number of venues and will pursue relationships with Oroané. Bissu, the "fifth gender" are those who regardless of their perceived sex have characteristics attributed to the other genders and whose role is spiritual in nature and often become (in western-specific terms) androgynous shamans.

The fact that non-binary gender configurations are present in pre-colonial and non-Western societies while these same genders are oppressed in Western societies must be seen as the logical evolution of European-American colonialism and white supremacy. The common belief in the strict sexual separation of humans into two categories must be recognized as intentional. Science, often heralded in its objectivity and disregard for the social concerns of society, is a tool, and one that has been used to justify genocide, erasure, and dehumanization. From the medical pillars of the Final Solution, to the justification of slavery, we must understand that science is often conducted in the service of all social systems at play. It is thus critical to note that the importance placed on sexual dimorphism and the clear morphological distinctions between "men" and "woman" held an important role in establishing the White Imperialist (namely British)

tradition and in the oppression of the people's settlers and colonists encountered in their blood-soaked search for land (Campbell, 1972).

Darwin's theory of evolution of species, and to a greater extent Lamarck's now discredited theory of evolution provided the foundation for numerous extrapolations and misuse of theory to justify the colonial imperialism which had for so long funded European and White American wealth and status. Lamarck stressed that evolutionary changes were caused by acquired, hereditary characteristics by which the environment and behavior of a species leaves a literal, physical impression on the body (Schuller, 2018). This *impressibility*, notes Schuller (2018) became a popular theoretical concept in the British and American schools of Anthropology in the late 19th century and described the ability for the body to be impressed upon, to have *sentiment*, and thus its capacity for change and "evolution"#. With Neo-Lamarckians such as naturalist Edward Drinker Cope at the forefront, the European body was deemed most impressible: that from the crude base of the natural, the European body was capable of responding to the stimuli of its environment, could use sentiment to reflect and interpret those stimuli, and rationally (and most importantly *morally*) respond to the environment. The African body however was deemed unimpressible, incapable of advancing past the primitive stage of instinctive reactivity; a primitive version of the White body too hard to mold into righteous participants of society (Lanzoni, 2009). Other races such as Native Americans and Asian immigrants were somewhere along the evolutionary path, with varying degrees of impressibility, which had nonetheless endured into the modern age (Cope, 1870).

Impressibility, however, was not without its theoretical complications. The same way that the White European body's impressionable sentiment impressibility allowed for thought and reflection, it also ran the risk of becoming overwhelmed, indulging in excess delicate feeling, and lacked the fortitude to resist being excessively swayed by stimuli (Van Sant, 2004). Evolutionists, particularly those affiliated with the American School, attempted to resolve this paradox of impressibility by dividing the White, "civilized" body into two discrete, yet interdependent categories "male" and "female". The "female" in this case served as the carrier of this delicate feeling, the excessive sentimentality, and the tendency toward hysteria which accompanies impressibility while the "male" retains the capacity to use rationality to respond morally and

intelligently to the environment (Schuller, 2018). Cope and his colleagues went on to highlight that in fact it is this dimorphism which indicates the level of civilization of any particular human group, simultaneously highlighting the lack of sexual dimorphism in "inferior" humans. While Cope (1888) recognized the existence of some primitive, biological sex, it was indeed the differentiation of a mental sex character which distinguished a civilized race from one that was not. We see this in accounts of Native women performing "drudge work" and the popularity of caricatures of non-white people and the poor as androgynous and animalistic (Schuller, 2018). This androgyny became evidence of evolutionary stagnancy of non-White races, and in their evident superiority, granted White people the biological authority to direct the fates of all other races.

While most people are unaware of the racist and imperialist history behind modern gender divisions (or more accurately this history is deliberately obscured), the effects of these are felt today through the careful enforcement of these historical structures. As described above, 19th and early 20th century anthropologists defined "correct" and "civilized" genders in relation to their proximity to White, heterosexual, and landowning men, rendering all distance from this ideal as deviation. For example, the removal of body hair is currently a cultural practice expected of women whereby women who are hirsute - who have body hair above the socially accepted 'normal levels'– are considered abnormal, freakish and most importantly unfeminine (Lipton et. al, 2006). While women across all racial groups feel socially compelled to remove their body hair, Black women in particular felt that by keeping their body hair they perpetuated the stereotype that Black bodies are dirty and ape-like—first promulgated by imperialist anthropology (Fahs, 2011). In a study by Fahs & Delgado (2011) women of color commented on having darker, more visible body hair than White women, and were more likely to identify race as salient in their experiences of gender. While Black women are masculinized, Asian men have been historically feminized, with early depictions of Asians in American films featuring men with long hair and braids associated with "girlishness" (Takinami, 2016). Indeed, these examples demonstrate the fragility and construction of the Western binary, where gender is contextual and where definitions shift according to one's race, class, and numerous other axes of social construction.

3.2.2 A Minority Within a Minority

While there has been a fair amount of research into binary transgender identities in the past few decades, non-binary identities have only recently garnered academic interest, resulting in an academic lacuna regarding understanding the specific experiences and oppressions of non-binary people. dickey, Hendrix and Bockting (2015) elucidates the reason behind this gap in knowledge can be attributed to the emphasis that early studies in transgender studies emphasizes and indeed defined transgenderism within the context of how closely a transgender person fits a binary gender role. As the availability of gender-affirming procedures increased in the 1960's and 1970's the narrative surrounding transgender and gender non-conforming individuals shifted towards a medical gatekeeping, in which transpeople are considered valid if those seeking were following a clear male-female binary model, that transpeople require medical transition to be recognized, and that the individual define themselves as heterosexual following transition (dickey, Hendrix & Bockting, 2015). Indeed, often to access gender affirming treatment such as hormones or any number of available surgical procedures, trans individuals may over-exaggerate their affiliation to a binary gender to seem "more convincing" (Mooney, 1976).

Through the 1980s and 1990s this binary medicalized paradigm remained virtually unchallenged. Since the 90s, clinicians have opted to use The Recalled Gender Identity Scale (RCGI), a measurement tool with cross validation in a variety of populations (Zucker et al., 2006). The tool– which contained 23 items assessing childhood gender identity, feelings about gendered parents and siblings, and gender roles–relied on two likert scales: one for males and one for females. Taking into consideration that one respondent must choose to either respond uniquely to the male or female questionnaire, the RCGI clearly reinforces a dichotomic and distinct male/female binary (McGuire et. al, 2019). The use of two separate versions of a tool in order to measure gender dysphoria is also seen in The Utrecht Gender Dysphoria Scale (UGDS), a 12-item subscale that primarily measures discomfort with their physical embodiment and assigned gender role (dysphoria), in the moment; and the Gender Identity/Gender Dysphoria Questionnaire for Adolescents and Adults (GIDYQ-AA), which measures subjective and sociological aspects gender dysphoria within the past year (Deogracias et

al., 2007; Schneider et al., 2016; Singh et al., 2010). Furthermore all the above described male/female distinguished measurements have not considered their applicability post-transition and it is unclear how physicians apply the tool in these cases. Relying heavily on historically reductive and simplistic narratives of binary transition such as the "born in the wrong body trope" (Engdahl, 2014; dickey et. al 2016; Doan, 2016), researchers have an implicit binary bias which is reflected in their study of gender diverse populations, and the need for more comprehensive tools to capture a more complete and nuanced understanding of trans and genderqueer identities becomes obvious. These biases have real life consequences such as more recent research highlights that genderqueer or non-binary individuals are likely to pursue other treatment options due to reasons such as a lack of genital dysphoria, concerns with medical risk, or lack of identification with a binary gender and were more likely to pursue a "partial transition" such as seeking varying degrees of hormone replacement (Beek et al. 2015; Stachowiak, 2017).

Newer tools have attempted to fill this academic gap, developing tools which can more accurately assess and discuss gender identity. A study by Harrison et al. (2012) analyzed respondents who had written-in their gender in the 2008 National Transgender Discrimination Study. The landmark study and first of its kind in the US, sampled 6,450 transgender or gender non conforming individuals over a six-month period, in which respondents answered survey questions regarding their experiences of discrimination at home, at work, in public spheres, as well as landlords, doctors, police officers and others (Grant et al. 2011). In an attempt to flesh out these axes of discrimination and the variability of experiences, Harrison et. al (2012) posed the question: "What is your gender identity today?" and centered his study around the respondents of persons who answered gender not listed here (GNL). The study concluded that participants who selected GNL and wrote in their gender were more likely to be younger, be somewhere on the transmasculine spectrum, and have higher levels of education than other respondents. However, respondents were less likely to identify as White, as respondents were more likely to be Black, Asian, or multiracial than the general survey population, thus confirming the demographic heterogeneity of people on the transgender spectrum (Doan, 2016; Stachowiak, 2017). However, this study also surprisingly highlighted that GNL participants who wrote in their gender were more likely to experience different forms of structural violence and discrimination. While the GNL participants were more

likely to be “out at work” (76% as opposed to 56% in the general survey population), they were just as likely to suffer anti-trans discrimination at work (90%) which includes: verbal harassment, denial of a promotion, physical and/or sexual violence, and delaying their transition or otherwise hiding who they are in order to avoid such retribution. GNL respondents were more likely to have participated in the informal economies for survival such as sex work and drug sales (20% vs 15% in the general survey population), more likely to avoid medical treatment for fear of harrassment (36% vs 27%), more likely to have suffered police harrassment (31% vs 21%), more likely to report having been physically assaulted due to bias (32% vs 25%) and slightly more likely to have attempted suicide at some point in their lives (43% vs 40%).

While the conclusions of this study indeed confirms demographic differences between genderqueer and gender nonconforming and their survey counterparts, the article fails to address the possible intersections of structural oppression due to these demographics. For example, the fact that GNL respondents were more often Black could be an indicator as well of the increased rates of police violence among the same GNL population, as Black people in the US were 3.23 times more likely to be murdered by police than their White counterparts (Schwartz & Jahn, 2020). Likewise Black people in the US are generally less likely to seek medical healthcare much like the GNL sample. This is due to a historically informed distrust of the US healthcare system. Since the forced introduction of enslaved Black people in the Americas, White doctors would often use Black people as a means to practice and perfect surgery techniques to be used on White patients, again reiterating that due to Black phenotypes and physical characteristics that Black people were subhuman and akin to beasts of burden (Smedley 2007; Gamble, 2016). We can see parallel discourses between the medicalized language of race and the aforementioned theoretical (and harmful) justification of the gender binary. Abuses included forced sterilization, the Tuskegee study which denied Black men syphilis treatment out of “scientific curiosity”, and dermatological tests on imprisoned persons. Currently, minority groups in the US are less likely than their White counterparts to receive needed services, procedures, and care for common health problems such as diabetes, cancer, or cardiovascular disease (Mayberry, Mili & Ofili, 2002).

GNLs were also more likely to be Asian, a population which while does not suffer the same types of violence, still in their vast majority consist of countries which have been colonized by either Western or western-aligned powers. As illustrated by some of my examples of third genders abroad, there is a strong history of non-binary conceptualizations of gender such as India and Pakistan, Thailand, Indonesia, as well as several other Pacific Islander nations such as the the Māhū in nation of Hawai'i and the Fa'afafine in Samoa (the US census categorizes Asian and Pacific Islander as a single category). While these are merely hypothetical as the study does not investigate these potential cultural and historical reasons for identifying with a non-binary gender, future study would do well to flesh out these possible hypotheses. Likewise, factors such as age and level of education could influence the likelihood of one identifying with a genderqueer identity.

A 2019 study by Catalpa et al. attempts to describe the heterogeneity of trans identities, as well as quantify any significant identitarian or demographic differences between binary and non binary trans experiences. The study relies on a tool developed by McGuire et al. (2019), the genderqueer identity scale (GQI) which I have previously described, and aims to test the predictive validity of the GQI and group differences in genderqueer identities, sampling transgender, genderqueer and nonbinary individuals, and sexual minority adults who do not identify as trans.

A distinct but related form of oppression concerns those who claim nonbinary identities—that is, those who do not identify exclusively as men or women. Within dominant contexts, there is even less recognition of nonbinary identities than trans-binary identities.48 In the United States as of 2018, every state requires binary gender markers to be assigned at birth, and only four states and Washington, DC, allow persons to later select a nonbinary gender marker. Those who are able to get nonbinary gender markers struggle to obtain passports and other legal documentation.49 As with trans men and women, this lack of recognition extends into medical, workplace, educational, and other social domains. Within these domains, nonbinary identities often are not only ignored, but unintelligible. Once again, this system of misrecognition is generated by the structures and practices that construct and define dominant gender kinds. These facts suggest that, within most dominant contexts, nonbinary gender kinds simply do not appear. While nonbinary identities are recognized within trans-inclusive communities,

these identities have no home within dominant contexts, where everyone is forced into one of two binary kinds (men and women)."

3.2.3 Status of NB people Internationally

To date, few European studies have attempted to capture the percentage of nonbinary people in the general population, in great part due to the lack of institutions who collect this data . In one of the largest European studies regarding the topic conducted by the Scottish Transgender Alliance (2015), the 985 respondents provided over 27 non-binary gender self-definitions including agender, androgyne, bigender, femme, fluid gender, genderfuck, genderqueer, genderqueer, neutrois, polygender and third gender. Of these, the most common labels were: non-binary (63%), genderqueer (43%), trans/transgender (37%), genderfluid (31%) and agender (28%). In another study by McNeil et al. (2012) 20% of a sample of 165 transgender people in the UK identify as gender non-binary or genderqueer. A demographic study by Kuyper & Wijsen (2014) in the Netherlands estimates that 4.6% of people assigned male at birth (AMAB) and 3.2% of people assigned female at birth (AFAB) report having "ambivalent gender identity"--or that they identify equally with their assigned gender at birth as with the opposite gender. Two other demographic surveys in Flanders, Belgium conducted by Van Caenegem et al. (2015) cite similar figures, with a prevalence of ambivalent gender or non-binary gender of 1.8% in AMAB persons and 4.1% in AFAB persons.

As of today, there are three European countries which legally recognize a third gender option: The Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and Germany. These three countries have in the past several years taken formal steps for individuals who do not wish to be recognized as male or female to be able to do so on formal documentation. However, this is not to say that these three countries have all taken the same steps, on the same timeline, and with the same implications on the citizens who wish to access this right to change their gender identification. As I have iterated previously, it is important to assess the definitions which have played into the institutionalization of a third gender, which sectors are affected, how large are the scopes of rulings and legislations, and which individuals therefore have the ability to claim this identity. Identifying these differences

shows how larger structures which by and large are still heteronormative in their drafting and application of laws and decrees propagate measures of exclusion and inclusion.

CHAPTER 4: TRANS AND NONBINARY PEOPLE IN SPAIN

4.1 A HISTORY OF GENDER DISSIDENCE

Spain has historically been a highly Catholic country, according to Eisenberg (1999), where sexual behavior had two primary outlets: chastity or procreation, and where heterosexuality was deeply entangled with both a moral, Christian value as well as a nationalistic value. The Iberian peninsula however--as arguably any country has-- has also been home to a rich tradition of gender and sexuality variance for example: the romance between Roman Emperor Hadrian and his beloved Antinous, homoerotic behaviors in Muslim al-Andalus. de Gabriel Fernandez (2010) recounts the history of Elisa and Marcela, two women who became legally married at the very beginning of the 20th, tricking the local clergy and subsequently escaping to Oporto (Portugal) following their discovery. Indeed, the democratic Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939) presented the opportunity to expand in its sexual liberation--for the LGBT community as well as women--it was brutally halted following the installation of Franco's fascist, nationalist-catholic regime. Even after Franco's death and the transition to Spain's current political regime, homosexuality would continue to be prosecuted and stigmatized well into the 1980s (Calvo, 2002).

Following Franco's victory in 1939, the dictator began to enact his social agenda, justifying the Civil War as necessary to liberate Spain from the imminent threats of Marxism and secularization. At the core of this discourse were four tenets which were to form the foundations of Francoist Spain: National-Catholicism (the restoration of traditional values), Hispanity (the exaltation of colonialism and the former Spanish empire), Fatherland (Spain as a homogeneous and indissoluble territorial unit), and the New Crusade (anti-Marxism) (Lopez Lerma, 2011). As a part of this social agenda, the 1933 Vagrancy Act (*Ley de Vagos y Maleantes*)--which aimed to isolate and correct

those deemed to be in opposition to the moral values of the state such as drug addicts, pimps, and the homeless--was reformed in 1954 to include homosexuals.

Gender played a critical part of Franco's reimagined unified Spain, whereby the social role of men and women (women in particular) was divorced from the modest advances of the Second Spanish Republic and sought to revive nineteenth century gender roles. The first third of the twentieth century ushered in a growing participation of women in the workforce, women as consumers, and --especially single women--as participants in the male-dominated spaces of public life reminiscent of the French garçonnes of the 1920s (Llona, 2002). The woman of the Second Republic, with her interest in individual satisfaction and legal independence was a clear threat to the feminine ideal of Franco's *New Spain,* in which women were positioned as the defenders of the family secluded in their homes with the sole purpose of producing children for *La Patria*--the Fatherland (Ortiz, 2018). To accompany the woman of francoist Spain, was its masculine counterpart, who in his Catholic, aggressive heterosexism embodied the *macho*, best exemplified through military service and the cooperation of conservative women (Pérez-Sanchez, 2000). To enforce and indoctrinate both the bodies and minds of women, Pilar Primo de Rivera, sister of the founder of the Falange movement, founded the astoundingly successful feminine mandatory social service branch known as *La Sección Femenina.*

Masculinity in Franco's Spain was, in contrast, defined predominantly by his martialness. While Spain had stayed relatively distant from the European military disputes of the twentieth century, between the civil wars of the nineteenth century, the colonial wars of the twentieth, the Spanish-American War in 1898, all the way back to the military prowess of the Spanish empire, Spanish history and society was a history of violence and militarization (Vincent, 1999). The Francoist Spanish man was not just a soldier, but a crusader, mobilizing Catholic ideas of both moral righteousness and martyrdom of *la Patria*. The framing of the Spanish man as a crusader also appealed to a nostalgic narrative of duty recalling the *Reconquista* and the dominance of the Spanish Empire. The military experience (*la mili)*, which was mandatory for all men from 1800 until it was repealed in 2001, was an important means of institutionalizing masculinity. In his book *'Soft Clerks and Hard Civvies': Pluralising Military Masculinities,* Paul Higate (2003) explains "gendered performance learned in the military may remain

tenacious after discharge from the armed services into civilian life; as such, these ways of performing masculinity can become institutionalized"(p. 28). That is, using military service as a system of indoctrination allowed for soldiers to return to society to perpetuate these hegemonic ideas of masculinity into all aspects of social life.

All rigid gender systems require rigid enforcement. The enforcement of these traditional gender roles in Spain bent its eye towards dealing with the "problem" of homosexuality in the 1970s during the decline of the regime. Despite the rigid control of the fascist state, there had always been since the beginning of the dictatorship been groups who chose to challenge the gender norms of Franco's Spain, though often covertly and timidly. Gay men in particular were under special scrutiny: men who were overly feminized and adopted feminine (submissive) sexual positions were a direct threat to the hegemonic gender system in place (Pérez-Sanchez, 2000). This threat was to be addressed legally through the criminalization of homosexuality. These psycho-medical constructions of homosexuality are evident in Francoist Judge Antonio Sabater's explicitly homophobic legal and sociological study *Gamberros, Homosexuales, Vagos, y Maleantes* (Hooligans, homosexuals, idlers, and crooks) in which homosexual people were codified as a direct threat to the heterosexual familial unit through the transgression of gender norms (Sabater, 1962). In Sabater's own words, he describes homosexuals as "*altísimamente peligrosos"* (highly dangerous) to "*las barrreras éticas, culturales, y jurídicas, y al progreso de la humanidad"* (the ethical, cultural, and juridical barriers, and to the progress of humanity) who do not have a place in civilization (Sabater, 1962, p. 180). Sabater describes homosexual men as "feminoid" dancers and entertainers, who wear dresses in their hopeless attempt to become women, while economic self-sufficiency and independence in women was strictly bound to lesbianism. Indeed, homosexuals were rendered equivalent to political prisoners and faced similar legal ramifications. The year 1970 ushers in the specifically punitive Dangerousness and Social Rehabilitation Law (*la Ley de Peligrosidad Social*), which now aimed to "rehabilitate homosexuals" via prison time, hard labor, and social isolation (Pérez-Sanchez, 2000; Fluvià, 2003).

Until the 1950s, Francoist Spain's autarchic system had been unable to successfully recover from the civil war economically, which paired with Spain's exclusion from the USA's Marshall Plan for European reconstruction, leading to an economic stagnation

and isolation from other Western European powers (Pérez-Sanchez, 2000). However, the arrival of US aid in the late 1950s, the abandoning of autarchic policies, the immigration of Spanish labor abroad, and the opening of the tourism industry all contributed to an unprecedented economic growth in the 1960s. The boom of the tourist economy# had a particularly important effect on Spanish life and society: sexual mores, consumerism, modernity, and the access--for the privileged--to foreign press and information long before national freedom of the press was achieved (Malefakis, 1982). The final years of the dictator's regime were marked by an increased dependency on foreign economic powers, slowly shifting Spanish industry into the hands of foreign capital, increasing inflation, and culminating with an oil crisis from 1973 to 1974. The weakening economy and the imminent death of Franco led to increased social upheaval, disturbances, and clashes with police as the country moved toward the tenous period known as *La Transición*, or the transition to democracy. While LGBT resistance movements had always existed throughout the entirety of Franco's regime, this period of transition to democracy offered the unique opportunity for increased mobilization as evidenced by the creation of "homosexual liberation fronts" in many major cities across the peninsula (Calvo & Trujillo, 2011) notably the Gay Liberation Front of Catalonia (FAGC) in 1975, who spearheaded the yearly 28 of June pride event in 1977. At this time, Spain enters what Guasch calls the "gay" period (1982-2005), a period of social and economic growth, participation in European institutions, the importation of an Anglo-Saxon model of gayness in which male homosexuality is positioned as the most legitimate form of sexual dissidance, and social respectability as a political tool.

According to Guasch, pregay describes the time period between the last two years of the Franco dictatorship and the first few years of the transition to democracy (1970-1982); a period of intense homophobia and transphobia which gave rise to the trans categories *travesti* and *travesti operado* ("operated"). During this time, popular understanding of transgender people--transwomen in particular-was that a trans identity was effeminate homosexuality taken "too far" and was rooted in trying to take femininity to its maximum expression. It is within this openly hostile environment that the social imaginary begins to perceive the *travesti* as a maximum expression of homosexuality in men. Much of what had been studied and recorded in historical sexology supported this thesis. The Austro-German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing, among the first experts on sexual deviance, describes different levels of "sexual inversion" in his book

Psychopathia Sexualis (1886), which reached its most developed manifestation in what von Krafft-Ebbing (1894) called *metamorphosis sexualis paranoica*--what later would be known as "transexuality". German-American sexologist Harry Benjamin expanded upon this work in his *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (1966) further supporting the (mistaken) hypothesis that homosexuality, transvestism, and transsexuality existed in the same linear spectrum. This understanding of trans people was the dominant perception until the 1980s in Spain: a man who is effeminate and homosexual runs the risk of desiring womanhood to the extent that they become first *travestis* and afterward *travestis operados.*

"Transexual "entered the popular lexicon during the gay period, named as such because of the importation of dominant anglo-saxon models of homosexuality following Spain's democratic transition. This importation was significant in that it diverged significantly from pregay understandings of gender and sexuality. "Gais", "lesbianas", "transexuales", and "bisexuales" arrived in Spanish popular culture in the 1970s in stride with the critical transition of Spain into a democracy and increased exposure to American and British sexual identities (Pérez, 2011). These identities replaced the "maricas", "maricones", "bolleras", "femmes","señoritos", "señorones" which were used to classify individuals not only my sexual orientation, but by gender presentation, and social class (Pérez, 2011). While the gay model did offer a number of new theoretical and linguistic tools with which to reconceptualize homosexual identities, this model also imported its own normativities, masculinizing the public presentation of homosexual men in contrast to their historically feminized portrayal: "the super virile man, the macho, became the ideal." (Pollak, 1983, p. 47; cited in Guash, 2014). Adopting masculine signifiers of sexuality was in a way a means for homosexual men to counter the historical feminization of gay men. Guasch (1987) describes how pregay period men often found themselves having to conform to and reproduce feminized stereotypes of homosexuality as a means of adapting to an openly repressive and hostile environment. Criticizing excessive femininity became commonplace in gay spaces and in doing so, contributed to the increased stigmatization of transfeminine individuals.

At the same time, *travestis operados* became *transsexuals* , and in turn became a medical category and thus allowed for classification within the existing gender system. Nuñez (2001) calls this a process of rationalization by which the naturalization of

certain realities allows for their regulation and control. In the 1960s and the following decades, advances in gender affirming medical interventions at the renowned John Hopkins Medical School helped legitimize the categorization of transexualism as a medical phenomenon in the US and Europe. However, due to the political situation, these medical frameworks to understand gender diversity arrived in Spain almost two decades later. While some doctors had been working underground to provide trans individuals guidance on hormonal treatment, genital reassignment surgery remained punishable with prison until 1981. Psychiatric units specialized in transexuality following the US model of treatment began to open around Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. However Spain opened its first hospital unit (called Gender Identity Disorders Units or UTIG) at the Carlos Haya Hospital in Malaga in 1999, and the public health system would not begin offering gender affirming care until the 21st century (Missé, 2012). In 2005, Spain entered its *posgay* period. Beginning in 2008 with the economic collapse of the real estate market, this period is defined by the contributions of queer theory and the consequent redefinitions of gay, lesbian and transsexual identities and experiences. Indeed, the *posgay* period in Spain is characterized by a shift in political strategies that refocused its efforts from tolerance to legal recognition and regulation by the state (Guasch & Mas Grau, 2016).

4.2 STATE OF CONTEMPORARY ATTITUDES TOWARDS LGBTQ PEOPLE

Since becoming one of the first countries in the European Union to recognize same-sex marriage (in 2005 after the Netherlands in 2001 and Belgium in 2003), Spain has gained a reputation for tolerance and acceptance of gay and lesbian people. With the passing of Law *13/2005*, Spain became the first country to establish legal equality with regards to adoption between two persons of the same sex, a measure which both the Dutch and Belgian legal systems had not included in their same-sex marriage legislation. Legal recognition and acceptance for transgender people, however, has moved significantly more slowly. Despite Spain being a European trailblazer in the removal of physical intervention requirements (such as gender affirming surgery or castration) in 2007, Spanish law still requires a psychiatric diagnosis of gender incongruity to qualify for legal recognition. Quite recently in February 2021, a new draft law proposed by the

Minister of Equality Irene Montero (*La Ley Trans* as it is colloquially known), with the backing of ILGA Europe# would remove this mental health diagnosis. Additionally, the legislation has made explicit mention to non-binary people, allowing specifically the option to remove gender identification on legal documents including identification documents for those who do not feel represented by the existing M/F gender markers. Quite notably the same ministry under the leadership of Irene Montero notably published a tweet recognizing July 14th as International Non-Binary Visibility day for the first time in the ministry's history. Unfortunately, the PSOE coalition government in power at the time of the law's proposal blocked the proposed legislation later that May 2021, with the notable exception of a similar law being approved and passed only in the Canary Islands.

However, it seems as though policy has not caught up with public opinion. According to the data agency Ipsos, positive, public attitudes towards transgender people are arguably on the increase. The study, which captures attitudes in 16 countries--Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Poland, Serbia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, and the United States-- notes that Spanish responses generally rank highly in positive attitudes towards transgender people. Spanish people were the most likely to believe that their country should to more to protect trans people (70% of respondents), to believe their country is becoming more tolerant of trans people (69%) , to believe trans people are brave (74%), and that trans people are a natural occurrence (64%). Spanish respondents were also the least likely to report that trans people are mentally ill (9%), and that trans people are committing a sin (8%). Additionally, Spanish people were most likely to believe that trans people should have access to gender affirming surgery (81%) and that trans people should be able to conceive if they are biologically able to (76%). However it is important to note that the definition of trans in this survey did not explicitly mention non-binary genders, and it is safe to assume that most respondents' responses are in response to binary trans people.

4.2.1 Transphobia in Spain

While the comparative metrics seem to place Spain as a leader in LGBTQ equality, the reality is that Spain has not been spared from the reactionary conservatism, homophobia, and transphobia which has spread internationally over the past few

years. According to ILGA-Europe's 2021 Annual Review, hate speech from media as well as official sources, and the report highlights a rise in hate speech in Spain. Coupled with the increase in anti-LGBT policies in countries such as Poland, Hungary, and the UK-- and the delay in progressing demedicalization legislation in Spain-- it seems as though the transphobia embedded in European societies is more evident than ever in recent years even as the number of out LGBTQ+ people increases. The same report highlights the trend in some feminist circles of the Spanish left to disguise transphobic rhetoric as academic critique, as witnessed at a 2019 feminist conference at the Rosario de Acuña Feminist School in Gijón, Asturias, in which speaker Dr. Alicia Minyares notoriously referred to trans women "as men because they are men" ("*Digo tíos porque son tíos*"). An important part of Spain's Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) was present and subsequently joined in this discourse, denouncing that queer theory and "gender ideology " as bogeymen who threaten feminism, despite the party's previous position as an ally to the LGBTQ community. This particular trend in feminism is what activists and academics alike refer to as trans-exclusionary radical feminism (TERF), or "gender critical" feminism (Auchmuty & Freedman, 2018; Zanghellini, 2020) and is a branch of feminism who is particularly concerned delegitimizing the womanhood and experiences of transwomen, protecting "women's only" spaces from "male" invasion, and emphasizing the biological oppression of "natal women".

These transphobic attitudes become even more evident when looking at labor statistics, for example. According to a study by Pichardo (2019), discrimination based on sexual and gender orientation remains significant: 36% of LGTBQ people have heard rumors about their sexual orientation or gender identity in the workplace, another 36% have heard jokes or negative comments about the LGBTQ collective, 13% have witnessed mockery or insults about being LGTBQ, 7% say they have been denied workplace advancement such as promotions or raises due to their LGTBQ, and a final 2% report losing their job because of the sexual or gender identity. Given the precarity and risks associated with being out in the workplace, the majority of these individuals report going back into the closet when in the workplace and 15% of respondents report avoiding workplace events in order to avoid having to discuss their personal lives. Trans women suffer the greatest bulk of this discrimination, with unemployment rates as high as 80-85%, often having to resort to prostitution for survival. According to Portero et al. (2019) the cumulative discrimination and violence has resulted in trans women having

the lowest life expectancy at just under 50 years of age. Transphobia remains prevalent in medical institutions as well, with a large number of trans individuals reporting discriminatory practices, lack of sensibility training, and transphobic from medical, nursing, and administrative staff in hospitals and other health centers (Fisher et al., 2017).

4.2.2 NB Status in Spain

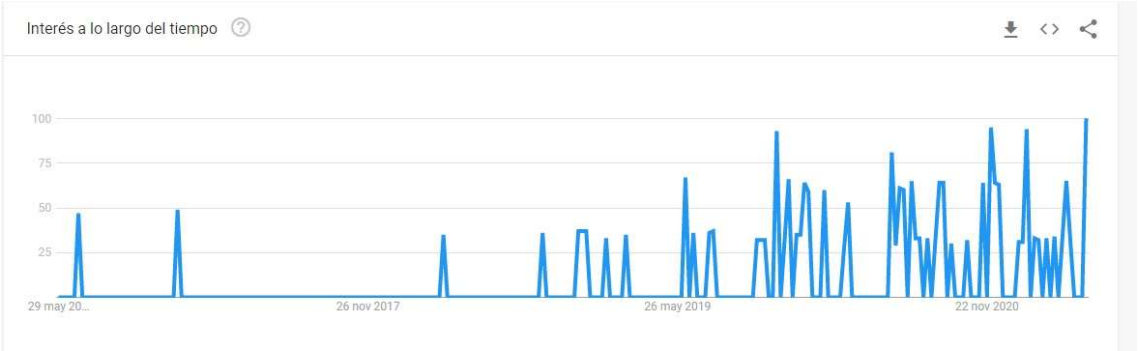
While Spain currently does not legally recognize nonbinary genders, there is a nonbinary presence which has recently gained greater traction and visibility over the past few years. However, since this data is not recorded and no large scale national studies have been funded to attempt to capture a snapshot of the non-binary community in Spain, there is no way to accurately describe the features of a non-binary population beyond the empirical. However, this may be likely to change as in November 2020. According to newspaper El Confidencial, the Secretary of State for Equality and Against Gender Violence under the auspices of the ministry headed by Irene Montero has awarded a minor contract to the social research and coaching agency 4Motion Systemic (itself a subsidiary of the 4Motion Vehicle Consulting SL, a company whose main focus is automotive consulting) to carry out a study on non-binary people in Spain. This is not the first time 4Motion Systemic has been contracted to carry out a study on non-binary people in Spain: the company signed off on a 2018 study featuring semi-structured interviews with ten non-binary people from continental Spain. The limited qualitative data collected in this study indicates that the youngest person interviewed was 18 and the oldest 32, and that all had either completed secondary or undergraduate studies (López Gomez & Lucas Platero, 2018).

This most recent study was ultimately published in 2022 and sought to capture multiple aspects of the experiences of nonbinary people in Spain, including but not limited to: what categories non-binary people identify themselves with, perceptions of discourse surrounding nonbinary people, barriers and difficulties experienced by nonbinary people, and the collective demands of this community in particular. This study was much richer, involving focus groups with professionals, focus groups with nonbinary people, an individual interview, and a questionnaire with 1.903 participants. Some of the more interesting revelations of the study state: 83,8 % of participants felt supported by their friend group during their transition, in stark contrast with 17,6 % %

of participants felt supported by their families. Friends (63,6%) and the internet (48,9%) by far provided the most resources to support their transitions in contrast with the 3,7% who found health providers helpful. With regards to personal safety, participants reported feeling the most safe among friends (86,2 %), other nonbinary people (52,2 %), and in online spaces (44,5 %), while they reported feeling the most unsafe in their family environments (71,4 %), in the workplace (64,6 %), and in healthcare settings (43,3 %). Transphobia, prejudice, or fear of violence limit the ways in which nonbinary people can engage in their daily lives, with 28% reporting that they avoid public spaces or public services, 19% avoid family events, and 25% avoid meeting people in general. The majority of participants reported avoiding medical treatment due to fear of discrimination (55%), had suffered public harassment and discrimination (65%), and reported feeling discriminated against in their own families (80%). Given these numbers, it is evident that despite the progressive reputation that Spain has garnered in the past decades, there is much room for improvement, particularly for trans and gender diverse individuals.

Empirically, we can note that the majority of activism done by and for non-binary persons is conducted by youth under 35. According to the above 2022 study, 43% of respondents reported engaging in activism, with respondents between the ages of 24-34 being the most active (58%). This is also observable through activism online, where unlike the limited mention of non-binary identities in mainstream media, there are vibrant and active communities on platforms such as Instagram. According to the statistics website NapoleonCat, in January 2020 the Spanish population between 24-35 were the most active instagram users at approximately 33,1% of all users nationally#. An internet search of Spanish media references to non-binary genders and non-binary persons reveals an early article in the online magazine Magnet in 2015. The article, titled *"¿Cómo es vivir sin género en España?"* (What is it like to live without gender in Spain), interviewed a few non-binary persons asking them to describe the particular challenges suffered by these individuals with a particular focus on bullying, alienation, harassment, and legal lacunas barring recognition of non-binary genders as well as access to gender affirming treatment #. Subsequent mentions in mainstream media have arisen in the past few years including in some of the most visited digital newspapers nationally: *Lo que 'nosotres' tenemos que decir*, elPais.es, December 2020; *Género no binario y burocracia: cuando la legislación no reconoce tu identidad y cada trámite es*

un obstáculo, elDiario.es, January 2020; *Guía LGTBQI+ para comprender las leyes de género de Podemos: 'elle', 'cis', 'terf' y personas no binarias,* elMundo.es, January 2020; *¿Qué es el género no binario, con el que se identifica Demi Lovato?,* OkDiario.es, May 2021. Likewise, Google analytics indicate a similar pattern, notingthat Google searches for *género no-binario* (gender non-binary) have increased substantially since 2019, reflected in the table below.



#

In July 2019, a group of non-binary people gathered in Sete Outeiros, Galizia for a weekend long retrest during which the participants produced the Manifesto of the 1st Iberian Encounter of Non-Binary Persons (Manifiesto del 1er Encuentro Ibérico No Binario). The encounter was organized online by the group AVANT LGBT, an advocacy group based in the autonomous community Galizia in northwestern Spain. In this document, the following definition non-binary people is provided:

> *Definimos como persona no binaria aquella que no se identifica exclusiva y/o estrictamente como hombre o como mujer, pudiendo identificarse con ambos, otros géneros, con varios, con ninguno, sin concretar, o una combinación de cualquiera de los anteriores. (julio de 2019, en Sete Outeiros, Galiza, España)*
>
> We define a non-binary person as a person who does not identify as exclusively and/or strictly as a man or a woman, who may identify with both, other genders, with many, with none, flexibly, or in combination with any of the above mentioned. (July, 2019, in Sete Outeiros, Galiza, Spain)

This manifesto, beyond defining non-binary people, makes an attempt to clarify misconceptions and positions regarding the treatment of this identity: the intersections of trans and and non-binary identities, the broadness and flexibility of this label, the importance of respecting pronouns, as well as the political importance of this label for advocacy purposes.

Similarly, in lieu of official proclamations on the state of nonbinary persons on behalf of government agencies or other institutions several other manifestos have been published online by non binary people who have turned to self-advocacy. Examples of these include *Pequeño Manifiesto Sobre el Género Neutro en Castellano* (Small Manifesto on the use of a neutral gender in Castilian Spanish) by Rocío Gómez in 2016, *Manifiesto por el Género Neutro y Guía de Lenguaje No Binario* (Manifesto on the Neutral Gender and Guide on Non-Binary Language) in 2019 by the Asociación Española Terapia Gestalt (the Spanish Association of Gestalt Therapy), and *el Manifiesto por los derechos de las personas No Binarias* (Manifesto on the Rights on Non-Binary People) in 2020 by the organization Diversas Canarias. Indeed, personal and ground-roots organizations' blogs online have provided a substantial platform for visibility and reclaiming power over personal narrative.

4.3 GENDER AND LANGUGE IN SPAIN

The majority of languages can be divided into three uses of grammatical gender: (a) grammatical gender languages; (b) natural gender languages, which distinguish gender through pronouns (such as he or she) but do not typically have grammatical gender markings; and (c) genderless languages (Prewitt-Freilino, Caswell & Laakso, 2012). Czech (Slavic) and Spanish (Romance) are grammatical gender languages, while English (West Germanic) is a natural gender language. The role of grammatical gender and its influence on social understandings of gender is complex. For example, some researchers have found that the grammatical gender of an inanimate object can influence the public perception of that object as more masculine or feminine (Boroditsky et al. 2003). A study by Jackobson (1966) tested Russian speakers by asking them to personify days of the week in which the respondents consistently personified the grammatically masculine days of the week (Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday) as male, and the grammatically feminine days of the week (Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday) as

female. Another study by Konishi (1993) compared how German and Spanish speakers rated a set of nouns according to their potency (a dimension highly associated with masculinity). In both German and Spanish speakers, nouns which were grammatically masculine in their native language were deemed to be more potent even in cases where the noun was the same (ex: el puente, the bridge, is masculine in Spanish and thus perceived more potent than the feminine German die Brücke).

However, the relationship between grammatical gender and gender equality (or equal gender representation) is not entirely clear. Several studies have indicated that there are implicit biases in speech and that the increased use of feminine pronouns visibilizes women to an extent, there are no current empirical studies which attempt to investigate the overall relationship between all three grammatical genders and gender equality (Prewitt-Freilino, Caswell & Laakso, 2012). In fact, all grammatical groups display gender asymmetry due to lexical structures, generic terms, and the social use of language where even presumably gender neutral terms such as "member of congress" is still more likely to be interpreted with a gender bias (in this case more likely to be interpreted as masculine (Stahlberg et al., 2007). Genderless languages—such as Finnish, Hungarian or Turkish—can seem to include gender neutral terms which actually connote a male bias, but the lack of a grammatical gender (therefore the lack of pronouns to promote the visibility of women and nonbinary genders) may default language use to androcentricity (Engelberg, 2002; Hellinger & Motschenbacher, 2015). Indeed, language is undoubtedly an influential force, the presence of a particular grammatical gender structure is not the sole determinant of gender equality nor does it highlight the potential for gender neutrality.

Unlike languages without a natural gender (such as English) or a neutral gender (such as German, Swedish, or Greek), there are some linguistic restrictions as to how one might recognize themselves with regards to the pronouns and adjective endings they use because all nouns and pronouns are gendered into masculine and feminine. Pronouns have been a particular point of contention in the public struggle for gender recognition in many Western countries as trans and nonbinary individuals, specifically with regards to having others address them with their chosen pronouns as well as having their chosen pronouns appear on legal documents. The lack of a natural gender in English in many ways has facilitated the gradual integration of gender-neutral recognition. On the one

hand, since adjectives are not gendered, there is no need to make any sort of adjustment according to the addressee as there would be in Spanish (guapo, guapa). Secondly, there is a widely established and grammatically correct usage of the plural and neutral *they/their* when referring to a singular individual in the case the gender of the addressee is unknown. In Spanish it is inevitable to avoid this gendering, even when referring to oneself unless there is a substantial reorganization of the sentence structure to avoid adjectives (eg.: "Estoy asustado/a" to "Tengo miedo") which is cumbersome and requires a significant effort.

Spanish feminists have long criticized what they call the "linguistic sexism"-- the unequal use of masculine and feminine linguistic genders– present in Spanish language use, citing examples such as the use of the masculine to refer to mixed groups (the *generic masculine*) and the lack of feminine forms for professional titles (ie: *médico* or doctor) (Pauwels, 2003; Papadopoulous, 2020). These feminists have generally targeted institutions such as the Real Academia Española (*Royal Spanish Academy or RAE*) The organization, founded in 1713, is responsible for ensuring that any changes or adaptations to the Spanish language are recorded and are consistent with core structures and essence of the Spanish language. While the RAE, founded in the throes of colonialism, has drawn more and more criticism as the authority of the Spanish language. Its emphasis on retaining the purity of the Spanish language is seen by some as an extension of imperialism and rejects the validity of a diverse Spanish language and all its dialects. However, it does remain an authority in educational and professional language, and socially still holds weight, despite accusations that these institutions help maintain patriarchy through prescriptive language. (Papadopoulous, 2020) Some of the proposals among these linguistic activists include: including a dash (i.e.: *amigos-as*), a slash (i.e.: *amigos/as*), or using an at symbol (i.e.: *amig@s*) to represent both masculine and feminine phonemes. (Nissen, 2020) Other, less popular proposals have included adopting the generic feminine or the use of abstract forms to refer to groups, for example *el alumnado,* or the students, and *la ciudadanía* for citizens (Bengoechea, 2008). While this activism has resulted in the acceptance of 366 feminized forms into the RAE, the organization remains resistant to adopt proposals related to the use of the generic masculine nor has it included any neutral forms.

Neutrality and inclusivity–while theoretically distinct concepts–require grammatical forms that are neither exclusively masculine nor feminine. While non-sexist language is inclusive of women, it emphasizes binary linguistic genders, highlights the limitations of the Spanish language, and excludes individuals who do not identify with masculine and feminine genders. (Papadopoulous, 2020) In response, hispanophone trans and nonbinary communities in Spain have aimed to creatively resolve this conundrum through the invention of neo-pronouns and neologisms. By far the most popular of these neologisms is the adoption of the ending -e to nouns, pronouns, and adjectives to indicate a neutral gender (Minoldo & Balián, 2018). This ending is not entirely unfamiliar to Spanish, and many nouns which are functionally gender neutral on their own end in -e (ex: *estudiante, student; paciente,* patient) and the pronoun "le/les" to refer to an indirect object also ends in -e. The proposed neutral -e would work in the following fashion with the sentence "the child happily goes to school":

> Binary language: *El niño/la niña va contento/a a la escuela.*
> nonbinary language: *Le niñe va contente a la escuela.*

We note how above the noun *the school* retains its original binary gender as this neutrality would only apply to living beings whom we perceive to have a gender (Minoldo & Balián, 2018). It is notable as well to mention that the neutral -e has also been suggested to replace the generic masculine plural (ex: los maestros, *the teachers* → les maestres).

The use of the ending -e, despite only recently entering mainstream spaces, was developed earlier than one would expect. This ending was originally proposed by Spanish engineer Álvaro García Meseguer (1976), to describe a common gender as an alternative to the generic masculine when referring to a person whose gender is unknown or intentionally undefined. While García Meseguer eventually redacted his support for the use of the -e ending, in 2011 the Spanish anarchist group Pirexia adopted this adaptation to refer to a true neutral gender: a concept which had not originally been included in García Meseguer's proposal (Grupo Anarquista Pirexia, 2011). Since then, the use of -e has become relatively widespread throughout the Spanish speaking world; Neutral Spanish today has been used in translation (López, 2019), in government (República Argentina, 2020), in universities (Alvarez Alvarez, 2020). While the ending

-e is among the most popular, it is certainly not the only linguistic proposal available, as demonstrated by the online project Gender in Language (https://www.genderinlanguage.com/spanish/gramatica), which collects information on inclusive and neutral language across different hispanophone countries. In 2015, Valentina Ramirez created a petition on Change.org requesting the pronoun elle be included in the RAE, one that gathered over 43.000 signatures.

In 2020 the Real Academia Española (*Royal Spanish Academy or RAE*) dictionary made the decision to include the neutral pronoun "elle" in their online platform the Word Observatory (Observatorio de Palabras) which includes words that are in use but not formally accepted in the dictionary. The organization, founded in 1713, is responsible for ensuring that any changes or adaptations to the Spanish language are recorded and are consistent with core structures and essence of the Spanish language. While the RAE, founded in the throes of colonialism, has drawn more and more criticism as the authority of the Spanish language. Its emphasis on retaining the purity of the Spanish language is seen by some as an extension of imperialism and rejects the validity of a diverse Spanish language and all its dialects. However, it does remain an authority in educational and professional language, and socially still holds weight. The acceptance of the gender neutral pronoun in what is fundamentally a conservative, mainstream institution is significant and could possibly signify change in the way the validity of the pronoun is perceived. However, citing confusion about the term, the RAE quickly removed the pronoun despite push back from activist groups online.

The aforementioned 2022 nationwide study had some additional commentaries on the use of language among nonbinary individuals. According to the study, 74% of individuals were between the ages of 15-25 when they first encountered the term nonbinary, 17% when they were 14 and younger, and a final 9% were older than 45; which suggests a significant generational difference with regards to access to hermeneutical resources. With regards to changes in labeling, 78% reported having changed identity labels: 48% stated that the change was due to a new way of thinking about themselves and 30% stated the change was due to finding a term which better defined their experience. While 70% of respondents surveyed used the term "nonbinary", only 15% use the term exclusively: the most common terms used in combination with "nonbinary" are "queer/cuir" (16%), "woman" (8%), agender (7%),

and genderfluid (6%). Regarding pronouns 35% of respondents report feeling indifferent towards pronouns use, 19% alternate between using masculine and feminine pronouns, and only 9% use the neutral pronoun “elle” exclusively. These results indicate that there is a significant amount of diversity in how nonbinary people refer to themselves. Particularly interesting is the prevalence of ambivalence toward neutral pronouns–despite the visibility that the pronouns debate has held in public discourse–and how the term “nonbinary” alone for most respondents insufficiently describes one’s experience.

While there has been very little work done on the epistemological consequences of adopting neutral language, a recent 2022 article by Medina-Lopez-Rey, Benitez-Guerra, and Craig-Alisaukas provides new insights into the possible causes of institutional resistance. They begin their analysis by discussing how science constructs its epistemological foundations highlighting several concepts. Renowned philosopher Karl Popper (1999) ,the scientist proposes statements, hypotheses or theories and justifies them by means of observation and experimentation, thus defending the deductive method as a means for developing theory and experience as a way of corroborating theory. Authors such as Alonso (1999) and García (2008) highlight that science cannot provide absolute knowledge nor is it the sole means of acquiring knowledge, and to believe so is an ideological position. All scientific activities are developed under a paradigm and these paradigms and the process of scientific knowledge production ultimately can be described as an overlapping, substitution and constant revolution of different historical-epistemological positions (Kuhn, 2012); due to this, there will always come a time when queries arise that cannot be resolved with existing paradigms and are thus outside of scientific knowledge (Chalmers, 1999). It is at this point when a new paradigm substitutes an existing one giving way to new methods and discoveries, emphasizing the progressive nature of science rather than a cumulative one (Escohotado, 1989; García, 2008). However, as a consensus-based practice focused on validating existing paradigms, those who aren’t able to adjust their work to those existing paradigms must either continue alone or find another group. This means that in practice, paradigms are rarely renewed, instead opting to force observable phenomena into existing paradigms (Kuhn, 2012). While academic science suggests suggests that epistemological obstacles are encountered when there is unawareness about a phenomenon and that this unawareness is what hinders the adaptation of human

knowledge to scientific knowledge, writers such as Tovar and García (2012) argue the real obstacle lies in the construction of "true, adequate and necessary" academic frameworks for the understanding of reality, which are later overwhelmed by the "incommensurability of reality" (Medina-Lopez-Rey, Benitez-Guerra, and Craig-Alisaukas, 2022).

Medina-Lopez-Rey, Benitez-Guerra, and Craig-Alisaukas (2022) go on to compare the institutionalization of science with linguistic institutions (such as the Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española), stating that the latter also are characterized by a similar epistemological rigidity that prevents the adoption of new ideas and concepts. They highlight specific aspects of The Academy which make it resistant to change: it does not recognize the breakdowns of normative language, it defends language validity on the basis of whether or not a term has been in use for a long time; and finally the Academy does not take into account that excluding new realities and ideas on the basis of factual arguments relating to linguistic use means rejecting the suggestions of improvement by deferring to archaic and undesirable facts (Feyerabend, 1969). In this sense, the introduction of the term "elle" in the Spanish language can be considered an epistemological break, product of an abstraction of the human conceptual framework delimiting what is knowable and where a new worldview is proposed with an impact on diverse academic disciplines. (Medina-Lopez-Rey, Benitez-Guerra, and Craig-Alisaukas, 2022). The authors also highlight how despite the resistance towards epistemic breaks, epistemic breaks have historically resulted in the assimilation of those breaks (Kuhn, 2006). Some authors such as Lopez (2019) for example, mention how the increased acceptance of nonbinary language abroad–in educational contexts and on legal documents–the lack of a neutral language in Spanish brings up ethical and legal complications in translation practice and could force the creation of these categories structurally. Others such as Wójtowicz (2017) mention how the rigidity of linguistic institutions often pushes people to adopt anglicisms to fill the gaps one's native language cannot fill, over time rendering the RAE and other native institutions irrelevant. The question is, then, what phenomena will eventually force this assimilation.

III. METHODOLOGY

1. BACKGROUND AND GOALS OF STUDY

This study used qualitative methodology to explore the process of becoming and defining one's self as nonbinary, specifically Castilian Spanish speakers who have been primarily raised in Spain. In order to do so, this work uses phenomenology the primary theoretical framework while also drawing from queer theory, linguistics, and identity theory.

Initial research proved a significant lack of qualitative research examining nonbinary identities specifically. While research into trans identities began to garner attention in the 1960s and 70s, this work was almost exclusively quantitative as these studies focused primarily on medical transition and the pathologization of the like. Indeed these studies were often conducted in such a way that that negated the existence of nonbinary identities and persons who did not or could not medically transition, while also emphasizing a binary and linear transition process (dickey, Hendrix & Bockting, 2015).

In the 90s, transgender research primarily used quantitative means of measuring gender identity with surveys such as The Recalled Gender Identity Scale (RCGI), The Utrecht Gender Dysphoria Scale (UGDS), Identity/Gender Dysphoria Questionnaire for Adolescents and Adults (GIDYQ-AA), (Zucker et al., 2006; Singh et al., 2010; Schneider et al., 2016). The largest study on transgender people to date The US National Transgender Discrimination Survey which counted on approximately 6.500 respondents is also a qualitative survey, which while providing multiple options for gender identification and capturing a large amount of valuable data, is still limited in its exploration of nuances and relationships between many of these demographic findings. Indeed, most qualitative descriptions on nonbinary people are captured through autobiographies and other personal narratives such as Riki Wilchins *GenderQueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary* (2002), Julia Serano's *The Whipping Girl* (2016), Kate Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw* (1995), with some limited scholarly research such as works by Judith Halberstam (1998). This work attempts to contribute to filling the still significant lack of scholarly qualitative work on nonbinary identities and identity formation.

Thus the objectives of this study are to shed light on the process of discovering one's gender identity as non-binary and to investigate the process of labeling oneself and describing oneself within a binarily gendered language and culture.

In doing so, this work aims to not only to attempt to describe the experiences of nonbinary people within this specific cultural context as an often overlooked group, but also seeks to allow nonbinary people to express these experiences in their own words. In fact, the focus on participants using their own language is critical to exploring the second objective of this study, and thus structuring questions in such a way that participants had a wide latitude to answer freely and without prompt was of vital importance to the work.

2. METHODOLOGY DEFINITION AND JUSTIFICATION

2.1 Phenomenology as a Methodology

The primary purpose of my study is to describe the process of defining oneself as nonbinary, exposing the interviewees' lived experiences of gender in their own words. This objective is best served using a phenomenological approach to data collection. A phenomenological approach is one that is interested primarily in the person's experience and the way in which that experience is lived, instead of drawing heavily from theory (Bevan, 2014). Mason (2002) describes phenomenology as a postmodern epistemological perspective in that it recognizes the complexity and intersubjectivity of the human experience and that this experience has meaning and value. The roots of phenomenological philosophical thought can be traced to key works by Edmund Husserl, who first coined two key terms in phenomenology: the *lifeworld* and the *natural* attitude. Husserl writes in his 1954 publication, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*:

> In this world we are objects among objects in the sense of the life-world, namely, as being here and there, in the plain certainty of experience, before anything that is established scientifically, whether in physiology, psychology, or sociology. On the other hand, we are subjects for this world, namely, as the ego-

> subjects experiencing it, contemplating it, valuing it, related to it purposefully; for us this surrounding world has only the ontic meaning given to it by our experiences, our thoughts, our valuations, etc. pg. 21-22

The *lifeworld* is described as the "consciousness of the world, including objects or experiences within it, and is always set against a horizon that provides context" (Bevan, 2014, pg. 136). This lifeworld exists prior to any science or analysis, and is made meaningful through our experiences and observations. The *natural attitude*, as a complimentary term, describes the unreflective mode of being and engaging with the world; it is effortlessly, "straightforwardly living into the world,"(Husserl, 1970; Bevan, 2014). That is, outside of scientific analysis (pre- or extra-scientific), as subjects we experience the lifeword in a state of natural attitude. According to Giorgi (2005), one's experience of the lifeworld in natural attitude is that which is investigated in phenomenological research.

Husserl also mentions an additional concept in phenomenology described as the *modes of appearing*, which describes the subjectivity of any given object or phenomenon existing in the lifeworld. Bezan (2014) describes modes of appearing as the way in which different ideas, thoughts, physical phenomena, events are experienced in a multitude of ways either by an individual or a collective. It is these different ways of being experienced that gives any given phenomena an identity, rather than relying on the belief that there is a residual object which carries an inherent and "true" meaning or value. To better understand this concept, Giorgi (2005) presents us with an example of a table, which depending on our positioning can be seen from a variety of perspectives - from the side, from above, or from below - and it is this combination of different perspectives which ultimately gives us an understanding of the table, since it is impossible to see the table as such. This is a challenge to the idea of an objective truth which is often a goal of qualitatively conducted research, particularly the dominance and preference for logical empiricism in Western philosophical thought during the 19th and 20th centuries(Giorgi, 2005). Husserl (1970) contrasts this idea of an objective truth with the idea of a "purer" truth in pre-and extra- scientific life which prior to being imbued with "objectivity", or any distinct form of interpretation, serves as the grounding for theory and is not greater or lesser in value. In relation to the research

conducted in the body of work, choosing to adopt a phenomenological approach ideologically reinforces the lack of universality and generalizability in the experiences I wish to record, while also recognizing the validity in the subjectivity of a lived experience.

It is important however to note that phenomenology as a philosophical tradition was not originally focused on data collection and analysis, and thus over the last century of scientific thought, the adaptation of the tenets of phenomenology to a method of analysis has been a critical development in the social sciences. Phenomenological philosophy aims to understand the uniquely complex human experience of phenomenon rather than explaining or establishing a causal relationship between phenomena. Indeed, Fusch & Ness (2015) emphasize the value of the lived experiences of individuals, stating that phenomenology's strength lies in its capacity to provide "rich" (quality) and "thick" (quantity) data. This posits a challenge when attempting to apply phenomenology to science, particularly as much of the human experience is illogical (in a scientific, quantifiable sense) and that our own ability to fully understand the other is limited depending on one's experience as a researcher, itself often times distinct from the lived experiences of the subjects of study. In adapting philosophy to research practice, it is important to distinguish between key differences between the two disciplines. While philosophical phenomenology focuses on the philosophers reflections on the givenness of an object or phenomena, in phenomenological research it is the person who has lived a particular experience who provides the initial reaction, and this the primary interpretation (Bezan, 2014; von Eckartsberg, 1986).

2.2 Justification for use of Phenomenology

A phenomenological approach is appropriate for this study for a number of reasons. To reiterate, the goal of this work is not to seek the definition of non-binary identities nor to explain the development of these ideas, but to capture the process of self-definition and the way it manifests in each individual. There is no attempt to universalize the results of this study nor should they be seen as an attempt to quantify the various potential factors in identity development. Instead, it should be perceived as an exploration and intentional exposure of the diversity of the human experience with gender and open the social imaginary to the various possible iterations of gender. Phenomenological study

also helps reinforce this study's focus on fostering the participants' own voice, as Wals (1993) states that phenomenology "produces knowledge with emancipatory relevance that can promote autonomy of the individual and the solidarity of the entire community" (p. 5).

Indeed, a number of researchers also have posited that phenomenology's ideological kinship with Queer Theory make it an indispensable tool to help understand these populations. Creswell (2014) notes the combined use of phenomenology with intersectional analysis "allows for keeping open to question the elements of race, class, age, and anything else…to challenge and undercut identity as singular, fixed, or normal" (p. 32). This tendency for phenomenological research question and subvert identity could be described as a queering of social science. Indeed, scholar Sara Ahmed (2006) describes a natural link between phenomenology and the queer experience, stating that "a queer phenomenology might find what is queer within phenomenology and use that queerness to make some rather different points. Phenomenology, after all, is full of queer moments," (p. 544). Phenomenology works like queer theory and intersectionality in that phenomenology "attempt[s] to learn about people . . . and come to know with them the reality which challenges them" (Wals, 1993, p. 5) to produce knowledge, understanding, and the essence of the lived experience.

As a result, a phenomenological approach has been used in several studies focusing on the lived experience of queer subjects. Bizjak (2017) used phenomenology as the primary approach and methodology to understanding the lived experiences of self-identifying LGBT educators with bullying, harassment, and discrimination. Authors such as Longhofer (2013), Searle (2019), and Giwa and Greensmith (2012) applied phenomenology to social work and medical practice, exploring manifestations of shame and discrimination with LGBTQ patients and providers in clinical settings. Indeed, a phenomenological approach is often deemed critical to understand the psycho-social dynamics which ultimately manifest in inequalities such as barriers to housing, medical care, education and safety which may not otherwise be visible without first-person narrative.

3. SAMPLE AND SAMPLING CRITERIA

Between the years 2018-2019 eight nonbinary people answered my request for an interview, six of which followed through with both interviews. In qualitative research, there is no predetermined number of participants, but rather sampling must end when data saturation is achieved; that is, when no new themes have emerged (Creswell, 2014; Trotter, 2012). However, there continues to be theoretical debate about how to determine saturation, and more so in phenomenological research where sample methodological practices are rarely defined; indeed Smith and colleagues maintain that "no right answer [exists] to the question of the sample size. In their book on interpretive phenomenological analysis, Smith et al. (2009) provide some rough guidelines on sample size recommending the following: (a) Master's level research projects could be limited to three participants, (b) quantifying sample sizes in doctoral dissertations are more difficult, however three to six participants "can be reasonable for a student project (p.51) and that (c) 4 to 10 interviews is generally a sufficient sample size. These sample sizes are so small because phenomenological methods aim to say something in detail about the perceptions of the group in question, and the detailed case-by-case analysis of individual transcripts required to achieve a sufficient level of detail is time consuming (Smith & Osborne, 2007; Bartholomew et al. 2021) Indeed, in the case of a single researcher conducting the study, Miles et al. (2014) recommends no more than 10 participants, as more data can prove "unwieldy" for a single person to achieve the adequate depth of analysis required for phenomenological inquiry.

Sample description:

- All participants identified as somewhere beneath the nonbinary umbrella: two nonbinary people, two nonbinary women, a nonbinary man, and an agender man.
- All respondents were between the ages of 20 and 34 and had completed compulsory education in Spain, despite the fact that two interviewees were studying abroad at the time of interviewing
- All respondents used Castilian Spanish as their primary language and all respondents had a working knowledge of English. Other languages spoken by participants included Euskara (Basque), Català (Catalan), and Galego (Galician)

- Participants represented the following Autonomous Regions: Euskadi, Catalunya, Galicia, Asturias, Aragón, and Madrid

It is worth noting that a major barrier to conducting this study is my identification with a private, Catholic, academic institution. Numerous potential interviewees reported they do not trust academic institutions to be respectful of their experience, many citing dehumanizing experiences with academics who are inadequately prepared to work with nonbinary trans people.

3.1 Participant selection

Due to the inherent broadness of the term non-binary and to allow for the most diverse and flexible representation of this umbrella identity, participants were selected based on their self-identification with the term "non-binary" allowing for further nuance and expansion of this term through the interview process. Additionally all participants were required to be native Castilian Spanish speakers who used Castilian as their primary language for communication, while also collecting data on whether they spoke any additional languages (nationally recognized or foreign). While participants were not required to be current residents in Spain nor born in Spain, they must have been raised and received mandatory secondary education in Spain. This is an attempt at providing a narrower cultural context for comparison, and while an attempt was made to be inclusive of multiple Spanish regions, I highlight that there was no attempt in this study to capture a homogeneous "Spanish experience".

3.2 Snowball Sampling

Due to the relative obscurity of non-binary people in this particular social context, and due to the lack of data collection with this identity concretely, it is determined that the most effective means of recruiting participants is through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a procedure by which the researcher accesses respondents (informants) through the contact information provided by other respondents. *Snowball* refers to the repetitive nature of the process: one informant is contacted, through which another, through which another until the subject sample has reached saturation, emphasizing its diachronic and dynamic dimension (Noy, 2008). This sampling methodology has long been deemed the most appropriate in seeking respondents in invisibilized populations

such as non-institutionalized drug-users (Heckathorn, 1997), HIV/AIDS patients (Sifaneck & Neagius, 2001) or the elderly (Warren & Levy, 1991). In the case of non-binary individuals, this demographic data is not collected at a national or public level through census and is rarely collected at private institutions (a notable exception being the integration of a third gender option in documentation at the public University of the Basque Country, *UPV/EHU*). Additionally, due to the lack of understanding regarding their gender, transphobia, and the additional emotional burden this supposes, many non-binary people may not be out of the closet to the general population, oftentimes taking refuge in specifically LGBTQ+ spaces.

4. ANALYSIS AND TECHNIQUES

According to Glaser &Strauss (1967), which is classically based in Grounded Theory, the Constant Comparison Analysis method refers to an iterative and inductive process by which data is reduced through continued comparison and re-coding of incidents or data. The analysis begins with an initial open coding whereby categories are developing in this first round of data reduction, followed by subsequent rounds of reduction and recoding to allow for the observation of possible core categories (Charmaz, 2001; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) Classical Grounded Theory identifies three types of constant comparison: incident to incident, concepts emerging from further incidents in new data, and concept to concept (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The Constructivist Grounded Theory approach, theorized at length by Charmaz (2001; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007), critiques the classical approach, arguing that its reduction of categories to data ignores the social realities relevant to the discovery process. Charmaz (2000) differs from Glaser & Strauss in its focus on the mutual construction of knowledge between the researcher and participants while also requiring accountability of the study's context and the researcher's biases, perspectives, and position.

4.1 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is concerned primarily with the examination of the intimate details of one's lived experience, first providing an in-depth account of each participant before then identifying patterns of convergence and

divergence across cases (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Initially developed in the UK in the mid 90s (Smith, 1996) as an approach to the psychology of experience in psychological/psychiatric settings, IPA quickly expanded to other fields such as education, organizational studies, and the humanities (Hefferon & Ollis, 2006). What makes IPA so appealing to researchers in these fields is its commitment to understanding the nuances of first person experience, and the belief that subjective knowledge is vital for understanding psychological phenomena (Eatough & Smith, 2017). While many forms of analysis aim to transcend the particular and attempt to discover some level of generalizability, IPA instead chooses to flesh out the details and textures of experience rather than any explanation of the phenomenon itself. Indeed, "IPA has the more modest ambition of attempting to capture particular experiences as experienced for particular people" (Smith et al., 2009, p.16). IPA has two primary theoretical underpinnings: 1) phenomenology and the understanding of experience, and 2) hermeneutics and the construction of meaning and interpretation.

4.2 Experience

Personal experience of phenomena is the true subject of IPA, rather than the phenomenon itself. Eatough and Smith (2017) describe experience as, "a complex concept and for IPA it means attending to aspects of experience which matter to people and give rise to particular actions within a world that is 'always-already to hand' and inherently meaningful" (p.7). For IPA, determining what "matters" requires a reflective process through which the researcher must choose what parts of experience to focus on and establish a hierarchy of those parts. In their seminal guide on IPA, Smith et al. (2009) provide us with an example of how these hierarchies of experience may present themselves in a narrative from small experiential parts to greater, comprehensive parts:

> …imagine that you are about to take a swim in the sea on a hot summer day. You may not be mindful of the pebbles under your 8 feet until you remove your shoes, and then find that you have to hobble the last few steps down to the waterline. You may not be aware of the warmth of the sun on your back, until you begin to anticipate your first bracing contact with the cold water. Momentarily then, you are made aware of the flow of experience; for most of the time, however, you are simply immersed in it, rather than explicitly aware of

> it. Now imagine that the event has further significance for you: you have been a keen swimmer since childhood, but have not swum on a public beach for some years, since undergoing major surgery for a serious health problem. The anticipation of this swim takes on a host of additional meanings. Perhaps you are concerned about the visibility of scars or other changes to your bodily appearance. Perhaps you have been looking forward to this moment for some time, as a marker of recovery, and the return of a lost self. Perhaps you are simply wondering whether you will be able to remember how to swim! In any of these cases, the swim is marked for you as an experience, something important which is happening to you. (Smith et al., 2009:2)

While an IPA study could focus on the smaller experiential details such as the feeling of the pebbles or the coldness of the water, IPA generally seeks to understand why the broader experience is meaningful in the participant's vital experience.

4.3 Idiography

In contrast to the nomothetic approach which predominates most psychological sciences--that is the mode of scientific inquiry which is dedicated to the discovery of general scientific law, IPA takes an idiographic approach. Idiography is primarily concerned with understanding the particular and the unique, and seeks to retain the integrity of the person as a subject (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Critiques of nomothetic approaches in psychology in particular span back to the 1930s and 40s, with noted psychologist Gordon Allport (1940) stating that, "psychology was becoming the province of 'one-sided tests of method" (p.17), in which "An entire population (the larger the better) is put into the grinder and the mixing is so expert that what comes through is a link of factors in which every individual has lost his (sic) identity" (Allport, 1937: 244). IPA is resolutely idiographic, and to achieve this IPA will tend to focus on the analysis of individual cases (e.g Smith, 1991; Smith, Michie, Allanson & Elwy, 2000; Bramley and Eatough, 2005; Eatough & Smith, 2006; Rhodes & Smith, 2010; Solli, 2015; Cheng, 2015), as the individual "offers a personally unique perspective on their relationship to, or involvement in, various phenomena of interest." (Smith et al, 2009: 29). Indeed, it is the detailed and holistic nature of the individual case study which allows the "life-world" to appear (Mischler, 1984). In cases where the study

features multiple (though few) participants, an idiographic analysis is required of each individual before moving on to comparative analyses (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

4.4 Interpretation

IPA, in its dedication to the hermeneutic position, relies on interpretation to obtain its analyses. Paul Ricoeur expertly described the natural relationship between hermeneutics and phenomenology, describing the vital role language plays in the manifestation of experience. To Ricoeur (1981), language is not merely a vehicle for description but an expressive force; experience reveals itself through poetic and figurative language. Ricoeur defines interpretation as "the work of thought which exists in deciphering the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning, in unfolding the levels of meaning implied in the literal meaning" (Ricoeur, 1974, cited in Kearney, 1994, p.101)According to Frisen, Henriksson and Saevi (2012), hermeneutic theorists utilize their subjective expressions to reconstruct original meanings during textual interpretation. In IPA, researchers engage in what Smith and Osborn (2003) refer to as the "double hermeneutic" as the interpretation of the experience is two fold: "The researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them." (Smith et al, 2009, p.3). Researchers are encouraged to adopt what Eatough and Smith (2006) refer to as a "both/and" approach through which the researches adopts a position of empathy –in which the researcher attempts to imagine what it is like to be the participant–as well as a critical stance in which the researcher must probe for meaning in ways the participant may not be able to do themselves. The result is the creation of a multilayered narrative with a number of possible meanings.

4.5 Analysis Dimensions

While it is true that there is still a lack of standardization of phenomenological analysis, Smith, Jarman & Osborn (1999) do provide several guidelines with which to properly carry out IPA in research. Firstly, they emphasize that research questions should be broad and open-ended; there are no hypotheses in IPA, rather the researcher seeks to "explore flexibly and in detail, an area of concern" (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p.3). Examples of appropriately framed questions include:

- How do gay men think about sex and sexuality? (Flowers et al., 1997)
- How do people come to terms with the death of a partner? (Golsworthy & Cole, 1999)
- How does being HIV$^+$ impact on personal relationships? (Jarman, Walsh, & De Lacy, 2005)

When developing an "interview schedule", or what may be described as a "script" for the semi structured interview, Smith and Osborn (2007) recommend broad and unspecific questions as well: the goal of this type of interviewing is to "encourage the person to speak about the topic with as little prompting from the interviewer as possible," (p. 61). Prompts can be useful for the researcher in certain instances such as where the researcher predicts some difficulty in answering, however IPA stresses the importance of allowing the participant to guide the interview process through the asking of generalized questions. The interview schedule was based on three principal questions drawn both a theoretical and empirical foundation:

1. How does one come to define themselves as nonbinary?

This question seeks to elicit answers about queer identity development as described in the methodological section. In contrast to many of the aforementioned traditional models of cognitive development which are linear in fashion (Kohlberg, 1966; Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002), this study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature which suggests that gender development is not linear (Devor, 2004). Prompt questions to address this matter were inspired by Devor's (2004) model of *witnessing and mirroring* and sought to address:

- Gender awakenings:
  - Acknowledging difference
  - Lack of gender enforcement
  - Gender comparison
  - Gender play

- Gender trouble and enforcement:
  - Policing the body
  - Bullying
  - Structural enforcement
  - Resistance
  - Self-containment

2. How do you define your gender?

This question seeks to inform the intersection of identity and language. Drawing on Bordieu's (1991) concepts of language and symbolic power as well as Hank's (1996) communicative practices, this study is primarily concerned with the semiotics (meaning-making) of gender identity. Cameron & Kulick (2005) and Canakis (2015) address the concept of *intelligibility*, that is the way in which one's identity is understood and contextualized socially. Thus, the prompt questions were concerned with eliciting the ways in which the participants used language to communicate their experience with gender:

- There's a name for that:
  - Rejection of imposed labels
  - Online resources
  - Juggling identities
  - Queer camaraderie/Seeking community
  - Redefining the self
- Becoming:
  - Processes of coming out
  - Name and pronoun choice
  - Embodiment
  - Transitions
  - Educating others

3. What linguistic difficulties have you encountered attempting to define your identity?

This question primarily drives the second round of interviews and yet again draws from the theories informing question 2. However, this question is more concerned with processes of *adaptation*. Informed by linguistic relativity (Lucy, 1997) and theories regarding agency (Ahearn, 2001), this work seeks to understand the ways in which the participants are able to navigate and construct meaning when faced with sociolinguistic barriers to self-fulfillment. Thus prompt questions sought to elicit reflections on:

- Name changes
- Pronoun choice
- The development of neopronouns
- Linguistic adaptations and other methods of problem solving

Question and Process Example:

Researcher:
Let's discuss the impact the fanzine had on how you identified

Participant:
Well for me it got me thinking. I began to investigate my femininity in a more performative sense, in my opinion, for my own personal expression…I was defining my gender as a man, not as a nonbinary person, so ***my gender identity wasn't changing as much as my expression was****.*

Researcher:
When did ***that*** *change? What made it no longer a* ***change in gender expression but gender identity*** *as a nonbinary person?*

5. RESEARCH DESIGN

5.1 Phase 1: Establishing theoretical framework

Extensive research was conducted using both scholarly and gray literature to understand the state of research into nonbinary identities. The use of gray literature –such as blogs,

opinion pieces, autobiographies, etc. – has been key to understanding first person experiences of gender diversity as there is a significant lack of qualitative work done on this particular topic. There was also a concerted attempt to include research and narratives written by trans scholars and activists to capture the nuances of the trans experiences which may be overlooked by cis and/or heteronormative authors.

5.2 Phase 2: Identifying participants

In the particular case of this body of work, the original respondent was identified and contacted through their visibility as a nonbinary author in the Basque feminist publication *Pikara Magazine*, as well as their presence as a local activist. As this individual is active in LGBTQ spaces, they were considered a valuable resource to reach out to additional participants as the trust the community has in this individual would give possible respondents an additional level of confidence in what many members of this community could consider an invasive procedure.

It is important to note that social media has proved to be a critical source of information and accessing informants. Snowball sampling inherently relies and partakes in the dynamics of social networks, which in turns demands an analysis social capital, social knowledge, and social system reproduction (Bourdieu, 1986). According to Noy (2008), traditional understandings of knowledge as inhabiting privileged spaces such as academia and "scholarly" individuals and locales (often cis-male dominated) is the logical reproduction of patriarchal ways of thinking. In such, the use of alternative sources of information based on the natural reproduction of social networks of the respondents could be viewed as a necessary "queering" of scientific investigation. Miller (2017) determined that oftentimes social media--such as Instagram, Facebook, or WhatsApp--are the only safe spaces for many nonbinary individuals to communicate, process, and share information and resources. This is particularly true in places where being out as a nonbinary trans person could be unviable due to lack of family and community support, lack of community resources, or the real threat of violence against trans and gender-nonconforming people and collectives. Due to this, the majority of respondents have been contacted through forwarded social media handles, most notably Instagram. Likewise, respondents who have accepted being interviewed have shared and

forwarded my contact information through both private and public social media profiles.

5.3 Phase 3: Interviewing

This body of work, I reiterate, has an important focus on the process of defining an identity or label, both to oneself, and ultimately in relation to their discreet contexts and vital trajectories. Re-emphasizing that the term non-binary is still a term exclusive often to persons who belong to a concrete portion of the population engaged in more radical discussions of gender and queerness, there is great value in analyzing the access to this vocabulary and modes of discourse. To discuss labels is to inherently discuss language and the reflexive process of both defining the label and being defined *by* the label. It is because of this focus on language that using phenomenological interviewing as a methodological approach is appropriate. Von Eckartsberg (referenced in Bevan, 2014) explicits that the means to gain access to the thing experienced, its modes of appearing, is through thematized verbalization of that experience in a vocabulary shared through the cultural and linguistic community of those who experience it. In fact, Heron (1981) goes as far as claiming that one's humanity is determined in great part by their ability to symbolize their experience through the use of language; that understanding the use of language is to understand human behavior. Heron states:

> The use of language, itself, . . . contains within it the paradigm of cooperative inquiry; and since language is the primary too! whose use enables human construing and intending to occur, it is difficult to see how there can be any more fundamental mode of inquiry for human beings into the human condition. (p. 26)

While interviewing has long been accepted as the primary means of data collection in phenomenological research, the body of work on how to conduct phenomenological interviewing is limited. However, there are writers who have sought to provide guidance on how to collect data using this approach. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) concretely welcomed the ambiguity of phenomenological methodology, and in doing so emphasized the description of specific situations and the complexity and uniqueness of the respondents' reinterpretation of experience. The researcher should adopt a

"deliberate naiveté" when structuring their interviews so as to respect and follow the phenomenological concept of *phenomenological reduction.* This term was also coined by Husserl (1970) to describe the act of setting aside past knowledge concerning the phenomenon that is being studied as well as observing the phenomenon without positing its existence. Husserl distinguished between the presence of an object and positing its existence, and through reduction we attempt to refrain from doing the latter, meaning that we construct our methodology in a way that does not emphasize the way the phenomenon presents itself to *us.* Simplistically put, phenomenological reduction is a recognition of preconceptions and biases regarding the objects of study and structure research in a way which does not ultimately guide the interview to reinforce pre-existing suppositions. It is also a commitment to the *epoché,* which Zaner (1970) describes as an attitude committed to critical-position-taking in which no data or information collected is taken for granted and thus engages in phenomenological reduction. The abstention from the use of personal knowledge is also known as "bracketing", and is in all cases done imperfectly as complete renegation of one's personal understanding is impossible. Despite this, phenomenological methodology requires an attempt at bracketing, as it is worthwhile and necessary investigation of one's natural attitude and lifeworld (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

With regards to structuring interview questions, Giorgi (1997) states that, "questions are generally broad and open ended so that the subject has sufficient opportunity to express his or her viewpoint extensively" (p. 245). Additionally, Giorgi specified a difference between descriptions and interviews, the former necessary for providing context and the latter for eliciting meaning. While Giorgi's approach is two-tiered, Seidman (2006) proposes a three-interview process: one interview with which to provide context, thus focusing on life history; the second interview focusing on the reconstruction of experiences with the structures and relationships integral to that life story; and finally an interview in which the respondent is invited to reflect on the meaning of those experiences. Bevan (2014) adapted this three-tier interview process: adopting the terms *contextualization, apprehending the phenomenon, and clarifying the phenomenon* respectively; the latter including *imaginative variation* as a tool. *Imaginative variation* is a process through which the researcher is aware of an element of the respondent's experience "which is then put through the process
of imaginatively varying its structural components to uncover invariant parts and

thus clarifying its structure". (Husserl, 1960 qtd in Bevan, 2014) Much like Giorgi, Seidman (2006) also emphasizes the use of open-ended questions, adding that these questions should be developed in accordance with the context-building process thus making the interview guide a flexible and living document to which the researcher should not adhere to strictly should it not be appropriate to do so. Questions, additionally, should be asked in language accessible to the respondent, avoiding theoretical vocabulary which could in turn burden the respondent's perspective (Benner, 1994).

These two goals were addressed in two separate interviews with each participant, each lasting approximately one hour. The first interview was structured primarily as a guided life story where the participants were encouraged to chronologically describe significant moments in their gender discovery process, beginning with childhood and first experiences with gender roles to their current identification today. This first interview is directed at fulfilling the first objective. While questions were open ended so as to encourage participants to highlight what they deemed relevant, prompt questions were structured so as to focus on gendered experiences:

- First understanding of gender roles
- Gender roles in the family of origin and their enforcement (or lack thereof)
- Experiences with peers in and out of school
- Early gender experimentation
- Processes of "coming out" in different environments
- Processes of acceptance

The second interview, also a semi-structured interview, was focused specifically on more specific questions concerning language and labeling. This second round is directed at fulfilling the second objective of this study. While there was a set of prompt questions which would be addressed during the course of the interview, the second interview with each participant was also slightly tailored in accordance with the initial interview. This allowed for continuity between interviews and offered an opportunity to expand upon specific terms or questions which were left unanswered in the initial

interview. Unlike the initial interview, the interview was not chronological. In this second interview participants were asked to investigate:

- How participants came to discover the identity label “non-binary”
- What media were critical to this investigation (books, television, internet) and what language was this available in
- How do they verbalize or describe their identity to others
- Pronoun negotiation
- What words and phrases produce gender dysphoria (or euphoria)
- What other labels that have chosen to adopt throughout their life cycle.

Interviews were conducted primarily via the participant’s preferred video chatting medium, such Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, or Skype. The participant from the Basque country was interviewed in person at a location of their choosing.

5.4 Phase 4: Transcription and Translation

Transcriptions were partially done by the author using the paid subscription application *Transcribe* by Wreally or Amberscript. Transcriptions obtained through the app were then reviewed by the author for correctness. First round interviews were fully transcribed, while second round interviews were partially transcribed according to established themes and topics of interest in the first round interviews.

Quotes selected to be included in the results and analysis were also translated from Castilian Spanish to English by the author. Accuracy in translation is complex, particularly when it comes to capturing *meaning*. According to Polkinghorne (2007), the distance between the meanings experienced by the interviewee and the meanings expressed in the findings are as close as possible. The reasons for why there may be a gap between the two are varied and range from a lack of available language to describe an experience. Oftentimes interviewees will rely on metaphors and narratives to describe experiences, many of which are culturally specific and have no direct translation to another language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Chapman, 2006; Otis, 2008). Likewise, translation also involves the process of interpreting meaning, which can be

additionally difficult when interlingual translation is required. Translating specific words for which there is no direct translation may require additional language to make meaning clear to the reader. This is, however, at the cost of altering the voice of the participant. This is particularly troublesome as an important aim of qualitative research is to highlight and amplify voices that may otherwise not be heard (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Taking these complications into consideration, all translation work was done by the author. This was deemed appropriate due to the author's bilingual capacity, but also because at the interviewing researcher, the author is able to inform their translation with gestures, tone, and other forms of communication that cannot be deduced from a word-to-word translation conducted by a third party unfamiliar with the work. The author's lifelong engagement with Spanish culture also allows for a more accurate interpretation of interview content. Likewise, as the author is nonbinary, they are more likely to understand the many nuances of gender exploration and interact with the participants in a way less likely to produce harm out of ignorance.

5.5 Phase 5: Analysis

However it is important to note that IPA does not require that the researcher or the interviewee follow the interview script. Often the subject of the study will direct the interview towards a topic the researcher had not considered, and this deviation may be highly valuable; ultimately what matters is what the subject deems important, not the researcher.

The idiographic approach previously described requires the researcher to initially analyze one interview in depth before moving on to any additional subjects included in the study. The first interview was with participant V, as their visibility as an activist and model practically guaranteed that V would be open and would feel more comfortable sharing her experience. Following the interview and the transcription process, I conducted various readings of the text. In accordance with Smith et al. (2009) recommendations a separate column was created besides the text in which observations and preliminary notes were recorded next to relevant quotes. With a second reading,

these observations were then abstracted to document emerging theme titles (*codes*). Saldaña (2013) suggests, "Keep[ing] yourself open during [the] initial [stages] . . . of data collection" (p. 65), allowing thus for both expected and unexpected themes to emerge from the text. These themes were then recorded in order of appearance on a separate excel sheet (*table of themes*), where ultimately the themes of all the interviews would be recorded.

Smith, Jarman and Osborn (1999) suggest several approaches to moving on to comparative interviews. The researcher can : 1) use the master list of themes compiled from the first interview to guide the coding of the rest of the interviews , 2) begin the process anew for each interview and do a subsequent compiling of themes across interviews. Smith and colleagues (1999) believe that the second approach is most feasible and appropriate in studies with fewer than 10 participants. For this reason each interview was analysed independently for emerging categories. Subsequently these themes were compiled in the same excel spreadsheet.

Once all major themes for each interview were compiled in the same spreadsheet, themes were visually compared. Smith and Osborn (2007) insist that the IPA process is highly interpretative and personal, thus the guidelines are not prescriptive and often the researcher may adapt the process if necessary. At this point the major themes were listed in chronological order, after which a thematic clustering of data was conducted to create broader, larger overarching themes. Because the phenomenological process is **reflexive and iterative**, upon having created these broader categories, these were once again compared to the interview text to ensure that there is textual evidence to support the interpretation.

6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Taking into consideration the vulnerability of the target population of this work, several measures were put in place to ensure participants were protected from potential harm. After a participant was referred via social media, they were sent an email discussing the project, the objectives of the study, their right to anonymity and their right to withdraw

from the study for any reason. These were repeated at the beginning of the interview and affirmative consent was recorded on audio. All interviews were conducted in a private space of the participants' choosing to ensure maximum comfort and were afforded anonymity. Due to the sensitive nature of the interview content, participants were also given the liberty to skip over any questions that would cause undue distress. All participants were asked specifically about their pronoun usage in English so as to ensure no participant was misgendered in translation efforts, and all participants consented to the use of the pronouns *they/them* when being referred to in English.

6.1 Author Biases and Limitations Statement

According to recommendations by Blodgett et al. (2020) on the importance of recognizing bias in social science research as it allows for readers and reviewers to adequately evaluate the methods and analysis presented in the work. The author of this dissertation is a bilingual, Spanish-American, nonbinary researcher who was primarily raised in the United States. As the work was translated from Castilian Spanish to English by the author, there will inevitably be discrepancy between the intended meaning and the resulting interpretation, as well the possible projection.

The author is also an autistic researcher, which significantly limits the author's capacity to intuitively understand many social cues and contexts which are not explicitly stated verbally. This also influences the author's capacity to engage with the participant due to impaired auditory and cognitive processes, ie: inability to understand human speech, delay in processing human speech, misinterpretation of words and phrases, selective mutism, wavering attention, and reduced auditory attention capacity. This also translates into a greater likelihood of errors in transcription.

III. RESULTS

Themes in the first interview are presented chronologically, as questions were designed to mirror Aaron Devor's "Witnessing and Mirroring" mode of gender identity development. Devor's model, which seeks to create an identity development model for trans people, is roughly linear as many models of development are, but allows for more flexibility and reflexiveness in this development; such flexibility was also afforded to participants during the interview data collection process. Themes from the first interview highlight key moments and thought processes in the participants' life relevant to their own understanding of gender and their own gender identities. Due to the socially constructed nature of gender defended in this thesis, a special focus was given to the nature, development, and interpretation of interpersonal relationships over the course of the participant's lifetime.

To provide a holistic, humanizing view of each participant, brief introductions in the form of participant portraits are available in the annex.

SETTING THE SCENE

To set the stage for the rest of the interview, participants were initially asked to reflect and share their definitions of gender as they understand it, as well as to contrast this definition with how they believe gender is understood by society at large. All respondents understood gender to be socially constructed as well a fundamental aspect of one's identity.

I define gender as a person's identity rather than perhaps their biological foundation such as chromosomes or others, a physical structure such as sex…but I wouldn't know how to define now. It's hard for me to conceptualize these sorts of things but I would say it's an individual identity thing as opposed to a biological identity. - MK

I think my definition is, if I wanted to define it, would be in a very classical way in the way that everybody defines it, that gender is a social construction of human

behavior…the set of stereotypes that are applied to a group of people based on their behavior, the way they socialize, their appearance. - L

Gender for me is a social construction dependent one's desires regarding one's way of being, who they want to be, and their sense of self - MA

I don't know if it's something innate or not, but in any case it's a permanent social reality. To me it's like the base of the social suit each of us wears. Like whenever you're on the street they say 'that's a woman' or 'that's a man', their age, race, or whatever but it's one of the most basic ways to categorize a human being. - MM

One respondent made sure to highlight how overall gender is just one more descriptor of the self which through social construction is granted an arbitrary importance that is ultimately imposed on the individual.

"For me gender is this sort of inescapable part of my life because people are a little obsessed with gender. I personally believe it isn't something that important. I think people have wanted to give it a very concrete shape and I think gender is more a lie that anything else. But it's a lie we all live through and make ourselves believe. But in reality it doesn't mean anything." - V

All respondents noted that their understanding of gender is in conflict with how gender is perceived by society at large. Respondents highlighted the conflation of physical characteristics, or what some refer to as "biological sex" with gender which is an identity and lived experience.

I think the definition of gender, at least in Spain, generally, is that gender is the same as sex. I believe this is the most common misinterpretation. - L

Basically people think gender is sex, basically people believe tha gender are the genitals people are born with . People understand gender as something reductive,

something like, a body and think that a man must be a man because he has a penis and a woman is a woman because she has a vagina, whether that is true or not. People see it that way, they don't think about it any further. On top of that, very traditional femininities and masculinities. - V

When pressed further as to what is meant by "traditional femininities and masculinities", V mentioned

Femininities that are vulnerable and consumable and masculinities based in violence and domination. Based on dicks. And machismo, that's what I mean when I talk about traditional - V

Respondents also mentioned that broader notions of gender and sex are also traditionally binary and are based on assigning roles according to an also binary understanding of sex, leaving little room for deviation from these gendered social expectations.

They assign roles to people assumed to be women and other roles to people assumed to be men and so, for example, there is a very clear and strict binarism. And whomever veers from the norm is looked at strangely. - MA

People definitely see it as binary, man and woman and all linked to biological sex and people give very little thought to it. - MM

Let's see, I live in a developed Western country, so obviously the gender that I experience is derived from colonialist thought, so I grew up with the idea of men, women, two little boxes like that, and that's it. I think that fortunately, little by little, this idea of the binary is starting to become undone a little, so I see more and more people with different gender expressions. I think we are moving forward a little. I'm happy and reassured. - MK

THEME 1: GENDER AWAKENINGS

This theme seeks to answer the question of how one first becomes aware of their gender when that gender is diverse. Historical cognitive-developmental models have argued that gender identity is either cognitively driven ("I am a girl, thus I must do girl things") or behaviorally driven ("I like girl things, so I must be a girl") (Mischel 1966; Kohlberg 1966). However, this perspective is both linear and without enough nuance to describe a nonbinary gender experience. Aaron Devor's (2004) model on transgender identity development however begins with anxiety and an acknowledgement of difference, continues with identity confusion, and gender comparison. These first three steps of Devor's model are what I will be referring to as "Gender Awakenings". Without proposing we begin in childhood as this could encourage a strictly linear narrative, participants were asked to reflect on when they first became aware of "gender". In this case respondents were encouraged to remember their first encounters with the division of men and women as discrete roles, as opposed to when the respondent first became aware of the term "gender" or gender theory.

1.1 ACKNOWLEDGING DIFFERENCE

Participants began the interview asked to reflect upon their first experiences of gender awareness. All respondents intuitively decided to share experiences in childhood, and it is clear that all respondents as children were expected to fulfill a certain gender role according to their sex assigned at birth. However, in contrast to Devor's discrete steps of anxiety, acknowledgement of difference, identity confusion and gender comparison, these processes are also enmeshed and reflexive. Indeed, an acknowledgement of difference often comes after gender comparison, or one's anxiety can come as a result of acknowledging difference.

V describes an unambiguous attraction to femininity from a young age based on an analysis comparing activities and behaviors associated with "boys" and "girls":

> "It was clear to me that I was always interested in femininity. I thought I wanted to be a girl, but I always had it clear that I was much more interested in what

being a girl was than what being a boy was. I thought their clothes were prettier, girls in general were prettier."

MA also reports feeling disconnected from their assigned gender from very early on, and also associates their early experiences of gender with a feeling of "not fitting in":

"I think I was pretty young, going to preschool even. I realized I didn't fit in, I wanted to be a boy. I wanted to be a boy because I felt like one. I think I felt that way because I had no role models like me. But I would usually hang out with the boys and I felt like just another boy."

MA continued, recalling being very aware of a conscious division of gender despite reporting that these roles weren't necessarily enforced at home, as they report coming from a "non normative family". Some of these markers were visual such as pre-school uniforms, but MA also observed differences in gendered expectations of interests and behavior:

At school they used to dress us with a white and blue robe if you were identified as a girl and in white and black if you were a boy. So normative genders were highly signified. There was a caretaker who once wanted to separate me [from the boys] because I had to play with girls and she didn't like that I played with boys. She wanted to separate me because I played football with them or join boys and girls together, but she didn't want me to be alone with the boys.

While some of the respondents were able to acknowledge this difference quite early on, some participants did not do so until late childhood and early adolescence. In MK's case, they had always maintained social relationships with their gender assigned at birth with little trouble. As MK became older, in his last years of primary school, the allegiances with the girls at school became more fraught. MK started to become aware that the friendships he had taken for granted his social circles and upon further introspection, became aware that he identified less and less with femininity:

> I never got around to identifying with it [femininity], the way [girls] would behave with each other…it was a friend group with very rigid standards with a very aggressive form of femininity, which was totally a learned behavior, but it scared me…while it's true I didn't identify as one of them, I did feel more comfortable with them. They asked less of me…boys were there, they got covered in mud, they threw spiders at each other, they threw spiders at us and that was how they experienced life and I desired that so much more than my little group of 6 girls.

MM spent most of their childhood associating quite freely with members of their same gender assigned at birth as well, stating, "I think in elementary school almost everyone hangs out with people of their own sex or gender, and so I also hung out with girls and I considered myself a girl". However later on in the interview MM recalled an instance in preadolescence when they visualized themselves as a boy for the first time:

> I think the first time I actively thought about gender was, I remember being 11 or 12 and I was looking in a mirror and I said to myself, "I would be so handsome as a boy. I started to actively buy boy clothes and people started confusing me with a boy and it made me really excited. Like I wanted to blend in with them a little bit.

While their explorations of their own gender did not occur until adulthood, A does remember becoming aware of–and bothered by–gender roles beginning in adolescence. A mentions being bothered by certain gendered expectations related to physical ability and behavior:

> I think in part being Basque, it's a cultural thing, I've always liked to show off my physical strength. And so, every time something had to be lifted [in class] I would volunteer myself. What would happen is that they [the teachers] would summon the boys to move a box. I would then get angry, why couldn't I move the box? It's something that always bothered me because, like many other things, I didn't understand the difference. These boy and girl things, you

> know?...I wouldn't know when exactly, but my first memories would be in adolescence which is when I started to be aware of many things. This is something that I didn't realize until I started to explore myself as a nonbinary person, but in retrospect I guess it's connected. I mean, it took me a long time until I was 20-something to even consider the possibility of, or suspicion of being anything other than a woman–which is what I had been assigned at birth.

1.2 LACK OF GENDER ENFORCEMENT

Five of the six participants reported coming from progressive home environments where perhaps traditional gender roles were not always upheld between parents, children were not explicitly imposed gender roles or were given more free rein to explore, or perhaps a beloved member of the extended family belonged to the LGBTQ collective. These types of environments in some cases allowed the freedom to explore a burgeoning gender identity, and in other cases the lack of clear gender roles made it more difficult for some participants to clearly define themselves outside the binary. This latter experience speaks to the importance social context of gender, and how gender identity may be formed in relation to counter-identies.

V was aware early on as well that her attraction to femininity was perceived as odd, stating that, "your first experiences with gender are that you're doing something wrong and that you aren't fitting in." Thus, some of her earliest memories of gender included concealment:

> I've always been a very feminine person and my first experiences with that were realizing my father and my grandfather weren't very pleased that I played with barbies or that I shouldn't ask to paint my nails or wear heels. I remember one time we were walking past a fountain and I threw a coin in to make a wish. My father asked me what I wished for and I said I couldn't tell him because or else it won't come true, and that he would be angry with me if I told him.

However V also clarified that despite her parent's early confusion about her gender identity and initial hesitance, she always felt support from her parents:

> I also have to tell you that for example, my parents always supported me as I was, and even my father would tell me that I was very special, and that my femininity never bothered him. Even though he was uncomfortable at the beginning because he didn't know how to react. But they never made me feel as though it was bad. And I always felt as though my father treated me more like his daughter than his son. My dad knew what was up.

L did not report the same feeling of "not fitting in" as other respondents did, and they believe this is mostly attributed to a family environment which was unconditionally accepting of L's early gender deviance:

> The truth is that in my home I had a lot of freedom to do whatever I wanted to do. I didn't suffer gender stereotypes at home on behalf of my family….when I wanted to wear my sweater [as long hair] they supported me, they gave me dolls…The "sexuality problem" society has was never inside my home and I now realize that even from when I was very little, this idea that I would be gay boy was super clear to my whole family.

MK highlights that their gender exploration was in part possible because of the open and accepting environment they experienced in the home, stating, "I've had the luck that my parents, and in general my parents' family are very open people, very tolerant and the like, so I've never had problems with experimenting, exploring. I think that all things considered I've been very lucky." It is due to this openness and lack of strict gender enforcement, MK states, that they took longer to feel in discord with their assigned gender as their assigned gender initially did not feel limiting:

> We would wear whatever we wanted and I had short hair for most of my childhood because I liked it and it was a lot more practical, so when it came down to expressing a gender identity, I never really had to think about whether I had one or not that young because I didn't have any barriers to break down. I could do whatever I wanted as long as I left the house wearing clothes and

> socks. They let me do whatever I wanted so I didn't have to think about it that early on, precisely because I didn't encounter any resistance.

MM also reports giving little concrete thought to gender in their younger years, in large part due to what MM perceives as a lack of strict gender enforcement in the home:

> I realized my parents didn't make any effort to construct a gender role for me. I mean, if you look at photos of me, I look like a half-boy ambiguous thing. I have puffy hair so I would wear tiaras because I loved tiaras but also with really plain baggy clothes, and also with very short hair because my mother would cut my hair very short, almost buzz-cut, every summer.

1.3 GENDER AND SEXUALITY CONFLATION

V clarifies that this support, however, was based on the assumption that V would eventually grow up to be a gay man as opposed to a trans person, indicating that transness still exists on the margins of the social imaginary as well as the continuing conflation between sexuality, gender identity, and gender presentation. While well meaning in their support, V's parents unknowingly also constrained V within other gendered categories which were ultimately not liberating:

> Growing up they always told me 'you're gay you're gay you're gay' because I was very feminine, but I never considered myself gay. Also I don't like 90% of men; I like men that look like women…I never identified with the label gay but ultimately you end up identifying with something because the whole world tells you that's what you are.

It is interesting here to note that L's family–much like V's family previously mentioned– assumed they were a gay boy as opposed to a transgender person, speaking to the conflation between sexuality and gender. Because gay people were familiar to the family circle, it would´ve made this reality more palatable for L's parents, stating, "what I'm realizing now is that they accepted very openly, but very rigidly, the assumption

that they had a gay son. Which for them wasn't a problem because I have two lesbian aunts."

1.4 GENDER PLAY

As children, some of the participants began almost intuitively to "play" with gender. The relative flexibility many are afforded during childhood to explore allowed some participants to begin to explore other gender identities under the guise of play. MM highlights how early on gender is imposed on children thus making it difficult to determine a specific moment in which they became aware of their gender identity. However, while the choice may not have been conscious, upon reflection MM recalls almost instinctively choosing to portray male characters when engaging in play:

> I think this [gender] is learned from the time you're born and nobody knows when they began to understand gender because it's evident in how they treat babies and pregnant women, so I wouldn't be able to tell you. I don't know, I remember having an interest in creating characters, because I always liked to make up stories, create male characters. I never even considered making them female, but I'm sure my gender identity came way before that.

L became aware they felt more comfortable with femininity early on. They mentions being drawn to the embodiment of girls, not only in dress but in the overall way feminine people behaved and moved, and would later replicate this themselves through play:

> I think for me it was when I was between 3-5 yrs old in preschool and I remember I always felt more comfortable with the stereotypes associated with the girls in my class and that I liked it, mixing with them and their games and movements. I remember I used to pee sitting down because it's what girls did. I put sweaters on my head to mimic long hair like I was a woman.

While MK did often interact with other children of their assigned gender, MK also remembers finding kinship with fictional characters who were boys, and upon reflection associates this with early gender exploration. Much like L, MK also chose to manifest this kinship with another gender through dress up and role play:

> When I lived in Oviedo, there was a series that I loved, Recess. I was obsessed with that show, it was my whole childhood. The protagonist, I don't know if you remember, was a little fat kid with a red baseball cap. And I didn't know if I wanted to be him or be his girlfriend and so for weeks only responding to this character's name and trying to get a baseball cap like his and I'd say 'this is me now!

1.5 LACK OF LANGUAGE/RESOURCES

However, not all of the participants felt or recognized gender discordance from an earlier age. MK for example reports not exploring their gender identity consciously until a later age, and generally reports not thinking much about gender at all early on. They also highlight not having the language to communicate any conflict they may have had with their gender:

> I never felt like a girl but I didn't have a way of saying it. I never felt as though "those people [girls] are like me and I'm like them. I liked hanging out with them because I liked their personalities but that's about it. But I didn't have it clear either, I'm not the sort of person who had everything super clear from the beginning and I started figuring it out much later in life.

A is the respondent who began to explore their gender the latest, doing so as an adult. They did not begin to question their gender identity until they had been formally introduced to gender and transness as a concept through individual research:

> I've heard other trans people say that they knew since they were very little, even people who very strongly identified one way or another and I don't remember

anything like that. I don't remember anything that clashed with me until I started learning about gender in the same way I started learning about other things in general.

1.6 Key Points:

Five of the six respondents reported a moment of realizing that "something didn't fit" early on in childhood. These respondents acknowledged their difference through comparison with their peers in social and academic settings. It is in these settings where participants became aware of the different gendered expectations and roles binary genders are expected to fulfill. However, this acknowledgement of difference did not mean that the above participants all identified with a gender other than the one they were assigned. Those who did not, reported not having the resources or language to express this difference. Half of the participants explored this difference through gender play. This included different processes of embodiment: adopting clothes associated with another gender, role playing as a fictional character of another gender, or inventing stories in which the participant portrayed themselves with another gender.

Participants came from a variety of family backgrounds. However, the four youngest participants all commented positively on their family environment, highlighting an intentional or unintentional lack of gender enforcement in the home. While recent data states that families are common source of conflict for trans and gender diverse youth, these responses suggest that home environments can be positive when the home is accepting and adopts progressive views. Noting the ten year age gap between the youngest and oldest participants, there is the possibility of a generational difference with regards to gender enforcement. These two participants who did not report a greater amount of gender freedom in the home were also the two participants who first came out to their families in adulthood, indicating that a separation of the family environment in some cases can be a liberating experience.

THEME 2: GENDER TROUBLE AND ENFORCEMENT

The way Devor describes the steps in his model gives the impression that gender development is primarily an individual process of discovery, as his fourteen steps all describe an internal process: an individual has anxiety, is confused, makes comparisons, discovers transexualism. However, understanding that gender is a socially constructed phenomenon (Butler, 1990; Halberstam ,2002; Roughgarden, 2004) and the fact that social punishment is critical to the preservation of the gender binary (Wichins, 2002), there is an implicit social context in which these individual discoveries are made. Indeed, the recognition of difference can only occur when faced with punishment or disapproval. Borrowing its title from Butler's seminal work Thus this section seeks to address those social interactions and forces which through antagonism catalyze and feed the processes of discovery.

Home environments are important because for the majority of children, their first gender models are family members within the home due to the proximity and amount of time children spend with their nuclear family. Respondents had a variety of home environments with various levels of enforcement of gender roles and varying levels of support from members of their family.

2.1 POLICING THE BODY

The history of the Western gender binary is intrinsically linked to the policing of and control over the body. As Schuller (2018) states, the western binary requires that men and women be clearly distinct from one another to indicate “civility”, and to do so must regulate the embodiment of these genders. One of the most popularly used distinctions as of the 20th century between men and women is the presence of body hair: hair on men is a sign of virility, while hair on women is vulgar. For persons assigned female at birth, the removal of body hair is an expectation, and thus the choice to forgo removal is a direct affront to the gender binary.

Some respondents had very clear disapproval from the familial unit regarding gendered behaviors and expectations. A for example, comments how from early on, gendered physical characteristics such as body hair were policed by various members of their family going so far as calling them an animal:

> I've always been punished for being hairy, simply because my hair grows, something I have no control over, for my whole life, literally since I was born. My mother always said something really nice–thanks mom–which is that when I was born, I was placed in her lap and my mother said I looked like a monkey. 'Is that my daughter or a monkey?'...my sister also, who had less body hair than I do and was obsessed with being hairless from the eyebrows down, and so she also used to torment me about it.

MM shares a similar experience with their own body hair. While MM reports that their parents allowed for much freedom with regards to dress and hair style, as a person assigned female at birth, MM was pressured to remove their body hair upon entering adolescence. This pressure to remove body hair was in part fueled by the expectation that MM would choose to eventually be in a heteronormative romantic relationship:

> I remember I never wanted to shave my legs and armpits, not once in my life, and I remember my mom at first did say that I would never find a boyfriend that way and I don't know what else and she did pressure me a bit. She said "at least dye them blonde" and we left it at that.

2.2 BULLYING

For most of the participants, the bulk of the criticism, shame, harassment received for their gender transgressions occurred outside the home. School, for most children, is not only the place they spend the most time outside the home, but is also the place where social skills, roles, and rules are learned and reinforced. This policing of the body was not limited to the home, and A was scrutinized as school by their peers as well. This scrutiny became much more obvious during adolescence, when it seems as though gender enforcement becomes much more rigid as children enter puberty. A even reports street harassment in response to their body hair:

> I'm hairy. I think I'm probably a little hairier than most people who are estrogen dominant and don't have high testosterone, so I've always had a little mustache ever since I started growing a little bit. I remember when I was a teenager one of the guys in my friend group used to tell me "hey, when are you going to shave that mustache!"... there was a point in time before I reconsidered my gender when I decided to stop shaving. People gave me a lot of grief over it, especially my sister and my grandma…Before when I used to wear skirts and I didn't shave my legs, and on the metro I'd hear people whispering, but whispering so loudly that I could hear it. And I'm pretty sure they've tried to take a photo of me before.

For MM, this critique of their body hair was then reiterated at school and in other public spaces, leading MM to feel embarrassment and shame about their chosen representation. Noting that they felt uncomfortable in gendered spaces due to the ambiguity generated by seeing a traditionally masculine presentation (visible body hair) on a body perceived socially as female, this speaks to the "unintelligibility" of the nonbinary body in the public sphere:

> What they've most harassed me about has always been not removing my body hair, so they bothered me a lot about it, calling me Chewbaka. I've never felt comfortable in public toilets because in the women's bathroom I would always get odd looks because I wouldn't shave and they would think I was a boy. Then I went to the men's bathroom and I would get looks because I was a girl and now I'm uncomfortable everywhere. Especially in summer, there was a time- for a long time- I wouldn't want to wear a sleeveless shirt because I was ashamed of my body hair being seen…I remember having a bad time, and though I was steadfast with my convictions and continued forward, they did laugh at me and look at me with disdain.

MK also remembers entering adolescence as a moment of significant change in how he related to others, and encountered harassment based on a perceived sexual identity for the first time. He recalls his first experiences with homophobic bullying at around 14 years of age, when some of his friends began exploring their sexuality openly. MK

notes this bullying was carried out by primarily by girls who had a strong attachment to traditional, heteronormative femininity:

> I noticed that a lot of the dynamics had changed. The first time I heard someone mention a sexuality which wasn't heterosexuality, that is referring to themselves, or someone my age, I think was in 3rd grade of ESO. A friend of mine came out of the closet as a lesbian and that year they bullied that girl, another, and me horribly for being "dykes". All because every once in a while we would hold hands.…there was this terrible idea of a learned [heterosexual] femininity, I don't know if from their parents or what but they lived that femininity with an intensity that I didn't understand. I still don't understand all that much but I had a really bad time because of it.

Not all participants received the same level of scrutiny from their families and indeed served as a protective factor against aggression and harassment experienced outside of the home. V for example notes how school was a particularly hostile environment where V not only suffered bullying as a visibly queer child, but also significant ambivalence from teachers and staff:

> Suddenly you're 10 years old, you don't know what sucking a cock means and they're calling you cock-sucker and it was a very strange experience for me…I didn't have any sexual experience with anyone until I was 21, and it was after beginning to transition. And of course at 13 they're calling me cock-sucker and I wasn't prepared for that. I was playing SIMS! When you're queer, you're sexualized very early.

L shared similar experiences with school harassment and the mitigating effects of familial support systems. Like V, L was openly recognizable as queer and in being so, bore the brunt of much homophobic verbal abuse from other teenagers. L quickly learned to confront this behavior by openly vindicating their queerness and demonstrated a keen awareness of the social dynamics which propel this particular type of violence:

> The only violence I received–which wasn't a lot—came from the outside world. But normally bullying and all those sorts of attitudes are a fear response from people, no? I mean, I'm gonna call you gay because that scares you, but that didn't scare me. My understanding of myself at 13, 14 years old they called me gay, and [I'd say] yes what of it? In that way, it's as if they lost the freedom to harass me in that way, no? I mean, they couldn't bully me for being gay because to me it wasn't something with which they could bother me because I didn't care.

2.3 INSTITUTIONAL ENFORCEMENT

Like many of the above participants, MA's transition to adolescence marked the beginning of a period of significant contention with their gender. While gender roles are generally more flexible pre-puberty, allowing for more exploration under the guise of play, becoming sexually mature meant an increased rigidity in gender enforcement. As such, MA describes this period as a period of acute stress:

> I think at that moment it was once of the most difficult because when you're a child maybe those notions that I didn't fit into my assigned gender were frowned upon but whether you like it or not, people will justify it saying "they're just kids, they should be allowed to play, their imagination, being creative". But later when you're 12 it's like you stop being such a little kid, and now you are a teenager and all those gendered norms become more rigid. People expected of me to adopt a much more feminine role and I for example didn't feel comfortable with that role. I wanted to show off my masculinity and because of that I was bullied or punished socially. I feel like at that age I really repressed my gender identity. I had to repress it to protect myself.

MA–who is a bit older than the majority of the participants– recalls very explicitly gendered activities at school which other participants did not experience, hinting at generational differences in gender enforcement between respondents. For example, MA describes girls being made to dance in music class to popular music with

heteronormative lyrics and the discomfort this caused especially as a person who was not attracted to men:

> I remember there's this Sonia y Selena song "Yo quiero bailar toda la noche" (*I want to dance all night long)* and they had this lyric "boys fall in love" and it was all very binary. They made us dance to it and it felt terrible. They were forcing me to perform a role that had nothing to do with who I am. In reality, I felt like a boy. I identified as a boy and I didn't lie performing the role of "girl".

V goes on to explain how the negative behavior of her peers was passively enforced by teachers and staff as they did not make any significant attempts to curb this behavior despite V's family intervening:

> Nobody cares that they're calling you a fat faggot for 20min, they only care if you get mad. I really don't think there is any empathy. I don't think anyone truly did anything to actively help me on behalf of the teachers. The most they would do is pull me and the girl who was bullying me out of class and tell us to "talk". And of course they would leave us alone and I wouldn't talk. I was in despair. There were a lot of conversations between the parents and the director [of the school] and with a lot of people and no one was able to stop it and the worst part was feeling as though the majority of teachers didn't care. They didn't like me either.

2.4 FAMILY SUPPORT

V highlights the importance of the support she received at home. Despite the hostility experienced at school or with peers, V always felt as though she could return to her home as a safe space and credits her adult success with the security provided by her parents:

> I think that [family support] has made me turn out half-okay. Even though I was receiving negative feedback from the whole world, my parents always told me

> that I was perfect. I guess that's what has created my disproportionate ego. It's perfect because even when enduring so much abuse, I was always able to come home and there I was happy.

Like V, L credits their parents and family for this resilience, stating that the unconditional support received at home granted them the tools to face this type of adversity and encouraged a position of self-defense and self-reliance:

> School actually wasn't that hard because with my family's support, I knew that if something happened to me, my family would have my back. My brother went to the same school, my sister went to the same school. So even if boys in my class messed with me, I've never allowed myself to be attacked. That is something my mother taught me, I'm not attacking if I'm defending myself and I have the right to defend myself, and that is something I learned thanks to my parents.

2.5 REPRESSION/RESISTANCE

Due to a lack of role models and inaccessibility of narratives which mirrored their experience, MA found themselves having to suppress and deny any feeling of gender dysphoria:

> At that time I was so overwhelmed by gender norms that this idea that I was a boy started dissipating because you have to adapt, you know? No, you're a girl. But I felt strange, so strange…I remember when I was 13 and I liked this girl and at night I would cry because I wanted to be a boy and being a lesbian seemed really complicated and was punished socially. So I wanted to be a boy because I associated gender identity with one's genitals. According to my environment, to be a boy you needed a penis, and since I didn't have a penis I believed what they said and denied both my gender and sexual identity.

This social policing did not only attempt to criticize MK's interactions with girls, but also their interactions with boys as well. In feeling overwhelmed by this type of

marginalization, MK–much like MA mentioned before– felt the need to protect themselves by repressing their gender incongruence and making a concerted effort to fit in with in the social category of "girl" as they were expected as a form of overcompensation:

> [They'd say] "You never hang out with us because you're always with the boys" and other things. So I had a very odd phase in which I would try to overcompensate femininity. I had to be everything they told me I had to be, and I was really stuck for a couple of years, trying to always be the most feminine and the most whatever just so I wouldn't attract negative attention.

It was during this adolescence where A also began to think critically about the nature of gender roles more broadly and in their analysis became more and more frustrated as they attempted to make sense of what seemed to be arbitrary gendered expectations and norms:

> As I was growing up and becoming a teenager, right? When I was a teen there were several things, here's a specific example: I always had these arguments, like real fights when I would go out with my friends to go party… I would go out with friends and especially the guys would always want to accompany me home. And I would rationalize it–because I've always rationalized everything– and think why would one accompany me home if they then also have to return home by themselves. What sense did that make that I had to have a chaperone and he didn't?

However, MM provides an additional perspective to the criticism they received with regards to their appearance. As their gender presentation became more androgynous, MM would be compared aesthetically to boys and this comparison was pleasing and reaffirming in their choice to diverge from traditional gender expectations. They stated, "I would get a comment from my grandmother, 'you look like a boy!' but I liked all those sorts of comments. In reality, I thought it was good to receive [those comments]."

2.6 Key Points:

Entering adolescence was a key period of gender anxiety in all participants, as the relative flexibility young children are allowed with regards to their gender expression became much more rigid following puberty. The sexual development from childhood to adolescence for many marked the beginning of their first encounters with gender enforcement and harassment. Five of the six participants experienced bullying during this time, though all participants recalled being socially punished in some sense. In the case of three participants, this bullying was explicitly due to their perceived sexuality and was explicitly homophobic highlighting the conflation of sexual identity and gender.

Often this enforcement was most noticeable at school where all participants were expected to socially engage with their peers. In the cases where bullying happened at school, teachers and staff passively encouraged this violence through non-intervention. This supports existing research which highlights how educators are poorly equipped to confront and resolve homophobic and transphobic bullying.

Two of the participants attributed their resilience to the support from their families, highlighting this as a protective factor against this type of institutional violence. However, for two of the participants, their family environment contributed to these gender anxieties, specifically through policing the body. In both cases, participants noted how the presence of body hair led to criticism both in the private and public spheres. In these cases, participants were not harassed on perceived sexual identity, but instead due to a transgression of gendered expectations of embodiment: in this case, that a body assigned female at birth should remove their body hair. While most respondents remained generally undeterred from gender exploration despite harassment or abuse, two of the respondents noted how this social rejection ultimately resulted in a repression of their identity.

THEME 3: THERE'S A NAME FOR THAT

Theme three encompasses primarily Devor's (2004) model follows gender comparison with discovery of one's transexuality, identity confusion about transexualism, identity comparisons about transexualism, tolerance of transsexual identity; delay before acceptance of transsexual identity; and acceptance of transexualism identity. However, Devor's model omits a process between gender comparison and discovery that I seek to investigate in this work: before one discovers their own transgender identity, they must first discover transgenderism as a term and as a concept. This question is driven by 1) the theory that language greatly influences our perception of reality (Lucy, 1999) and that 2) our ability to "choose" a gender identity is conditioned by the options that we have determined are socially available (Butler, 1986). Thus this theme is predicated on the notion that to name oneself as trans or nonbinary, one must first come to understand that it is an option. The title of the theme is based on a participant's own observation upon encountering the term nonbinary and summarizes the feeling of joy and relief shared among the participants when finally able to name their experience.

3.1 SEEKING COMMUNITY

The moment in which respondents became explicitly aware of trans identities as a social phenomenon was of great importance to all respondents. The ways in which the defendants entered this awareness is varied, though it is interesting to note that almost all the respondents became familiarized with gender diversity through both fictional and non fictional media representation. The lack of nonbinary representation in their daily lives drove participants to seek out additional queer role models and inspirations with which to contextualize and inform their identities. Poland (2000) describes the inherent need in humans as social creatures to be witnessed as we are as well as the need to see ourselves mirrored in others; when this is done well, one's sense of self is both validated and reinforced. Unable to do this in daily life, many of the participants took to social media as a means to be in community with others of similar experience. Today, social media is highly relevant as it provides a source of inspiration, educational resources, and community.

As V became a slightly older adolescent, it became clear to her that she was not a gay man as had been assumed by V's family and environment up until then, thus realizing the label of "gay man" was also an imposed one:

> Growing up they would always tell me "you're gay, you're gay, you're gay" because I was a very feminine person, but I never considered myself gay…also I realized that I wasn't attracted to 90% of men, and the men I liked looked like women. So I couldn't call myself gay, I never identified with the label "gay man" but in the end you end up identifying with it because that's what everybody tells you that you are.

Following this critical realization, V felt motivated to pursue additional information about trans identities as she had received little exposure up until then. She had first heard about "transsexuals" on an LGBT website referring to the American trans icon Amanda Lepore, but at the time still identified as a gay man and didn't research it further. It was later through the social media site Tumblr. V had created a site dedicated to the musical artist Madonna, who remains an icon to V to this day. V describes their admiration of the artist and how Madonna exemplified a non-normative femininity, finding inspiration especially in the ways she would play with both feminine and masculine presentations:

> Madonna to me is a queer icon because her book Sex to me is an interesting exploration of feminine sexuality…In the world vision tour she explained that her idea was to mix classical femininity and classical masculinity in her looks. For me, that continues to be my ideal aesthetic, the corset with a suit, with strong arms and harsh eyebrows and yet a woman!…She didn't conform to what a woman had to look like and that to me was very inspiring because I've always felt that I have that type of masculine femininity, and that feminine masculinity.

Having established this Madonna fan page, V likewise began to follow other Tumblr pages managed by other members of the LGBTQ community. In doing so, she discovered the first significant content describing trans identities:

> I began to discover all this when I joined tumblr and I had a tumblr about Madonna. And of course, on Tumblr I followed a lot of gay men, lesbian women, and of course I kind of naturally gravitated toward following people who were non-binary and trans. I started re-blogging content about gender, sometimes about non-binary people, and almost unconsciously when I was 16 or 17, I began to consider myself non-binary. Reading those definitions I felt as though they fit for me.

This anxiety around transitioning and altering their public perception, V began to struggle with anorexia and bulimia as a means of relieving dysphoria by decreasing musculature in an attempt to be "less masculine". However, a queer romantic relationship in her late teens provided the comfort and support that finally allowed her to begin healing from her eating disorder, but also the freedom to explore her gender:

> That year I started dating my first love. and he identified as queer, and for me it was… I mean, dating someone who had long hair, who was wearing heels. In theory he was a boy but he was someone who wore dresses, who defined himself as queer, and who always encouraged me to see beyond queer, with whom I was able to talk about the fact that I felt like a non-binary person and so on. and that I even told him that I was going to transition and he fully supported me and he told me that he didn't care.

Having abandoned their own abusive relationship, L found the new-found freedom necessary to explore and define one's self. During the relationship, L was limited in expressing their interests and modes of expression, as their partner at the time expected L to be a gay male within very concrete and stereotypical confines and expressions. This newfound freedom also allowed L to interact with and be inspired by other gender nonconforming and trans people:

> After that abusive relationship, a few years later, I began to have a real puberty where I could discover my body and the things that I liked, how I express

> myself. For example there was a femininity I was interested in that I couldn't reveal earlier because my partner didn't let me expand beyond some very clear stereotypes he had. So now it was like "Ah! Now I can wear a skirt if I want to"! There were more subtle ways as well, but they were very useful for my self discovery and to be able to read other people other people who identified as queer or gender non-conforming and think "wow, what does this mean? Why does this interest me? Why is this exciting?

Through personal research impulsed by this new-found freedom, L first encountered the term "gender non-conforming" online, stating that, "that's when I really started to see a non binary definition of gender. That's when I told myself "well look, that seems a little more like how I feel." Following conversations with lovers and friends, L decided to create a fanzine which explored the dynamics and non binary and gender-nonconforming people as further research:

> To explore a little further, I decided to create a fanzine interviewing people who identified with a nonbinary gender. That's when I started to come in contact with people who identified as non-binary. It was online. And there were people from the US, England, Germany, and I can't remember what others. But it was very exploratory, with a lot of different points of view, and it was to inform myself on what it means to be gender non-conforming, gender non-binary, or gender fluid.

Social media not only provided MK with eye opening information, but also a community. This community, by trans people and for trans people, allowed for an exchange of information based on solidarity and shared experience. The lack of information regarding identity and transition in general media is replaced by peer-to-peer sharing. It is interesting to note that this information was available in English, which is not MK's native language:

> I remember there was this blog on tumblr that I liked a lot that was called "the transgender survival guide" and it was basically very young people who maybe didn't have support who would ask the administrators questions. It's a

> compendium of knowledge, there's a whole bunch of really useful resources and I remember specifically going to visit that blog to see if there were any other losers who were going through the same thing I was. They have a frequently asked questions section and that's where I began my research.

MK quickly began to follow trans content creators and became exposed to a wide range of different gender and sexual identity configurations. He highlights how today on the internet there is wide range of available content, but at time Tumblr was among the few outlets for queer or questioning youth:

> Well, I started a tumblr account when I was about 15 or 16 years old and I didn't have much contact with the Internet at the time…I remember seeing [trans content] and I liked it and then the moment you click, the algorithm starts to show you related content and because of this I began to come more in contact with all this content about gender identities… If you went to Tumblr, you're always going to find someone just like you and you're going to find someone to talk about that with… it was like this echochamber of everyone that didn't fit in anywhere else. I think that's why I went from practically not knowing that there were more people than men and women, and the occasional trans person, to suddenly having contact with a lot of people with a lot of different genders, sexes and sexual identities. It was a bit of a shock.

Much like L, A's first gender explorations after leaving a particularly negative romantic relationship. A found themselves in a transitional phase emotionally and with low self-esteem. In this transition they turned to the internet to find complicity and support for their decision to retain their body hair as well as to adopt a more masculine presentation. It was at this time they met a trans person for the first time through facebook:

> Having met someone who didn't identify with the gender assigned to them I began to ask questions too. Do I identify with the gender I was assigned? I had this period of time where I remember looking in the mirror and asking myself:

> And me? Am I a woman? Do I identify as a woman? And my answer was always silence. By looking online, I discovered what it means to be "agender" as well as other non-binary genders. And that was like hmmmm interesting! And so of course, I had doubts.

MA had at this point through childhood and adolescence actively repressing their sexuality and gender identity. Entering young adulthood, MA began to rebel against the feminine identity and presentation that they had adopted until then. Fueled by anger and hurt, MA began to overcompensate by rotundly rejecting femininity in order to satisfy the need for exploration that had been denied them in earlier childhood:

> Well, at the beginning I started to deny my femininity in a very aggressive way, trying to perform masculinity as much as possible…it was like a wave of rage that I had inside me for having been denied masculinity for so long. Then that wave of rage that I had inside me for some time softened a little bit and sometimes I alternated with femininity… I wanted to be able to perform everything that was denied to me in my childhood. And then I think that in the end I've reached a point where I feel comfortable with both elements of the identities socially understood as feminine and masculine. Depending on the day I feel more one way or the other.

This rebelling against what had been imposed on them led MA to seek out resources and role models online. As a self-identified lesbian, these initial searches for community were done in sapphic online circles, through which she learned about the diversity of lesbian lived experiences:

> When I started seeking out lesbian role models, that's when I started looking online, on contact pages and the truth is there was this show online that was super influential, a web series called "girl seeks girl" and that series showed me there were so many ways to be a lesbian. Even though the show is what it is, going from zero role models to at least 10 opened up my mind a lot.

3.2 JUGGLING IDENTITIES

Almost all of the participants initially defined themselves differently to how they define themselves today, and described a process of juggling different possible identities until finding one that "fits" or better describes this identity. This directly contrasts with the normative trans narrative of trans and gender diverse people having a clear and uncontestable identity from early on in order to be considered valid (especially according to biomedical models).

V had at this point discovered she was not a gay man and that she identified with the term "nonbinary". However this new information did not come without its own complications, and V did not take any steps to disclose her newfound identity label and remained torn about what her new presentation would be and how to reconcile desiring both masculinity and femininity:

> There was this point where I thought, yes I would like to be more feminine, but at the same time I wasn't a woman completely either. I realized I also enjoyed my masculinity and continue to do so, and I do believe that everyone has both energies inside them, you know.

Through Tumblr, MK discovered the term "agender". This term was particularly revelatory because it was the first exposure to a gender identity outside of the binary. While this label served as a stepping stone in the process of defining their gender identity and MK describes it as "fine for the time", ultimately MK would juggle various potential labels before arriving to their current identification:

> I imagine that I would've come into contact with the concept [of gender] via the internet, as usually happens to all of us, especially at this time… well the first thing I discovered were agender people. I read an online post someone had made about their experience, I think it was on Tumblr or something like that, and that's where I realized that it exists and from there on it was like "oh my god" and I was completely stuck for a while and I thought about it for a long time… I

> went through many labels for myself that were fine at the time but it's taken me a lot to get to where I am.

MK's adoption of the label "agender" (that is the absence of gender) was in part due to MK's conflicting thoughts about masculinity. His experiences with men had shed a negative light on his conceptualization of masculinity-and in doing so–limited his own gender expression:

> It was much easier for me to think I was neither a man nor a woman. It was always clear for me but it's always been harder to identify with a masculine gender because my experiences with masculinity hadn't been positive at all. So I thought I don't want to be like that and so I was going to deny this to myself for many years and so I identified as agender for a while and gender fluid at another point in time.

Like MK, MM's process of identifying as they do currently entailed undoing a number of misconceptions they had about trans people. MK's first exposure to trans identities was by reading an article on queer theory by Spanish trans academic Paul Preciado. MK adopted the term "queer" to describe themselves in response, however kept this to themselves and took no steps toward a transition:

> In the magazine El Pais Semanal, I guess there must've been an article about Paul Preciado, now that I think about it, I'm sure it was Paul Preciado, but at that moment I didn't remember the name or anything. But the point is that I was reading an article about queer theory. I don't remember any sort of trauma about it, I read it and thought "Ah! I'm queer!" and that's it. From that moment on I began to identify as queer, not as a boy or a girl. The thing is, in my day to day it wasn't relevant. I thought about it and if anyone asked me about it I would have expressed it, but I didn't go around correcting people, I referred to myself in the feminine, I called myself a girl. It wasn't relevant but the point is that I started to think about [my gender identity] from then on.

A reflected on how, as opposed to other participants, they first adopted the label trans first before giving any more thought to the specifics of their gender. By identifying as trans first, A was able to identify the root of their "difference" and then gave them the freedom to try on other labels under the "trans umbrella":

> When I came out of the closet as trans, I didn't come out as a trans man or anything like that. For me, in the contexts and groups in which I was in and all, to me being nonbinary was a way to be trans and that it. I came out as trans because there came a moment when it was clear to me that I was not a cis woman, it wasn't clear to me yet so I was just trans. At first I actually had the strongest notion that I was agender. In later periods after coming out I thought I may be a trans man, but they've never been long periods and they've never convinced me much.

3.3 BARRIERS

3.3.1 Transphobia

Two participants in particular recognized transphobia as a barrier to their own acceptance. Internalized transphobia can be defined as discomfort with one's own transgender identity as a result of internalizing society's normative gender expectations (Bockting, 2015). Indeed, the predominance of transphobia in Western societies means that all participants have heard, observed, and to an extent internalized many of the social messages regarding trans people. The ways in which these transphobic narratives impacted the lives of some of the participants is diverse. V became overwhelmed by the generally negative and tragic portrayals of what transitioning and living as trans would entail: fearing rejection and violence and having to subject oneself to an unending lists of possible surgeries required to "validate" one as trans:

> And at the time I got very upset and thought the only possible solution was to be a trans woman, and make a complete transition. because everything would be impossible for me, and they were going to judge you, and they were going to kill you, they were going to hit you, you had to have surgery on everything, on your

> face, on your boobs, on your vagina....and I had a very bad time at the beginning. the truth, that is... I honestly was very paralyzed because I thought that my life was going to be a series of operations and how... It was very demoralizing.

MK also became truly familiarized with trans identities through the internet, having himself opened a Tumblr account at age 15/16. MK knew about the existence of trans people prior, but his exposure to traditional media and cultural narratives had painted an alienating and limited portrait of trans people:

> I did notice at a distance that trans people on the show are always trans women and always the comic relief or the sexual degenerate…it's obvious that I grew up with some pretty transphobic ideas because of that, they sell you this idea of a sexual predator, these mysterious creatures "are they a man or a woman", they sell you this sort of drag queen sex criminal. I think the problem was that I hadn't had any contact with other images [of trans people]. Most of the people I knew hadn't even considered the possibility of a trans man.

MM mentions their initial rejection of the term "trans". This reluctance to identify as trans, MM noted, is in part because of their own preconceptions about trans people and latent transphobia. MM's understanding of transness was that it was binary and one conditioned–if not defined– by the hatred of one's body (dysphoria). Indeed, MM originally defended queerness as separate from transness, as trans people's existence reinforced gender as a construct:

> It was at the end of my university studies, I must've been 23. At first I didn't know anything about trans people, trans people to me are people who have it very clear from the beginning, and hated their bodies, and we talked about it before. They change and have surgery and I have always been leery of medical stuff , I don't like going to the doctor and everything. I didn't even consider that I could be trans at all, I was ideologically opposed to the concept of gender , being queer meant I wasn't a boy or a girl but it was also a political position of wanting to abolish gender. So it seemed to me that trans people legitimized the

> gender system. I thought "why would you go through all that if you're going to be the same anyways? I even criticized them so it didn't even occur to me that I could be [trans]. For me it was queer vs. trans.

3.3.2 Lack of access to diverse trans narratives

Part of the isolation MK felt was due to the lack of diversity in mainstream trans narratives, especially a lack of visibility of transmasculine experiences.. The most common image of a trans person is a trans woman, and a very transmysogynistic image at that. MK first had to learn the definitions of cis and trans to be able to apply it to their own experience and ultimately identify as trans:

> I had a preconceived notion in my head that I guess a lot of people have at the beginning about trans people…I didn't even know trans men existed and it seemed like something so distant from me…later I realized, when I first discovered the term "cis" because we were learning about it in linguistics, and I thought to myself "well, I'm obviously not cis because I clearly don't identify with the female gender I was assigned at birth". I thought, could I be trans? Even if I'm not a man or a woman? And after giving it some thought I realized it was applicable to me too and that I felt very comfortable with the term. It validates me a lot to be able to define my experience to the world.

While taking a gender studies class at university which encouraged reflection on how gender roles had been imposed in childhood, MM began to see their childhood through a trans lens. This led MM to do additional research on trans identities and reimagine transness not as binary, but as a wide array of experiences with multiple manifestations. Still, the highly medicalized, normative trans narratives were overwhelming and alienating, much as it had been for V:

> I started to see there were other ways to be trans, or to listen. I started to learn a little bit about the topic because I didn't know anything. I knew what other people knew: a flamboyant gay man is a "locaza" and what a drag queen was. So

> I remember being in this course and thinking "wow, I had a really trans childhood" because I watched videos and read stuff and I identified with it a lot. I had thought a lot of the same things like not wanting to get my period, hating my breasts when I looked in the mirror but I said "no" because I didn't want surgery and I didn't want hormones. So I said, I'm just queer and that's it, but from then on something started changing.

MM describes the pinnacle moment which changed their conceptualization of their gender fundamentally. In 2018 a year after moving to Santiago, MM described finding a book called "Work in Progress" which featured testimonials, writing, and images of trans/non binary people. The diversity of the trans narratives presented in the book allowed for the deconstruction of many of the prejudices or misconceptions that MM originally held. In doing so, they were able to ultimately identify as nonbinary:

> It was a very pleasant book and it was very visually appealing and had a lot of key phrases. I read that book and Pandora's box exploded. From then on I started thinking "wait, what's happening? I don't know what my gender is," like this is reality. Up until then I felt as though the topic didn't concern me but then above all I learned that there are trans people who don't use hormones, that don't get surgery, that are nonbinary, and that queer and trans can be the same thing. That was March and in June I came out to my friends: first as agender, then as a nonbinary person.

Despite intuitively identifying as trans initially, A also struggled some time with identifying as trans publicly because they did not feel that the predominant narrative surrounding trans people: that it is also binary and that in some way trans people seek to replicate the cisgender dynamics and identities:

> I have had to beat myself up with the more traditional version, if we can speak of traditionalism within a trans context, which are either cis or trans people who only conceive a very tight binarism that I don't think only harms us, but also trans people who do not fall within [the binary]. That basically in the end the

> goal is to try to be like cis people…I have internalized things from this more traditional version of trans, which is still the prevailing one, but I mean there are things that sneak into my head too, things like I have to do X things to be trans, to be more valid as trans, to fit into trans the trans label. In fact there was a period in which I have avoided using the trans label: I still consider myself trans, but I have tried to leave it a little more aside.

MA is the only participant who does not identify as trans for many of the same reasons that created doubt in A. Due to their lack of a desire to medically transition, MA does not feel they relate to the "trans" experience and fears unduly appropriating the language of those who experience other intersections of oppression:

> Maybe because I have never considered a medical transition for my body. Although I could still be trans, why not. But mostly because I don't want to take ownership of things, of physical realities that I will never live. So, I think I do myself a disservice by identifying with the trans identity when I don't have to live many of the realities of trans people like the HRT issue. But I don't know, I guess anyone can be trans.

3.4 REDEFINING THE SELF

3.4.1 Labeling

This gravitation and intuitive understanding of trans experiences led V to think critically about the nature of sexual and gender identities and reconfigure her own conception of herself. Once the gender binary came into question, concepts related to sexuality and attraction began to shift as well:

> There came a time, I had up until that point accepted the fact that I was a gay man despite being attracted to women. But in that moment in which you rethink what is a man or what is a woman, how can you say you're gay? If I don't

> believe that “men” and “women” don’t exist, how can I refer to myself as gay or lesbian, you know?

V recalls encountering the term nonbinary and identifying with its definition, as she felt it described her experience as neither a man nor a woman. While the discovery of the term was not enough to solely motivate a change in presentation, being able to name one’s experience opened V to the possibility of alternate modes of being:

> I understood it as an identity beyond man and woman, and the truth is that I had never felt completely a man or a woman. I personally liked it and I identified with it, but at the same time I was at a point where I still didn’t feel comfortable changing my look in general. I didn’t dare yet to present in a more feminine way…for me it was more of a “there’s a name for that”, it has a name and I’ve always felt that way. Like, this is a possibility.

With time, MK noted that the agender label “felt small”, explaining that, “I realized I had a gender, what happened was that I didn’t have the words to describe it.” Exploring this further, MK came to the realization that trans identities did not have to be binary and that he could indeed have a gender without limiting himself to being a transman or transwoman. While he recognizes this is not the case for all, MK personally finds label useful, and describes the satisfaction of finding one that fit:

> It helps me to label myself, it helps me understand what it is, what is happening to me, and what is happening to a collective of people. It took me a while to identify as a transman because of my issues with masculinity and what I had observed in the men around me…they were disgusting and I didn’t want to be that so I identified as agender. But as time passed by, I realized I was spending much more time on the masculine side of the spectrum. So I realized I was a transman, I just didn’t have to be a BINARY trans man and that to me made so much more sense to me. It’s hard to verbalize, but realizing I could be a nonbinary trans man was the discovery of the year and that’s where I am most comfortable.

It was not until about 8 months later that L would choose their name and ask their friends to refer to them by it. It was at this time that L recalls first referring to themselves with the term “non-binary”. This also coincided with the moment that L left home and moved to go study in Amsterdam, and used both the change in scenery as well as the change in primary language (Castilian to English) as an opportunity to catalyze an identity shift:

> When I moved to Amsterdam it was like: great, everybody knows me as L. Everyone here is going to use neutral pronouns with me. Pronouns to me in Spain were, and continue to be, a chaos because I didn’t know how to refer to myself. But in English there was a much clearer and simpler way [to refer to myself]. So, I’m going to a place where I’m going to speak in English and I’m going to ask for these pronouns and all these other changes.

While other respondents upon labeling themselves find clarity, this is not the case for A. Despite identifying as nonbinary, it is precisely the ambiguity and broadness of this identity which was appealing for A. Lack of specificity grants the space for uncertainty and exploration and A moves within this uncertainty comfortably:

> At the beginning, when I started to think about gender and so on and suspecting that I was not a woman, I started to look for what my gender was or the absence of it, right? And I was for a long time trying to look for something more concrete to see if it was a combination of genders, if it was none of them, so on and so forth and in the end I haven’t found a satisfactory answer. In the end I said, look nonbinary is an umbrella term as well as an identity and I’m going to use it that way because I'm not finding anything more concrete that convinces me. Today, I couldn't tell you exactly what my gender is today, it depends on the day you ask me, but it's not that either because I’ve considered whether I’m gender fluid, but I do not see it clearly either. I tend to be more agender than anything else, but of course that's just me...my specific case is my specific case.

MA likewise states that the broadness of the non-binary umbrella was what drew them to adopt the term, allowing them the space to move freely within the gender spectrum:

> Well, [I discovered the term] non-binary, well, I think I must've been 26-27 years old and at this point I had been exposed to queer theory, right? So that's when I started to know that there were non-binary identities and that in fact I liked not defining myself... I liked to be in the middle, but being in the middle and not defining myself as the middle. I didn't want to define myself for the socially accepted and normative binary system, but also not define myself within the queer spectrum.

3.4.2 Embodiment

Embodiment refers to the idea that we "mark" the body in one way or another in order to signify social and political meaning (Butler, 1988; Stryker, 2008). Most of the participants who had come to the conclusion they were trans or gender diverse began to seek ways in which to physically manifest these internal changes. This step is significant in that this embodiment inevitably visibilizes their difference in the public sphere. As a fan of live action role playing games MM saw an opportunity to explore these new feelings even further. These games, played with multiple other people, require participants to create characters to perform over the course of the game. MM had already written male characters in early childhood, however the ability to embody another person through play was revelatory for MM and set the foreground for further transformation:

> I wanted to know what it would be like to take it a step further. My idea was that I wasn't trans because I didn't meet the requirements of hating who knows what, but what if I HAD been trans? What if my trans childhood had resulted in becoming a trans adult? So I presented this character and it was a bit of a revelation… When I presented this character, this boy, it's like it started to become clear o maybe for a moment I inhabited this masculine world and I realized that it was a world I hadn't inhabited before.

It was following this positive experience embodying masculinity that MM began to ask to be referred to with masculine pronouns, despite still remaining skeptical of identifying with anything other than "queer":

> That's when, I don't know, I started to think a bit and then I decided that I was going to ask people to refer to me as masculine. It was 2016 and I was having people talk to me as masculine, but I didn't want to change my name or anything because I still identified as queer. The thing is I wanted to keep living and experimenting.

Having compiled this information L decided to take steps modifying their gender presentation without fully claiming an identity label yet. L at this time began to wear signifiers of femininity such as make-up, bras, or items of clothing associated with femininity. However, these explorations were still occuring within the framework of L's of as a man rather than a trans individual:

> I began to investigate my femininity a little bit in a more performative way, in my opinion, as personal expression. I started to wear a little bit of makeup. I started to wear skirts sometimes. I would take photos in which I wore bras…trying to emphasize these marks of femininity, that there are bodies that are not assigned female at birth, but all of this from the perspective as a queer person or a gender non-conforming person. I was defining my gender expression as a man, not as a non-binary person, so it wasn't so much my gender which was changing but my expression at the moment.

A found the opportunity to explore their presentation further during the local summer festivities. These festivities included a drag event, during which A delved further into masculine presentation using drag and celebration as a safe space for gender exploration without the commitment or social stigma of a change in gender identification:

> The first year I went with a group of male friends and we exchanged clothes. I looked online how to contour my face and how to draw on a beard, just to try it out. And I was so happy that the event was over and we went to dinner, I didn't

> want to take [the makeup] off. It was funny because I even walked differently, with my legs open and comfortable. I remember being little and being told to walk on a line on the floor so I could "walk like a lady", you know, with one foot in front of the other. And my whole life I had walked that way.

A continued to search for narratives that paralleled their own through Facebook, this time looking specifically for groups dedicated to nonbinary people and began to explore the option of using neutral pronouns, initially using both feminine and neutral pronouns as a transitional phase. However, it was not until A cut their signature long hair that they truly visualized themselves as a trans nonbinary person: A had maintained their hair long for 20 years and had been both a personal signature as well as their most visibly feminine trait:

> I remember I went to the hairdresser wearing a dress, because I think I was a bit in denial, like "I'm going to cut my hair, but I'm still a girl."...a couple days later, I mean I have a photo of that day. I was coming home from work wearing trousers, a jacket, and a backpack and I looked at myself in the mirror and I saw that I looked like a guy and I liked it, so I took a photo. That's where the denial started to fall apart…one night I don't know if I dreamed something, but the point is I woke up suddenly with a very clear idea: "I don't know what gender I am but I know I am not a cis woman. That means I'm trans, and there was no way to deny it.

3.4.3 Pronouns and name choice

Despite being a nonbinary trans man and using neutral pronouns in English, MK uses masculine pronouns in Spanish. MK states that using the neopronoun elle still feels awkward and that they are not used to it, but that also this way they avoid awkwardness with others:

> I use the -o mostly because I'm used to speaking normative Castilian, you know? So it's easier for me to use and also depending on the conversation

> you're having, you avoid people making a face like "hmm something is up with this guy." In general it's just more comfortable but more and more I've been caring less about it so I've started using [a neutral pronoun] every once in a while sporadically. [The -o] is just easier.

However, MK notes that they refer to themselves with neutral pronouns in English. Because much of their online community shared resources in English, MK became familiar with and adopted they/them pronouns when speaking that language. MK explains that the historical use of neutral pronouns in English and the fact that neutral pronouns are accepted as correct grammar makes its use less awkward:

> Usually I use they/them [in English]. It doesn't have the same stigma that the neologism elle has in Spanish, you know? It's a pronoun that already exists and has existed for a long time and has been used for centuries, so it's easier to use the neutral pronoun in English than it is in Spanish…When I have to opportunity to talk about myself in situations which are more neutral, where you don't have to clear all the biological weeds and give someone a lecture, then I use they/them because it's easier.

Much like MK, MM had a slew of negative experiences and stereotypes associated with masculinity that originally inhibited them from claiming a transmasculine identity, stating, "my relationship to masculinity is still complicated but after a few months I accepted that there is a genuine masculine part of me that isn't just gender expression but the way I am. And from there I began to identify as an agender man and reclaimed using masculine pronouns."

MM currently uses both neutral and masculine pronouns in Castilian. When asked about how they decide which to use, MM confesses that like many of the other respondents, they usually rely on context and commodity to inform their pronoun use. Because of this, MM usually reserves male pronouns for the public sphere, and neutral pronouns in their private sphere:

> I don't decide myself as much as everyone else decides me. Until I started my master's degree I spoke about myself exclusively in neutral. However I realized that people…that people find it very difficult to speak in neutral. From the beginning I gave people the option to refer to me in masculine just so they don't use the feminine. But in the beginning I still had trouble accepting my masculinity so it was very weird, I'm still working on it and also to take the test for what happens then I could not speak in masculine. So ultimately what would happen was that until last year, I would speak in neutral and most people spoke to me in masculine, the people around me... So it depends on the environment. At home, since I'm always speaking in neutral, it's not hard for me, but in [my master's program], wanting to speak in neutral didn't work out...I think it might be a bit like what happens here: there are people who speak Galician to some people and Spanish to others, and it feels very strange not to do it that way, like even if they speak both languages. If you speak in one language with one person, it becomes weird not to speak in that language.

V decided she would change her name and adopt feminine pronouns. Changing her name was important to V as it would symbolically mark the beginning of her new life stating that she "began to live as V, to be truly happy." V settled on a name that was meaningful to her in many aspects, though highlighting that the queerness associated with her namesake was a particularly important criteria:

> I named myself after V******. Because I identified very closely with her...because I wanted a name that was not extremely severe. V******. is a very feminine name but at the same time I consider that V****** for me is not an example of hegemonic femininity. She was a bisexual person. She was a person who even had affairs with non-binary people. Besides, I wrote... I felt very identified with an artist like that. The tortured artist.

Choosing a new name–regardless of its associated gender–was also a means of moving past the trauma V associated with her pre-transition self:

> And also, by deciding to be a non-binary person, on top of that, it was important for me to have a new name because ****** was too loaded. You know, ****** had been bullied, they hadn't fallen in love with ****** and they had fallen in love with V******. You know, Victor for me had a lot of negative associations and I wanted a name that I had chosen. And I didn't care if it was a woman's or a man's name. Because I think it's like, you know, I honestly think neither of them exist.

Following their cathartic moment of realization, A quickly began searching for a gender neutral name and explored pronouns usage. A began using “they” first in English because it was within anglophone contexts where they first encountered the possibility of neutral pronouns. However, their preferred pronouns in Castilian were not so straightforward and required a willingness to try out various options. Much as with their gender identification, A embraces taking action even without complete certainty and values experimentation:

> I actually started in English with the pronoun “they”. I started my gender and pronouns and such in groups on the Internet, on Facebook specifically, and all the information I found was also in English .... At the beginning when I had many doubts about my gender, when I didn't know if I was cis or not but I was already questioning things, I was talking to this friend and he gave me some advice. I always mention this because I told him that I had many doubts and so on and among other things I told him that I don't know which pronouns to use and he told me "you don't have to be 100% sure, you know? You can try with one and see how it goes and if not, that's it. And it was like a change of perspective: like, of course, why not just try it?

A first came out to their therapist and later their friends, which in both cases was positively received. A notes that this is due to consciously coming out to people who were deemed safe, stating, “my friends supported me a lot because I only told people whom I expected would support me.” However, outside of these close circles, A was still hesitant to use neutral pronouns in public and would resort to censoring themselves, or manipulating language to avoid explicit gendering:

> It took me a while to get used to it because at first I was really embarrassed, right? People are going to think it's weird, right? And so I would lower my voice at the end of a word, I would use a vocal sound somewhere between an -a and -e, and as I gained more confidence and saying the -e clearly. Also I would do all kinds of juggling with language when I would talk about myself because I had already realized that talking about myself in feminine, it would feel grating.

Among all the respondents MA is the only participant to explicitly state that they are comfortable using all pronouns.

3.5 Key Points:

The process of identifying with a nonbinary identity varied from participant to participant, but all participants had to first be exposed to the term and concept "nonbinary" through access to resources and counter narratives, most of these online. These resources serve as inspiration, toolboxes, and mirrors of their own experiences, allowing the participant to recognize themselves. All of the participants at some point in their gender journeys sought out community and queer kin with whom to share their journey, learn from, and obtain support. For many of these participants, social media was a key tool in accessing trans and nonbinary narratives. In contrast to Devor's model which implies a passive encounter with liberatory terminology, all participants demonstrated a significant amount of agency over their identity construction through the active search of interpretative resources.

Transphobia was a barrier to self-identification for multiple participants, however this transphobia manifested itself in a number of way: negative representations of trans people in mass media, abuse in interpersonal relationships, highly medicalized narratives of the trans experience, and internalized transphobia. This combined with a lack of positive counter-narratives made it difficult for participants to see their future transitions positively. These anxieties ultimately results in a form of minority stress, in which anxieties around having to combat and counter negative perceptions and misunderstandings related to their gender identity.

The process of identifying as nonbinary is non-linear, and participants adopted other identity labels (often sexual identities) prior to nonbinary, sometimes juggling multiple identity labels at once. However, once arriving at nonbinary as a label, participants utilized this discovery as a catalyst for several processes such as naming oneself, pronoun choice, or changes to their physical presentation. All participants adopted new pronouns and/or new names in accordance with their gender identity, however, not all participants use neutral pronouns. Pronouns are not synonymous gender with any particular gender identity, and nonbinary people can and do use all pronouns.

THEME 4: BECOMINGS

When referring to "becomings" I am referring to the processes that follow the acceptance of one's identity and the ways in which this acceptance is externalized and manifested in the public sphere. I refer to "becomings" in the plural to highlight that transition is not a singular or linear event, but is instead composed of multiple processes in a constant evolution and renegotiation of one's identity. The analogous steps in Devor's (2004) model are the following: 10) Delay before transition; 11) Transition; 12) Acceptance of post-transition gender and sex identities; 13) Integration; and 14) Pride. However, I again contend that Devor's model is too linear, and that these are not ordered discrete steps, but are instead processes which are enmeshed and can indeed repeat themselves. Devor's model also is primarily interested in the internal, individual experience. I seek to flesh out in greater detail how social interaction fuels or inhibits these evolutions on the basis that gender is created through intentional negotiation in relation to other identities (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Diamond et al. 2012).

4.1 COMING OUT(S)

Coming out here is made plural as well to emphasize that coming out is not a singular process but one that happens continually as a person encounters new environments and contexts. As most people–and certainly the participants–exist within different social dynamics, the ways in which people "come out" are also socially and contextually informed. Participants must continually evaluate to whom they come out and how,

negotiate expectations, and determine what level of understanding is appropriate given a certain circumstance.

V began to come out to both friends and family. This process went very well and V notes how she didn't encounter many difficulties in being accepted by her closest circles. This was not surprising to V, as over the years she had cultivated relationships with people who were either gender nonconforming themselves or were unambiguously supportive:

> [Coming out] went pretty well, actually. Honestly, for the majority of people, it surprised me how much everybody understood, even my grandparents. How open people were, how kind people were, how encouraging they were. Even when I complicated my identity by being nonbinary. I never encountered resistance on behalf of anyone. I do have to say, however, that the friends I had even before my transition were not people who would conform socially in general. So in a way, those reactions didn't surprise me.

MM, after having alo struggled to accept their masculinity, was going by neutral and masculine pronouns. Now living in Galicia, MM sent their core group of friends an email containing their new name and preferred pronouns The reception among their friends was also very positive and supportive:

> So I sent an email to a whole bunch of people because since I'm in Galicia, most of them are in Madrid and they received it very positively…I went to Madrid and they had told other people who hadn't seen the email or hadn't received it and it was kind of like big news, it almost surprised me because I hadn't expected people to take it so seriously, but it was always supportive… A lot of people were congratulating me for taking such an important step. I felt very accompanied and it was pretty great.

However, MM struggled much more coming out to their parents, and describes this period of time as "turbulent". They directly avoided telling the rest of their family due

to a lack of confidence in their family's capacity to understand. Despite having come out to friends, MM continued to use feminine pronouns with their parents, and was soon faced with the weight of their parents' gendered expectations of them:

> I continued to speak in feminine with them and I was wearing a trans flag bracelet and they saw it and asked me at some point "and that bracelet?" and I told them that now I considered myself trans because I realized trans and queer can be the same things. They said "aaaah" but later my mom told me that she was sad because I would no longer have children…Half a year later at Christmas I had decided that I wanted to go on hormones and it was a big deal, it was a big deal because I was still referring myself in the feminine too. I felt like I wasn't myself and I had always had a good relationship with my parents, we've never had secrets like this, and I was hiding too much from them. Things that were too important.

At this point MM was struggling with both the dysphoria associated with continuing to present as gender that was not coherent with themselves, as well. Six months later at Christmas, MM planned on letting their parents know that they planned to start hormonal treatment. MM found it appropriate to begin with clarifying definitions:

> First I gave them a little chat about terminology, that I had discovered the queer was more of an ideology and that being trans was not feeling identified with my assigned gender, and so I was trans and I had changed my name and pronouns, but at first I didn't ask them to change anything so it seemed to soon. I wanted them to know, and that we'd work on it and that part they took super well.

However, once confronted with the prospect of a medicalized transition, MM's parents' attitude changed. Their parents struggled with understanding why a nonbinary person would want to begin HRT without the intention to transition to a binary gender, especially knowing the MM had originally held anti-medicalist views in the past. Given their positive relationship with their parents, this moment of rejection was shocking for MM:

> I felt encouraged so I went on to the second part, "well I want to start taking hormones, at least beginning the process, even if just a little bit" and that's where everything blew up. I think the shock was worse because they had taken everything else so well…They thought that it invalidated everything I had said before. It meant that I wanted to be a guy, and that I hated my body and I wanted surgery and change everything about myself…they didn't understand or weren't capable of understanding how a person could be nonbinary and take hormones at all.

By the time that MK had decided to come out as trans and nonbinary, they had already come out to their family several times before. As aforementioned, MK had not been exposed to trans people or trans narratives earlier on. However, they had been exposed to diverse sexualities and thus found it easier to classify themselves within a non-normative sexuality, coming out as a lesbian, and later as bisexual:

> I knew I was bisexual in the moment I began to learn what that meant. I am bisexual and I actually told my lesbian friend–who was also the first lesbian I had ever met–and I told her I actually liked guys as well and she told me I was bisexual.That was the first time anyone had explained it to me and I thought that label fit me and I clung to it for many years, though nowadays my gender is clearer to me than my sexuality. But at the time it worked for me.

Despite this lack of inherent understanding of MK's situation, their parents demonstrated a capacity to support their child's gender explorations and have shown material support in their medical support as well. This calls into question the necessity for cis parents and others to "understand" the trans experience, as even in the face of misunderstanding, MK's parents trusted their child enough to provide much needed acceptance:

> They never tried to talk me out of it. 'As long as you want to, go ahead and explore,' and that was a pretty good attitude to have. It as a little harder to

> explain that I was a trans man, that it was real and that I showed signs of it when I was little, things that now are very obvious to me but in the moment they were overlooked…We're improving the situation a lot in this respect, and they've even accompanied me to go get hormones, so generally the experience has been positive.

Much like MK, L also had come out to their family previously as a gay man early on. L, having expressed earlier that their family had already assumed they were gay, did not find the process of coming out stressful since no expectations were being transgressed at the time:

> Well the thing is, for me it was clear because everyone told me, and it was a very comfortable way for me to express my queer identity. No, I didn't have to tell anyone in my family and just... well I remember I was in the car when I was 14, my mother asked me if I had a boyfriend, I said yes and that was it and that's where the conversation ended and nobody cared and my family already knew that I had a boyfriend and that's it.

Despite the self-reported accepting and progressive attitude L's family had displayed in the past, the reality of the limits of this acceptance were put to the test once L decided to change their name. While theoretically supportive of their trans identity, the act of changing their behavior in order to accommodate L proved to be a much more complicated process. L highlights how important it is not just to verbalize approval, but to adjust one's behaviors and decenter oneself when presented with another's experience:

> My family didn't have any problem with it, but it has been a long process to get my whole family to use my name. There were difficult moments for me in which my mom, for example, decided not to use the name I wanted and would give excuses to not use it and that was the toughest moment. Then there have been other really dark moments during which I would ask other family members to use the name and they'd say "well I keep thinking about you as a memory" or whatever other excuse. So in theory nobody cared but in reality it was a difficult

> experience, and there was a lot of pain of reconciliation, struggle, and peace with my family for a long time.

MA's first coming out as a lesbian was not well received by their family, particularly her mother. MA expresses compassion towards their mother, understanding that her negative reaction was rooted in ignorance and fear in her child's future rather than a lack of love:

> So in the beginning it wasn't well received. My mother told me something like "no, but it can't be so, you're going to be disgraced. It's better to become straight, you'll be happier." My mother was a bit overwhelmed by the stereotypes and all the preconceived notions she had about being a lesbian. For example, she had never met a lesbian.

However, with consistency and patience, MA was able to make her mother more tolerant, not only with their lesbian identity, but later on with their gender identity as well:

> Of course, that was a long time ago. That was when I was 21 and 'm now 31. It was 10 years ago and my mom isn't anything like she used to be, she's much more open now…My mom knows I am [nonbinary] and her mentality has evolved a lot and she's even interested in these [gender] theories and wants to learn about them. She even talks about her dog as if the dog is queer. Because who knows? Maybe animals also have nonbinary identities.

Much like other respondents, MA has curated her social circles and chosen relationships and has surrounded themselves with people who are supportive and thus coming out in this situation was relatively easy. However, in their hostile work environment, MA has chosen not to come out explicitly, but by attempting to subvert binary thinking and gender roles in the workplace:

> In the rest of my chosen environment I've had no problem because my environment is also quite transfeminist. And if I've been able to come out as a non-binary person at work, it hasn't been saying "hello, I'm a non-binary person", it's been by demonstrating it. Demonstrating that I can dress as I want, that I don't have to be feminine, that in fact I can do things that many men do. I don't believe in the gender stereotypes that I know they believe, and I've defied them several times…if I didn't defy them I would drown.

While A had come out with a fair amount of security to friends and community, their tense relationship with their family meant that they were among the last people to become aware of A's gender identity and the multiple steps they had taken towards transitioning. Due to the little in-person contact A maintains with their parents, they decided to reveal this new information in written form. Having compiled a number of resources through their own personal research, it was much easier to provide members of their family with information without risking too much emotional vulnerability:

> There are people to whom I send links and that's it, I'm thinking specifically about some people in my family...For those few people whom I've come out to, it is much easier to send a link and not expose myself, or open myself, so much. I'll send a link so you get more or less an idea of what non binary genders are and therefore have a general idea of what my gender is instead of dedicating time to delve into my [personal experience].

A also makes mention that coming out is not always a grand gesture of revelation and that indeed coming out involves a continual negotiation of practices which signal difference to others. For example, A describes finding the valor and confidence to put their pronouns in their email signature:

> It was a process of empowering myself and starting to tell myself "well this is valid and I have the right to use [elle] and it's my pronoun and I can decide which one to use and so on, right?... I try to tell all the people with whom I feel comfortable. I recently put it in my email signature, but of course, I have to feel

> comfortable to even do that because it's a way of coming out of the closet. I mean, its not a clear way of coming out because I'm not revealing my gender, but of course they can tell that something is up.

4.2 FEAR/ANXIETY

Having arrived at an identity label that felt coherent, respondents were faced with the challenge of "becoming non-binary": engaging in processes of embodiment, coming out in the public and private spheres, and the various administrative requirements often accompanying these processes of transition. There is significant quantitative and qualitative data at this point in history to indicate that trans and gender nonconforming people suffer from an exponentially higher likelihood of facing verbal, physical, and structural violence (Wilchins in Nestle, 2002; Koyama, 2003; Scott-Dixon, 2006, Grant et al. 2011, Harrison et. al, 2012). That coupled with the dominant narrative that the transgender experience is inherently a tragic one, creates a more than justified fear and anxiety around transition.

V having now recognized her nonbinary gender identity, was supported by her queer partner and encouraged to transition. However, V continued to fear the stigma and consequences of existing publicly: the prospect of being permanently denied closeness and intimacy with other people or being considered a "monster":

> To me that was really important, to see that people would love me unconditionally and that the people who love you, love you despite your insecurities. And maybe it's stupid, but seeing that I could fall in love being myself was really important because I thought I'd have to give up recognition by those around me, or beauty, or any sort of relationship. I'm not the sort of person who wants to marry and have children and have a stable heteronormative relationship but I did want to fall in love, and have adventures, and all those things. That's what I wanted and I thought it would be impossible because I would be a monster.

This Christmas incident was painful for MM and provoked a fear of abandonment that they had never felt before. Much like V, MM was all too familiar with popular narratives of transgender tragedy, where trans people are inevitably faced with rejection and disownment on behalf of family and other close loved ones. MM grieved the prospect of losing the relationship with their parents as many other trans people have:

> Until July actually of this year I was avoiding the whole issue with [my parents] under any circumstances. Hiding from them as well and feeling very distant. I felt a rupture with my parents that I had never felt, I began to feel as though from here on the relationship would get worse and worse. You know, I spoke with trans people and almost all trans people get along badly with their family, right? and I have never gotten along badly with them and they were an important part of my life and we talk every two or three days, which for me is a lot. That rupture was very hard for me and it was a very dark time for me. In fact I had plans made in case they decided not to give me money anymore.

MM also admits that this process of existing publicly as trans and nonbinary is extraordinarily stressful in ways that MM had not foreseen. This anxiety about what to reveal, and how, and the realities of being perceived as an "other" permeate and hinders social interaction in a seemingly permanent way:

> It's one of the things that has disturbed me the most. Before it was all very easy. i.e. nobody thinks [about this] when they meet someone. It's "hey what's up" you say your name and that's it. Now it's a whole world unto its own. How do I say it? When do I say it? It's a new permanent stress factor for your whole life that wasn't there before. Bathrooms and things like that threw me off at first because suddenly your life has become very complicated forever.

MA likewise shares their exhaustion with the continual process of explaining and defining oneself to others:

> The truth is that you're forced to constantly come out of the closet. It's not just one time, because, obviously the whole coming out thing once is more associated with your sexuality. You have a partner, you present them and that's that. But I have the feeling that it doesn't matter if it's your orientation or your gender, you're always going to be having to come out of the closet. It wears you down.

Unfortunately, after socially transitioning and moving to Amsterdam, L faced both institutional violence in higher education in the form of regular misgendering as well as street violence and harassment. L again warns against performative allyship, elucidating the difference between a person or place being open and accepting theoretically but not in praxis:

> Dutch society isn't really that open minded. I struggle on a day to day basis to have people use my pronouns, even professors at my university. Even though it's an art school where people are for the most part more open-minded…Then on I get insulted on a regular basis, almost weekly, though previously daily. Verbal and physical violence. People have thrown things at me: rocks, bottles, coins. I've been pushed. I've been grabbed on a street by native Dutch people. It's been shocking, because there's this whole idea that Amsterdam is tolerant, but it really isn't.

One of the most predominant forms of microaggressions against trans and GNC people is misgendering and can be done consciously or unconsciously. L was repeatedly misgendered by professors and staff at their university—even professors who were members of the LGBTQ community–despite going to great administrative lengths to have this corrected, creating an air of hostility. L's frustration with this behavior is not with its hostility, but how it reflects upon people's lack of critical thinking and unwillingness to see a person in their totality:

> It shocks me when someone calls me él or he. For example the other day I was at the gym doing yoga and I went to the women's dressing room…I left the

> dressing room and I ran into someone I knew. I was with my friend and this person called me "he". It simply shocks me that one isn't capable of seeing anything beyond the context of my birth…you see my physical presentation has changed, you see that I'm leaving the women's changing room. I don't understand why you aren't capable of thinking about the language you use and the way you see and understand me.…For me the most important thing is that we when we meet people, we have to learn to note create a language or conversation based directly on what we perceive someone's assigned gender to be…I am aware of the need to look beyond assigned gender, to directly see the person in their form of physical expression, their way of speaking, their way of communicating, their gender expression.

4.3 LANGUAGE

4.3.1 Contentions

Having chosen a feminine name and choosing to go by feminine pronouns, V notes how this causes confusion with regards to her identity. She highlights how people mistakenly confuse one's pronouns as an unambiguous indicator of one's gender; that her choice to refer to herself in the feminine is not a rejection of her nonbinary identity, but a reclamation and celebration of the femininity she had repressed for a long time. She states, "people don't understand that the fact that I use feminine pronouns and call myself V****** doesn't mean that I'm a woman." She goes on to describe her use of feminine pronouns as a powerful form of vindication through language, a reclamation of the femininity which was always weaponized against her in her earlier years, and a way to connect to important feminine figures in V's life:

> I feel like as someone who was born with male privilege and who was also bothered by the fact I was referred to as feminine for a long time, it's a revisioning of that. What is so wrong with being a woman? What's so wrong about being a feminine person? I want to vindicate that. I've always felt more connected to the feminine people in my life and it's a reclaiming that femininity which is so often seen as superfluous, dumb and superficial and instead saying

> "no, this is beautiful, this is something I want to identify with, it's part of me and I want it to be part of me. And I do this with my pronouns.

L came out as trans to their family at the same time as they changed their name. When asked about this "coming out" L makes a point to clarify their contention with the term. Because their queerness was never hidden or repressed, the analogy of concealment and revelation was not descriptive of their experience. Instead L refers to this process as a "clarification", and shifts the onus from the passive perception of others to the agency of the person "coming out":

> The name change happened at the same time as coming out of the closet [as trans]--or really a clarification about my gender—to my family, so like 'I want you to know that I identify this way.' I don't even know if I would call it 'coming out of the closet'; it seems more logical to me to say I clarified the way I refer to myself and how I understand myself. Coming out of the closet puts the onus of the action on how the other is going to receive you, but it's actually more about how you want to be received. Like I just want them to know how to refer to me more than say I'm in a closet.

L's contention with gendered language goes beyond pronouns, and they ask society to examine and deconstruct the ways in which gender hegemony presents itself in common speech. For example, L critiques the assumed neutrality of masculine words:

> It also shocks me when someone refers to me as "dude" o "tío". I understand that these are words that, well I mean that I don't blame people who use them. I know that my best friend's boyfriend uses "dude" with me, with his girlfriend, with everyone but it stands out to me because it's a masculine word. I know that people have associated it with neutrality even though it's not. So this whole thing where people use masculine words as neutral words is something that we should also deconstruct.

Even in languages such as Basque with no grammatical gender, it is still not without its gendered aspects to negotiate. A recognizes that by having no grammatical gender, it is easier to speak Basque without fear of misgendering. However, terms for family members are indeed gendered and require that A make up their own word to describe their position in their family:

> I don't have any problem in Basque...the only things that are gendered are words related to the family, the typical, brother, sister and these things.....it seems to me a great advantage to have a language that doesn't gender things…When my nibling was about a year old and I was already thinking about how I want my nibling to refer to me.... I want my nibling to know me as I am before she starts talking....so I sent a whatsapp to my sister and i told her my name is A and to [my nibling] *oseko* for. *Oseko* is a term I made up by merging *osaba* which is uncle in batua and *izeko* which is aunt. so i merged them and now I'm *oseko*.

.

4.3.2 Language as a tool

V has always enjoyed writing ás a means of expressing herself. She finds comfort in writing as it allows her another way of communicating that allows her to be herself and serves as a positive channel for her energy. She reflects about how reading experiences similar to hers helped her get in touch with her own humanity:

> Writing is often about having to accept myself and be in my body, because many times I try to run away from my feelings, I try not to accept something that is happening to me. Writing is having to channel my energy into something positive for someone, forcing myself to be sincere, and forcing myself to share because it's hard for me many times... jane fonda's biography influenced me a lot because she was an activist for many years and I think her biography is her great legacy: she talks about her bulimia at 25, she let herself be abused in love relationships, and that vulnerability, that introspection, that desire to open up to help other people inspired me a lot and I realized that this is what I wanted to do. I'm not a role model but you can learn from my mistakes, you know? Reading Jane helped me a lot, and seeing that she was a person. I want to be a person.

While V believes in the value of definitions in the context of explaining oneself to others, she also emphasizes the importance of deconstructing those definitions. From her philosophical point of view, definitions are a starting point, not an end goal, and that in order to "queer" or transgress boundaries and norms, one must first understand what they are:

> I think that everyone is nonbinary up to a point, so I don't see it as something foreign. I see it more as a philosophy: being queer, being radical. Not to accept biology as the indicator for how you're supposed to be…I think definitions are important, but from the perspective that the definitions don't actually matter. But to defy those definitions, the definitions need to exist.

4.3.3 The limits of understanding

However, V cautions to not hyperfocus on using and developing the right language. V posits that language will always be reductive when describing the human experience:

> I don't think there's a word to define [my experience] in any language. I don't think it exists. I feel like language is limited. You're never going to be able to express a lot of things. I feel like there aren't words for certain emotions. Those feelings don't have a language. So of course I think Castilian is limiting, but that's because all languages are limiting.

L also highlights how they approach communication by adjusting their expectations as to how much understanding can be achieved, and indeed, how much is actually necessary. By "meeting people where they are", L realizes that not all people have the lived experience or resources to fully understand their lived experience and forgoes unnecessary explanations that would complicate understanding:

> I also don't think I can give them more than what they can handle, I try to take into consideration not just their capacity to assimilate [information] but also their capacity to act. First I have to get them to understand my identity in the way I understand it and then later on we can talk about language… I think I need to take all those thing into account that I'm asking them to do, for them to use a specific language with me and I have to be patient basically, so that they also have the space to understand it as well.

In a conversation with their grandmother, L demonstrates how it is less important–and possibly unfeasible–for their grandmother to understand the nuances of L's identity, and instead focuses on the actions and changes is actually capable of doing:

> The only thing i've fought for [with my grandmother] has been that she use the name I've chosen, which she has used for the first time this summer, that she call me L. I mean, her relationship with me isn't going to change if I explain that I have a non binary identity, you know? I think that simply the fact that she understands I'm called a different way and that she notices my changes, and that she's aware of the changes I'm making is enough understanding for me.

MM and L both share the idea that we are perhaps too focused on language and being understood. As MM remarks, having to go into detail explaining and justifying their gender identity is not only exhausting and vulnerabilizing, but not strictly necessary. Instead, MM notes that understanding an experience is not a prerequisite for respect:

> I don't usually go into more detail because it makes me feel more vulnerable. It's like it's very personal...Well, you don't have to understand it either, right? You just have to respect it and that's it. It's hard to understand it from the outside, because gender can't be explained and I don't understand it deep down either. It's only upon reflection and living my life right now is the only thing that makes it make sense to me. But I couldn't make an argument about why it's like that. It's an act of faith.

A reflects a more ambivalent view with regards to language, and questions the importance of correct language and the energy that must be dedicated to ensuring correct language. They accept the fact that they use language with which people are unfamiliar, and thus misunderstanding and misgendering is to some extent inevitable:

> For me this language thing is more important than I would like it to be. I think the non-binary people in the contexts in which I've learned all this give [language] a lot of importance, it's talked about a lot…I don't know to what extent it is important or not important because there are times when I think that language is very important, and there are other times when I think "well it's a set of sounds and that's it". I just go with what makes me feel good, not to obsess too much. Well, besides the fact that I aspire to use a language that people don't know and don't know how to use, right? So of course I can't get my hopes up. I don't try to be fatalistic either. I try not to get obsessed when people misgender me because it happens every day.

4.3.4 Intelligibility

V recognizes that for heteronormative society today, identity labels such as "cis" or "trans" carry a social and political weight, one that is still highly medicalized and associated with the unnatural. She hopes that one day these words will become neutral descriptors. However, until that day is achieved and these definitions are taken for granted, it is still important to provide people with a definition of one's experience in order to be understood: that is, to be intelligible:

> I think it's really good to make these things visible, it's just a matter of dealing with it in a natural way. By which I mean, many times sometimes you hear these words and it sounds very pathologizing, but we have to get to the moment where "cis" and "trans" are just simply adjectives like "blonde" or "brunette". One day we'll get there but it won't happen in two days. But I do think that we have to define ourselves in order to be understood.

MM recognizes the difficulty the general population has with using neutral pronouns, in great part due to the lack of a non binary social archetype which people can use as reference. In other words, MM recognizes nonbinary identities as unintelligible within the current social framework. It is particularly difficult for people to grasp the concept of duality, or the idea that one could embody multiple gender experiences. This also conditions with whom MM shares their gender experience as MM chooses not to share this aspect of themselves with people who would question their identity:

> The only people with whom I shared this with are people who I know will not question me because otherwise I wouldn't tell them… I guess it's hard for everyone to see someone as agender because that doesn't exist socially. It's even hard for me a lot of the time...Sometimes I've explained it, but most of the time just say non-binary, or lately "a guy" and I don't give more explanations. There are a few times I've called myself an agender man, and I think it's hard for people to understand that it's both things at the same time.

MK came to realize that people understood–and thus accepted–the binary trans experience to a greater extent than nonbinary trans experience. This speaks to the unintelligibility of his gender. Despite not identifying as a binary trans man, MK facilitates understanding through the simplification of their experience:

> My gender isn't fully masculine or feminine, but much closer to the masculine end of the spectrum. Maybe 75% masculine…in my inner circle people know that I'm nonbinary. Saying trans man is something easier, to make things easier when explaining to people. With less context, as in telling you my life story and a whole lesson on gender, and just say "look, I'm a man, just not completely."

Having come out to friends and family, MK began to seek out ways of embodying his gender. They had already decided to pursue hormone therapy and were supported by their parents in this effort, and were supported in wearing a binder by their romantic partner. However, informed by their conversation with their parents, MK began to assume that the complexities of their gender identity as a nonbinary trans man would be

too much for the layperson to understand and would involve too much explanation. Thus, they would present themselves as a more "palatable" gender identity, omitting the nonbinary descriptor:

> Especially with people at my university, I explain to them that I am a trans man and I keep the nonbinary part to myself and share it only with my siblings because it's pretty complicated to begin a whole debate about gender with people that you don't know, so in my second semester of year one I began to as the professors on the committee to refer to me as masculine.

A–who is an educator by profession–is very well aware of the lack of resources, language, and social exposure to gender diverse people that fuel a still predominant ignorance in the general population. However, they push back against the notion that they have to explain their personal experiences–and thus make themselves unnecessarily vulnerable in order to receive external validation:

> Just as with the non-binary gender identity itself, people have no idea what neutral language is all about...so of course it's like you have to explain to people- which again, for me is very easy, but I try to remind myself that it's not that easy for everybody. Plus I'm a language teacher, so to unravel this language stuff is easier for me than it is for other people. I spend all day training myself ...you risk getting asked a lot of questions like and I want people to use a certain language with me, but I don't want to talk about my gender…I don't feel I have the obligation to explain anything. This is important, that sometimes we feel that we have this obligation because society sends a message that your gender is not valid, and so you feel the need to validate it, and that requires explaining and it's like look fuck it. Fuck it. My gender is mine.

MA also explained how the unintelligibility of their gender requires them to engage in a continual process of coming out to people and in different environments. MA chose to alleviate the stress this supposes by embracing gender fluidity, as well as deciding that they only need approval and understanding from their chosen family:

> It's a pain to have to be coming out of the closet all the time because people are so entrenched in their binarism even if you explain it to them once, there'll likely be another situation where you'll have to explain it again. And then there comes a point where I realized that I can flow between identities so that I'm not constantly making an effort depending on the environment. Because I don't need the approval of everybody, I need the approval of my people and to know that my people love me and that's it. Of course it should be different and people should be more open minded, but that's not under your control either.

MA however, shares a particularly revelatory experience regarding unintelligibility. They describe an instance where they come out as non binary to a potential partner, revealing how gender can be constructed through social interaction. In this instance, MA's nonbinary identity directly confronted this other woman's lesbian identity, ultimately dissolving the relationship:

> This person got defensive saying "I'm a lesbian I've only been with women, so if you aren't a woman, what does that make me?"...I tried to explain but she was very reticent. I don't know if I managed to make her mind more flexible, you know? Sometimes it's a lack of mental flexibility…but it's like why do you care? Why do you care how someone wants to be called? Just do it and that's it. You don't actually have to understand anything.

4.3.5 Contextualizing "Queer"

V, who defines herself as queer and is familiarized with queer theory recognizes that the term "queer" is not necessarily a term which is well understood by laypeople. Decontextualized from its original use in English, the term queer is often associated with the elitist ivory tower of academia or the frivolity of pink capitalism and popular aesthetics. V critiques the fact that this is not an unfounded association, as many queer theorists do not take the time to make this knowledge accessible to the masses:

> The problem is that people see [queerness] as commercial or an aesthetic more than anything else. They've turned it into guys with heels and fake nails and people who end up falling into superficial, competitive capitalism and I think that to be queer in itself is to be trash. But trash as in not in that I'm garbage, but that I'm aware of my shit. Being queer is being a person who is questioning the norm and nothing else. There are straight queer people and there are cisgender queer people. For me queer is a philosophy...for me it's being an outsider and being conscious of that...questioning the lies you've been told....And I think for me being queer is a way of life beyond sex and beyond gender...but I think people see it as something very academic and I think that's also a problem. There are many queer theorists who try to be as obscure as possible because in the end what matters most to them is that the academy gives them a pat on the back and tells them "very good honey, very good" and there is no real interest in helping queer people, young queer people who are questioning and I think that it's classist and a very strange elitism.

MA similarly reports how in some lesbian circles, queer theory–and by virtue the idea of nonbinary identities–is repudiated, by associating queer theory with American cultural imperialism:

> Yes, in fact I was in a lesbian group some time ago in which there was a woman who had become a leader and she said that queer theory is capitalism, that's what the USA does, that's Yankeeism, that's neoliberalism… I do not know what that was, as if she were defending binary identities to death.

Having reflected on the frequent inaccessibility of the word queer, V was asked if there is another word which may be less divorced from her social context and thus more intelligible to laypersons. V proposed the term punk, highlighting the parallels between the anti-capitalist, rebellious punk movement to the inherent deconstructive nature of queerness:

> Punk. you realize how many things in your life you do because you want to, how many are by inertia, and how many are because you have been told that is what

> you have to do. To me, being punk is to do that with life in general. Why should I get married? Why should I have children? Why should I have a job? Why should having more money mean you're more successful? Why monogamy? Why be a man? Why be a woman? And then finding your own answers to these. And for me being queer is the same: to ask yourself what is established, to find your own path in the world and in the same respect that it is only yours and that others have the same right to find their path...for me that's what punk is.

MK and other participants have found themselves in the position of having to find simpler ways to explain their experience to others. The same way MK has adopted neutral pronouns in English, they rely on an English word–"queer"--as a simpler way to communicate their gender and sexuality are not heteronormative and to associate themselves with a movement which vindicates past harm. However, they do recognize that the word "queer" has less context in Castilian:

> In English I use it to refer to myself. I think in Spanish it has a little less context, but in English I do use it to refer to myself. I think that it's a generic descriptor that's very useful because it's a way for me to say that I'm not cis or hetero. I'm neither of those things actually, so it's an easier way to say it and I personally like it as well. I like the fact that it's a word that has been reclaimed from a terrible time and with a terrible association. I like that it's been converted into a positive way people can identify, and that's part of what attracts me to it.

Having been misgendered and mistreated by other members of the LGBT community, L makes a distinction between being gay and being queer. L, who identifies as queer, highlights the political nature of the word queer beyond sexuality. Indeed, reducing queerness to sexuality and gender divorces queerness from the anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and intersectional foundation:

> Yes, I consider myself queer in many ways because I feel like my sexuality is chaos and in a way, it's the easiest way to label it and not have to discuss it any further. Simply, to me queer comes with a certain level of intersectionality, it has political weight, it has social consciousness, class consciousness, awareness

> of one's privileges, awareness of racism. So for me a person can be considered queer when their actions are political and have the desire to expand their knowledge…I would never accept that a gay, right-wing person would call themselves "queer".

However, the political implications of the term queer are not attractive to all the participants. A, who had spent several years involved in politics, currently does not wish to politicize their identity and wishes to anchor their identity in introspection and private exploration:

> Before I started to identify as trans or non-binary, back when i was reading about gender and stuff, I often read about the label genderqueer and it's a label i'm comfortable with.... but it's not something I usually use because at the beginning when I started investigating it all, it seemed to have a very political connotation, and I've been doing politics all my life but at this point in my life I wanted to focus more on my own introspection and not so much this political aspect. I also do gender politics but not when I'm defining my identity.

4.4 EDUCATING OTHERS

MM's negative experience with their parents' lack of understanding was profoundly troubling, and they put their transition on hold. Committed to being understood, MM changed their approach and searched for alternative ways to adequately inform their parents since their spoken discussion had not gone well, and MM had now for a few months not spoken to their parents. They decided to compile as much information as possible into a pedagogical document intended to demystify the trans experience:

> I used this great website called genderqueer.me, which I'm not sure if you know about but it belongs to a nonbinary person, it's in English and when I found it I almost started to cry because it contained so much useful information. I started finding testimonials because I had informed myself a ton. I already had that information so I found the best information, organized it, and forwarded emails

> of people with whom I had talked to, photos of people, the Transit Website, all the information I could put together.

MM was hopeful that this approach would make the information easier for their parents to assimilate. Ultimately the document had its intended effect, and MM came to the realization that their parents had simply "gotten scared" by a subject they knew little about. Despite some continuing misunderstanding, MM and their parents reconciled and committed to supporting them throughout the transition process:

> They confessed to me they hadn't understood anything the first time I told them, and that now they did understand me…I sent them a whole bunch of testimonies of parents and children…at least they could see it's not something I had made up…The two of them gave me a hug and said that they had felt very hurt when they saw how bad of a time I was going through, that they never felt that they had rejected me, they simply didn't understand it. But anyway, a hug and that they will love me even with a little mustache. And from then on, I mean, it's something that they would prefer hadn't happened, but well, they say they want to be kept informed for me not to keep hiding things from them. That they would support me and so on.

MK's coming(s) out were uneventful, and went virtually unnoticed by members of their family. This is consistent with MK's description of their parents as liberal and accepting, stating, "they never said anything to me to try and get it out of my head and I never had any issues with them, it was very simple…I was expecting some grand declaration of my sexuality and at the end they were just like 'ok' and left it at that". However, coming out as trans and gender fluid was more complex as MK had to help their parents overcome the same lack of exposure and information MK had navigated personally:

> It took my parents a while to really understand. When we got to talking with them about how they knew what a man or a woman was and they didn't really know how to answer me, the truth is that I've asked a lot of people that question

> and they tend to get really confused. They never know what to answer; if they leave the biological part out, they don't really have an answer. And so we kind of remained there with a difference of opinion and it took them a while to understand the concept.

Despite the effort it takes to explain their identity and lived experiences, MK makes an effort to share their knowledge with younger generations of LGBTQ people. MK recognizes their privilege in being a university student with access to many library resources and that the complexity of these resources as well as their limited availability renders them difficult for laypeople to access. In this regard, MK relies on the community blogs they found useful, as they are written in an accessible way and are free to use online:

> I keep educating others at the same level of understanding [as the tumblr blog] because it's really relatable to teenagers and very young people, and if you don't have a clear context, lived experience, or an idea of queer theory, or gender outside of the binary, it's very useful. For example, acquaintances I have who have ultimately come out of the closet as nonbinary started there as well. People who are at the same university as me have the luck that we have a large library in sociology so in a pinch we can go check out a book and research… but I always prefer that [resources] be easily accessible.

L contrasts their negative experiences with misgendering with a positive one which provoked feelings of gender euphoria and validation in their identity. The value in this experience, according to L, is not only in being understood, but also in they way their existence fosters empathy towards others; their example presents a more positive landscape for gender non conforming youth:

> It's been a bit of a battle, but at the same time one of my professors has a child with a very feminine gender expression and she's been asking me about how to open gender opportunities to a 7 year old. It turns out they speak a lot about me and they refer to me with "hen" which is the Dutch gender neutral

> pronouns…So this professor not only is trying to understand me, but through me, understand her child and I value that a lot.

4.5 COMMUNITY BUILDING

With a newfound security in their identity, MM began to seek out a queer community in Santiago. MM became a local activist, interacted with trans people for the first time, and indeed became among the first in their organization to integrate nonbinary people and narratives into LGBT activism. As they lived their truth, MM noticed that more and more people in their trans community began coming out as nonbinary, speaking to the importance of visibilizing other modes of embodying transness:

> Well, that's when after reading this book I was thinking a lot about gender. I was here in Santiago and I didn't know any people either, that is, no people at all, and I wanted to meet people. Well, one of the first things I did was to write Avante LGBT, an Galician association and I got involved. At first I didn't know anyone trans or anyone non-binary, in fact I did a lot of non-binary activism in Avante because I was very keen on the matter.…well, there were more people in Avante, it's just that they hadn't dared to say it yet, and as I began to come out, I began to find nonbinary people
> everywhere.

Like other respondents, MK had been surrounding themselves with like minded people since highschool, thus "coming out" to his friends was well received and accepted with great ease. At this point in their transition MK almost exclusively socialized with other trans or gender non-conforming people, and those who were cis were people who were already comfortable with gender diversity. In fact, MK draws much inspiration from their queer community and other queer youth, admiring the security with which younger people are accessing resources, questioning gender, and embodying their own gender in fluid and diverse ways:

> My group of friends is just as confused as I am. In fact, the cishetero people in my group of friends are the absolute minority and it may be dumb, but I especially like that they are straight people who are as sure of their own identity as to not feel weird about it. I'm surrounded by people who are very comfortable. I spend a lot of time with young people. In fact, I think that the youngest friend I have is in the first year of high school and is like a sister I absolutely have to protect. She knows there are people in her class who are questioning their gender in a way that I couldn't have dreamed of when I was that young. Super young people with super cool, super coherent ideas about themselves. I'm surrounded by very positive people with a very open attitude.

As an activist, V's writing is public and accessible and hopes to be seen as a resource. The process of writing gives her pause to reflect upon her life, but is also a form of community building: sharing her experiences she hopes allows other trans and GNC people to find the courage and knowledge to begin shaping their own paths:

> In general, my topics are non-binarism, gender, my mental disorders, my bulimia, my anorexia, being queer and what that means to me. For me it's very important to talk about affective relationships and ways of loving because I feel that I have been like people throughout my life have made me feel weird because of how I feel about people. Right now I am practicing relational anarchy and I want to make these things visible, not so much because you have to do the same as me, but get informed, knowledge is power, explore your life options...What I try to be is a catalyst for other's explorations.

Despite their experiences with violence, L feels fortunate to have found a queer community with which to navigate both their transition and the struggles which accompany such a process. However, by identifying this community as a privilege, L highlights the reality that such relationships are often denied to trans people:

> I recognize that I occupy a privileged position where I have a stable house in Amsterdam where my gender expression isn't questioned. I feel supported, I can

> support the rest of the people who aso live in the house because they're all in the same situation. We all belong to a queer minority in some way and I have the support of all of my classmates who have never misgendered me. In that sense, I have a very good inner circle and I feel privileged to have it.

4.6 EMBODIMENT

Much like L, gaining distance from one's hometown allowed for greater freedom to explore their gender embodiment. In A's case, they recall taking the opportunity to shop for masculine clothes for the first time during a visit outside of Euskadi, and the confidence gained during this trip allowed for the continued exploration of their gender at home. Their excitement at taking photos of themselves reveals the importance of a visual manifestation of one's identity:

> I went to Cáceres because a cousin of mine and some other friend lived there. So I was there for about a week or something like that, and since my cousin worked, I had a lot of time on my own to experiment….I went to a store and went to the men's section to shop for clothes, which is something I had never done before: I was super nervous walking into the changing rooms. I took photos of myself in the changing room and I was all happy and that's how I started little by little. I continued renovating my whole closet…I'm also not sure at what point–I think it was parallel to this–that I was uncomfortable with people noticing my chest, so I wanted to wear baggy clothes, and at some point I bought a binder.

This was among the first steps A took in the process of embodiment, and began to consider other ways in which to feel in congruence with their gender. A took into consideration altering various gendered aspects of their appearance such as voice tone, facial hair, and chest size. They were able to access information on these transformative techniques through a Facebook group and other online resources:

> I considered doing something about my voice, right? Well, there are a ton of places online that give you exercises to make your voice deeper…there were people who talked about minoxidil, which is a medication to make your hair grow and there were people who would put it on their face to grow a beard, so I bought that…and because I couldn't use my binder, I also considered getting a mastectomy.

It is important to note that A tried out these forms of embodiment, but did not commit to them due to various forms of inconvenience: adapting the voice was hurting their voice, they were unable to keep up the consistent with minoxidil, or was physically uncomfortable wearing binder. This lack of commitment to specific forms of transition are **not** indicative of less security in their identity.

In attempting to pursue medical transition, A found themselves faced with several bureaucratic processes that gatekeep access to different affirming procedures. In order to access a mastectomy, A had to be on hormones for at least a year. In attempting to seek access to an endocrinologist, A first had to be referred by their primary care physician, who would in turn refer them to a psychiatrist to first issue a psychological evaluation. A had been warned by fellow trans people that these psychiatric evaluations are highly binary, based on stereotypes and pathologization, thus A did not follow through with this process for the time being:

> They'd ask questions about what kind of toys you used to play with when you were a kid or how you have sex, up or down, a process that turned me off a lot and I didn't want to go through it. So now I think they removed that in the Basque Country, it's no longer a process you have to go through legally, right? You're supposed to be able to say "I identify as such" and that's it. But in practice, a lot of people have told me it's still the same. You ask for an appointment with endocrinology and they'll try to send you to psych, and if you don't go they won't give you hormones, even if it's against the law.

Having chosen their name, A decided to pursue a change in the civil registry. Basque does not have grammatical gender and multiple gender neutral names exist in Basque,

allowing A to find a name which matched both their gender and cultural identity. However, the bureaucratic bodies in charge of a name change do not recognize gender neutral names and require the name to be classified as masculine or feminine. Additionally, A was requested at to bring a psychiatric report despite it not being necessary to transition:

> there are a lot of gender neutral names in Euskera, but at the civil registry they have to classify all names as masculine or feminine, and my name was considered "masculine", so in theory so on my ID I couldn't change it…of course, then they would ask you to be medically transitioning in order to change your name…but I wanted to try anyways and so I called the civil registry and the first person to answer the phone directly told me that I couldn't do it, if I wanted to I could use it as a middle name.

4.7 MOVING FORWARD

V has continued to evolve her perception of herself, exploring different relationship dynamics with other trans people, and getting to explore the multiple ways in which both femininity and masculinity intersect to create a uniquely nonbinary experience. Indeed, it is through these supportive queer relationships that V was able to conceptualize both her sexuality and gender, noting that they are intrinsically linked:

> I had this mental block that I couldn't date girls because to date a girl I had to be a boy and I didn't want that. But I did want to. I realized that I do have a masculine energy… It's a masculine femininity, you know? Obviously I'm not gonna be a straight guy, never, and I wouldn't want to be, but I do have a masculine energy and I started to appreciate it in a way I hadn't been able to before…I feel very comfortable with my sexuality and gender in a way I had never felt until now. I am very happy with my masculine and feminine parts.

When asked what they believed would allow for a broader understanding of gender in society, MK listed concrete steps that could be taken to normalize the presence of

nonbinary identities. They emphasize a ground-up approach with a focus on education, however find that task daunting and recognizes the efforts and time this would require:

> For example, including [a third category] on forms at an official level, in education it could be something as basic as in language class eliminating the whole "two genders, words are either masculine or feminine", something like that, right? Starting things from the ground up, which is the only thing that'll actually make a difference, educating kids, making an actual bureaucratic change in general, and I imagine things will slowly integrate into society and day to day things. I imagine that's a way for [nonbinary genders] to be accepted, to have it be everywhere, but it's a titanic task.

When approached with the same question, MA responded specifically to their situation in their male dominated workplace. As a self-proclaimed feminist, MA believes that tackling toxic masculinity and patriarchy is a core aspect of undoing the gender binary and creating safer spaces for gender diverse people:

> The truth is that I often think about it. How it would be to have a workplace where these things [intolerance] don't happen and where you can be free to express yourself without any limitations, without fear of being judged or being singled out as an "other". First of all, I think the root of everything is– especially in my case– because they are very masculinized environments with many cismen. Maybe dismantling their toxic masculinity because it's toxic to themselves and especially for other people. I think that toxic masculinity is part of what makes these environments so binary, and working on that would make it much better. I mean, a much more friendly environment for non-binary people.

Despite this MK has hope for the future and is conscious of an improvement of society's treatment of diverse gender identities, as well as a culture of empathy and inclusion in general:

> I'm noticing that people are more and more empathetic and careful with other people. Maybe not on a macro sociopolitical level, but the human interactions…people who maybe 5 years ago I would've been shocked to see them act like human beings now are people who are decent and understanding. I think being a bully is going out of style. So I think that little by little, we're deconstructing this layer of solid shit that is society.

4.8 Key Points:

While coming out was a varied process for the different participants, all participants reported having abundant support from their friends. However, this is due to the selectiveness all participants employed when seeking community and building relationships, taking care to create an open and supportive environment for themselves. The process of coming out to family, however, was more fraught for the different participants, and even participants who reported having liberal or progressive families had difficulties in communicating their transition to their parents. The mildest reactions included confusion but eventual acceptance, and in the worst cases caused a permanent rift with their families. These familial conflicts, harassment, misgendering, the threat of violence and having to justify their existence continually is a source of constant stress, fear and anxiety for participants.

Participants navigated their use of language in a number of ways and listed contentions such as the equation of pronouns with gender or the use of the masculine neutral. While all participants agreed that respecting one's pronouns and name are basic tenets of respect, some of the participants questioned the limits of language and understanding. Throughout their coming out processes, participants had to negotiate what information to reveal, in what contexts, and how much the participant is capable of understanding. This for many participants meant defaulting to a binary gender in order to be more "intelligible", but also to avoid invasive questions. Most participants identified with the word "queer" in some way, due to its broadness and its political implications. However, some participants did not identify with the label to avoid political implications, do not connect with the history of the word queer, or critique its association with academic elitism.

Secure in their new identities, participants sought to build community through a number of ways, notably through activism in the case of a few of the participants. Participants emphasized the importance of connecting, inspiring, and trans and nonbinary youth.

IV. CONCLUSION

STUDY BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of six self-identifying nonbinary people who were raised in Spain and speak Castilian Spanish as their first language: three nonbinary people, two nonbinary trans men, and one nonbinary woman. More specifically the work aimed to shed light on two main objectives: 1) how one comes to identify as nonbinary and what phenomena inform this process and) how do nonbinary individuals engage with and negotiate hermeneutical dissent. The study used formal, semi-structured qualitative interviews informed by phenomenological methodology and analysis and narrative inquiry to share the stories of six individuals and their journeys for identities.

The two objectives of the work were distilled into three primary questions which guided the interviews with each of the six participants:

1. How does one come to identify as nonbinary?
2. How do you define your gender?
3. What linguistic difficulties and successes have you encountered in attempting to define your identity?

While the original intention of the study was to address questions 1 and 2 in the first interview and question 3 in the second, the participant-driven nature of phenomenological methodology resulted in much more dynamic interviews. Themes relevant to all three questions emerged and re-emerged over the course of both interviews such that ultimately it did not make sense to analyze both interviews separately rather as two parts of an overarching personal narrative. These themes are the following: Gender Awakenings, Gender trouble and Enforcement, There's a Name for That, and Becomings. These four principal themes broadly describe processes shared by all respondents and provide a unifying (albeit not universal) element that speaks to the essence of an experience. Indeed, it is where these narrative and experiences intersect and overlap that meaning emerges (Creswell, 2014). Under these four umbrella

themes, several sub-themes also emerged which highlighted additional similarities but also differences, providing nuance and texture to the overarching themes.

DECONSTRUCTION AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In this section I will discuss the emergent themes and describe how the principal findings of this work answer the two primary research questions. To do so, I will highlight and prioritize the sub-themes which provided the most salient and compelling analysis.

How does one come to identify as nonbinary and what phenomena and hermeneutical resources inform this process?

The development of gender identity historically has provided us with two primary models: 1) biological, psychological, and psychosocial determinant models and 2) transmission and behavioral models. While most biological and psychological analyses have generally been discredited and considered antiquated, behavioral models paved the way for later cognitive-developmental models, namely those Walter Mischel (1966) and Lawrence Kohlberg (1966): the former stating that behavior precedes categorization ("I have been rewarded for doing boy things thus I must be a boy") and the latter claiming that cognition precedes behavior ("I am a girl thus I must like to do girl things"). However, the vast majority of these theorizations have been developed within a cisheterosexual framework that fail to address the variability of gender experiences, nor do they contemplate the possibility that gender development is nonlinear. How does one imitate and reproduce behavior when there is no "nonbinary" behavior to model? How can one cognitively categorize themselves when "nonbinary" does not exist as a category within the social imaginary? Today there is still little qualitative work describing the identity development of trans and nonbinary identities, and less work still produced by transgender academics. Access to participants was limited by self-reported distrust of academia. Several potential participants were approached during the sampling phase, ultimately rejecting the offer to participate based on previous negative experiences with cis researchers and the long historical mistreatment trans people have suffered in the name of science. Those who did

participate agreed to do so because I shared an identity with them and thus trusted my line of inquiry would be appropriate and compassionate. This speaks to the importance of trans and gender diverse academics taking the lead on research within their own communities.

Aaron Devor's (2004) model of transgender identity is a departure from this academic tradition by providing a mode of gender development which is much more nuanced, emphasizes a more nonlinear model and one informed by Devor's own experiences as a transman. The 14 step model includes: The 14 stages include: 1) Abiding anxiety; 2) Identity confusion about originally assigned gender and sex; 3) Identity comparisons about originally assigned gender and sex; 4) Discovery of transexualism; 5) Identity confusion about transexualism; 6) Identity comparisons about transexualism; 7) Tolerance of transsexual identity; 8) Delay before acceptance of transsexual identity; 9) Acceptance of transexualism identity; 10) Delay before transition; 11) Transition; 12) Acceptance of post-transition gender and sex identities; 13) Integration; and 14) Pride (Devor, 2004). However Devor's model again only focuses on his experiences with trans people who identify with a binary gender and in doing so, does not provide insight into what processes like transition and integration look like when "passing" is not a relevant or useful goal.

To begin this process, participants were encouraged to identify their first experiences with their gender identity in childhood. While all participants came out at varying points in time, all of the respondents described the experience of "being aware" of gender in early childhood. This awareness refers to the fact that all participants observed early on that "boys" and "girls" were distinct categories, were treated differently, and had different social expectations. Sometimes this binary division was explicitly enforced with externally imposed signifiers such as uniforms as MA states:

> "At school they used to dress us with a white and blue robe if you were identified as a girl and in white and black if you were a boy. So normative genders were highly signified. There was a caretaker who once wanted to separate me [from the boys] because I had to play with girls and she didn't like that I played with boys. "

Other times this separation was not so explicitly projected, but manifested itself in what behaviors were implicitly expected from children according to their assigned gender as A describes:

> "What would happen is that they [the teachers] would summon the boys to move a box. I would then get angry, why couldn't I move the box? It's something that always bothered me because, like many other things, I didn't understand the difference. These boy and girl things, you know?"

In the case of other participants, this acknowledgement of difference came through the realization that they individually were attracted to the cultural signifiers, modes of being, and ways of interacting associated with the gender "opposite" to the one they were assigned to at birth. V for example describes being interested in femininity rather than in being a girl herself: "I always had it clear that I was much more interested in what being a girl was than what being a boy was." Likewise MK was attracted to the ways in which boys interacted with each other rather than wanting to be a boy: "boys were there, they got covered in mud, they threw spiders at each other, they threw spiders at us and that was how they experienced life and I desired that so much more."

It is interesting to note that none of the participants except for MA ever expressed the desire to be another gender in early childhood, a finding which contrasts directly with the master narrative surrounding transness. Ulrica Engdhal (2014) describes this predominant discourse as the "wrong body" narrative as a dichotomous explanation of transness in which there is a stable, essential gender identity born into "the wrong body": "wrongness is here understood in relation to how the body is gendered, connoting that the body is wrongly gendered in relation to a self-identified gender identity (p. 267). Transness is rendered socially understandable–and therefore valid– by constraining the trans experience to the existing gender binary, while simultaneously not threatening the notion that gender is an immutable and stable part of the human experience. Indeed, being to express a clear and consistent gender identity beginning in childhood has been considered a requirement to access gender affirming care, which

ultimately forces many trans people to lie about their level of identification with a particular gender (Engdahl, 2014; dickey, Hendrix & Bockting, 2015; Doan, 2016). As the results demonstrate, a firmly held gender identity in childhood is not a necessary condition to be trans and emphasizes the nature of gender as a flexible and mutable reality. Given this reality, the recommendation is that gender affirming care and support should not be contingent on whether or not a stable gender identity was present in childhood: in fact, the data collected in this study shows that gender identity need not be stable at all.

If trans and nonbinary children do not *need* a stable gender identity in order to develop a coherent and satisfactory sense of self, then what *do* these children need? The data collected in these narratives suggest that a child's environment needs to be equally flexible, allowing for creative gender expressions without judgment. Five of the six participants reported coming from environments they deemed "progressive" this included: parents either shared parenting and house maintenance equally, subverted traditional roles entirely (ie: the mother is a breadwinner while the father is the primary caretaker), or simply did not attempt to "correct" behavior that could be attributed to their "opposite gender" (ie: playing with dolls, wanting short hair, androgynous dress, etc.). In fact one participant, MK stated their environment was so accepting of their gender exploration that it took them several years to even identify their gender dysphoria:

> I never really had to think about whether I had one or not that young because I didn't have any barriers to break down. I could do whatever I wanted as long as I left the house wearing clothes and socks. They let me do whatever I wanted so I didn't have to think about it that early on, precisely because I didn't encounter any resistance.

While it is no longer believed that children model their behavior on the parent who shares their gender identity, it is indubitable that parents' attitudes and ideologies have an influence on how children understand gender roles. According to (Rodriguez Menéndez & Peña Calvo (2005) children perceive adults as a significant "Other" who serve as models for behavior while possessing the overwhelming power to punish and

condition behavior considered inadequate. Bem (1985) states that from an early age children will internalize the subtle messages about gender roles they observe in their cultural environment s; For many children, a bulk of these early perceptions occur within their home (Epstein and Ward 2011; Gelman et al. 2004). Research has generally concluded that parents with more traditional views on gender roles were more likely to have children who espoused the same views while the inverse is also true when parents hold more egalitarian views (Epstein and Ward 2011; Fulcher 2010; Sutfin et al. 2008).

There is no evidence that a parent's ideology and home environment influences whether or not a child will be trans (neither binary or cis). However, there are ample studies which describe that familial support as a protective factor for trans youth in many instances. In quantitative studies such as Simons et al. (2013) noted that parental support was positively associated with a reduced incidence of depression, a reduction in perceiving transness as a "burden" and generally improved life satisfaction, while Stotzer, Ka'opua, & Diaz, (2014) reported that strong familial ties were associated with higher self-esteem. Qualitatively, it has been found that family support improves mental health and sense of self (Pusch, 2005) as well as their self-definition of marginalized gender and racial identities (Singh, 2003). In this work, two participants in particular described their home environment as essential to their resilience, V stating:

> I think that [family support] has made me turn out half-okay. Even though I was receiving negative feedback from the whole world, my parents always told me that I was perfect…It's perfect because even when enduring so much abuse, I was always able to come home and there I was happy.

In the context of this study, we can theorize that progressive home environments with more flexible gender expectations may grant gender diverse children the self-confidence, safety, and freedom to explore their gender in ways that feel fulfilling and protect them from the negative attention that trans and gender diverse people often face. However, as demonstrated later in the interviews, oftentimes well meaning parents will find themselves lacking the knowledge and tools to adequately support their children throughout the course of their gender identity development. According to Goetze

(2018), the participants as children suffered *effacement,* the hermeneutical injustice incurred when neither the speaker nor the listener have the interpretative tools to make sense of the child's experience. In this sense, parents of trans and gender diverse children can also be assumed to suffer a type of hermeneutical harm, one that harms both the parent in their capacity to ally themselves with the well-being of their children, and the child who can suffer harms at the hands of ignorant care givers. While there are a handful of associations supporting the parents of trans children, moving forward, additional education must be available for parents–all parents–about gender diversity, addressing gender bias, and creating safe environments. While studies such as the nationwide 2022 study indicate how familial systems are a very common site of conflict, this study suggests that when families are supportive, they provide tremendous protection from harms suffered outside the home. Besides a single article by Gómez and Cáceres Feria (2023) I was not able to find any Spanish studies conducted on the potential protective factor of families, and given the potential positive impact on the lives of young trans and nonbinary people, further research must consider investigating this protective factor and analyze the best ways in which families can support their gender-diverse youth.

When environments are unsafe and unsupportive for gender diverse children, they face what I have called in this work "gender trouble". According to Devor (2014), gender anxiety and confusion manifests first as unfocused gender discomfort, followed by the first doubts about the suitability of one's assigned gender. However, Devor's model does not interrogate the origins of this confusion and anxiety. Statements such as "individuals come to recognize that their preferences are for companionship and/or activities socially expected from people of another gender than the one to which they have been assigned at birth," (p.47) characterize gender norms and expectations as passive, rather than imposed. Recalling Riki Wilchin's characterization of gender as "a system of symbols and meanings--and the rules, privileges, and punishments pertaining to their use--for power and sexuality," (p.14), we understand gender to be an actively enforced social phenomenon that often employs violence. We also understand that children learn in response to positive and negative reinforcement from adults, later peer groups, and is ultimately internalized and self-imposed (Mischel, 1972; Rodriguez Menéndez & Peña Calvo, 2005) Instead of positing that dysphoria, gender confusion,

and social discomfort manifest internally in response to individual observation and comparison of gender expectations, this anxiety is in response to hostile reactions to their gender diversity.

The ways in which gender is enforced are numerous and ubiquitous in society, and the punishments for diversion from heteronormative expectations often violent. Indeed, these expectations act as restrictive forces, policing of the body, as well as maintain the medical, legal, and cultural intolerances which ultimately result in increased rates of violence towards trans and gender diverse people (Wilchins in Nestle, 2002; Koyama, 2003; Rodriguez Menéndez & Peña Calvo; 2005; Scott-Dixon, 2006). The manifestation of these methods of enforcement range from gendered harassment to physical violence, and it is enacted by parents and caregivers, peers, educators over the course of one's childhood. All of the six participants described experiences with peer violence and harassment during their secondary education. These sort of behaviors range from insults, jokes and gestures, to physical and sexual assaults (Meyer, 2015). The literature describes a number of motivations behind gender-based abuse in educational settings such as physical appearance and gender expression (Sánches, Penna, & de la Rosa, 2016) or not adopting gendered stereotypes. The participants described experiences which are consistent with the literature, such as harassment due to gender presentation, in this case the presence of body hair on people assigned female at birth (Meyer, 2008). A described being talked about and having pictures taken by strangers without consent: "Before when I used to wear skirts and I didn't shave my legs, and on the metro I'd hear people whispering, but whispering so loudly that I could hear it. And I'm pretty sure they've tried to take a photo of me before". MM also recalls being insulted due to their body hair:

> What they've most harassed me about has always been not removing my body hair, so they bothered me a lot about it, calling me Chewbaka… I wouldn't want to wear a sleeveless shirt because I was ashamed of my body hair being seen…I remember having a bad time, and though I was steadfast with my convictions and continued forward, they did laugh at me and look at me with disdain.

Three of the participants reported verbal violence as well in the form of homophobic insults such as “dyke”, “fag”, or “cocksucker” from peers as well, V stating:

> Suddenly you’re 10 years old, you don’t know what sucking a cock means and they’re calling you cock-sucker and it was a very strange experience for me…And of course at 13 they’re calling me cock-sucker and I wasn’t prepared for that. I was playing SIMS! When you’re queer, you’re sexualized very early.

While harassment from peers obviously causes strife, there is an additional harm caused by educators who see this type of violence but do not intervene either because of a lack of resources as to how to prevent harassment based on gender and sexual orientation, or they themselves have innate and explicit gender biases. Typically after the caregivers and other adult members of the nuclear family, educators have the most contact with children and are also explicitly tasked with teaching and enforcing socially acceptable behaviors. Madeleine Arnot (2002) for example states how "one of the ways in which male hegemony is maintained is obviously through schooling, where it is most easy to transmit a specific set of gender definitions, relations and differences while appearing to be objective" (p. 119). Aside from actively maintaining heteronormativity in the classroom, teachers also passively contribute to the creation of unsafe, homophobic, and transphobic environments through nonintervention in cases of peer abuse. There is a significant amount of literature to determine that teachers are less likely to intervene in cases of sexual, homophobic and transphobic harassment than in other types of bullying. (California Safe Schools Coalition, 2004; Wilson, Griffin & Wren, 2005; Kosciw, Diaz & Greytak, 2006) The data produced in this work supports the literature in this respect, as of two of the respondents described being obligated in gendered activities, such as with MA:

> They made us dance to it and it felt terrible. They were forcing me to perform a role that had nothing to do with who I am. In reality, I felt like a boy. I identified as a boy and I didn’t like performing the role of “girl”.

Two other participants explicitly stated they sought help from teachers and staff and were rebuffed, such as V:

> Nobody cares that they're calling you a fat faggot for 20min, they only care if you get mad. I really don't think there is any empathy. I don't think anyone truly did anything to actively help me on behalf of the teachers. The most they would do is pull me and the girl who was bullying me out of class and tell us to "talk"...I was in despair.

Both of these examples only serve to reinforce the growing body of literature which highlights how critical it is to train educators in gender diversity. In Spain, one study demonstrates that despite a majority of teachers self-reporting tolerant attitudes (Perez-Testor et. al, 2010) teachers are often still hesitant to intervene, reporting a lack of tools and strategies (Álvarez Bernardo, Lara Garrido & García Berbén, 2017). Studies such as Piedra de la Cuadra, Ramírez Macías & Latorre Romero (2014) suggest that even when reporting positive attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals and receiving training, teachers recognize reproducing practices in the classroom which sustain heteronormativity and its associated violence. While studies have determined that educators would benefit from trainings encompassing emotional intelligence, stress and burnout management, and communication strategies (Palomero, Gil-Olarte & Brackett, 2006; Palomero, Fernández Berrocal & Brackett, (2008) I recommend there must be a greater emphasis on personal examination of gendered attitudes and more research on how to best combat personal bias, so as to create environments truly accepting of supportive of gender diverse children.

Without these hermeneutical resources and without community with which to contextualize and support their gender identity, participants found themselves having to take on the responsibility of individually seeking out and engaging with alternative gender narratives. The process of becoming intelligible to one's self and being able to name the phenomenon one is experiencing is critical to the development of one's identity. Devor describes how following a period of experimentation and comparison with alternate modes of being, the discovery of one's transness occurs through accidentally coming into contact with the terms transgender/transexual. This phenomenon of encountering a word is poorly described in his model, and contrasts with the results found in this work, in which participants reported actively sought

language with which to describe their experiences. This study suggests that participants have much more agency. We recall Butler's (1986) analysis of agency and choice in which choosing to embody a gender one is limited to the contextually meaningful and previously established corporeal styles which are rendered intelligible. Participants describe the process of seeking and creating an identity within the confines of the unintelligible.

In contrast with Devor's model, none of the participants accidentally encountered the terms they would later use to describe their identities (nonbinary, genderqueer, agender, etc.) As discussed earlier, respondents began to understand their difference through their multiple interactions with peers and adults and encountering resistance between their modes of being and societal expectations. This is supported by the literature on symbolic interactionism, which emphasizes how humans interact with people and things according to the meaning they attribute to it, how these meanings are created through social interaction, and the continued mediation of these dynamics through interpretative processes (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1986; Carter & Fuler, 2015). The literature describes the importance of social interaction in developing our identities, particularly being both witnessed and mirrored. Poland (2000) highlights how being "seen" for who we really are is essential to one's sense of self and validation, quoting Feldman & Laub (1992) assertion that "it takes two to witness the unconscious" (p. 15). As participant L stated in their interview, seeking community was "useful for my self discovery and to be able to read other people other people who identified as queer or gender non-conforming". Without role models or resources to analyze their processes of discovery and to contextualize their gender within their immediate surroundings, all participants engaged in a search for kinship and community. For most of these participants, this search occurred online and particularly using social media. As participant MK commented in their interview:

> you're always going to find someone just like you and you're going to find someone to talk about that with… it was like this echo chamber of everyone that didn't fit in anywhere else. I think that's why I went from practically not knowing that there were more people than men and women, and the occasional

> trans person, to suddenly having contact with a lot of people with a lot of different genders, sexes and sexual identities.

Research on the impact of online communities has found that they can often serve as safe spaces for marginalized communities such as LGTBQ youth to connect, learn, and support each other. Online communities can provide LGTBQ youth with adequate health information and promote empowered decision making (Mustanski, Lyons, & Garcia, 2011; Downing, 2013) as well as form friendships and connections that would otherwise be impossible (Bryson and MacIntosh 2010; Holloway & Valentine, 2003). The respondents' use of social media corresponds with the literature, as the reasons they enumerated for turning to online communities included finding inspiration for processes of embodiment, transition information, and—critically– discovering the terminology and linguistic options with which they would later define themselves. The research on hermeneutical dissent emphasizes the ways in which interpretative resources are created in marginalized communities, and indeed LGBTQ spaces have developed language to describe marginalized sexual and gender minorities. However, if the individual has yet to access this community, we encounter the hermeneutical injustice of *separation*. While it is certainly commendable that youth are capable of accessing these online communities, there are some problems to highlight such as the dubious safety of online spaces for youth. A study by Gámez-Guadix and Incera (2021) highlights how LGBTQ youth are particularly vulnerable online and suffer high rates of bullying, unwanted sexual communication and sextortion. Despite their high levels of personal awareness, trans and gender diverse children are still children, and benefit from the support of adult guidance and protection. While the technological gap between parents and children is narrowing and some parents may be more capable of helping their children navigate online spaces, many children may not feel able–or safe enough– to ask their caregivers for assistance.

This suggests that there may be a need for creating bridges between trans and gender diverse children and adults who can provide guidance and mentorship for these youth. It is important here to highlight that the limited age range--all young adults who have had access to the internet--means that there is a great opportunity to develop further research. Even within the limited diversity of ages, there are indications that

technological and cultural shifts even within a decade may influence how and when nonbinary people access these interpretative resources. This work, like much work on nonbinary identities in Western contexts, tends to focus on young people, especially as data indicates that the most recent generations are increasing their identification with LGBTQ identities. However, I fear that this contributes to the idea that these identities are novel. The concept of the "elder" has gained significant importance in the LGBTQ community as a means of establishing a legacy of continuity as well recognizing the importance of elders in the transmission of knowledge, queer history, and experience. (Hayashi, 2019) Identifying LGBTQ elders and connecting them with younger people who experience similar marginalization in mentorship programs in the US have found that younger people find that these interpersonal relationships with elders are significantly meaningful (Sheran & Arnold, 2001; Hayashi, 2019; Csaposs, 2022) If we understand that nonbinary people have existed forever, I believe there is important work to be done in identifying older nonbinary people, their experiences with hermeneutical injustice, and the ways interpretative resources are shared outside of the confines of the internet.

Having acquired the information and interpretative resources necessary with which to reconceptualize their experiences with gender, participants began to take steps privately with which to ultimately redefine themselves prior to coming out in the public sphere. The data reflects that this redefinition happened primarily on two fronts: linguistically and corporeally. Linguistically, during this phase, participants experimented adopting different potential labels for themselves, a process which I have identified as "identity juggling" in this work. Before adopting the specific identity labels held at the time of the interview, participants adopted several terms to describe themselves including but not limited to: gay man, lesbian woman, agender, trans (without modifiers such as man/woman/boy/girl), queer, genderqueer, and nonbinary (without modifiers). Participants engaged in these ongoing negotiations of their identities over several years as they acquired more information and increased their participation in trans and gender diverse social circles. The processes of deciding which pronouns to use were similarly varied among the respondents as well, some experimenting with neutral pronouns, or using different pronouns in different contexts, or used different pronouns in other languages. This speaks to the fluidity inherent in the experiences of the participants as

nonbinary people, an assertion which is reinforced by the work of McGuire et al. (2019), Diamond and Butterworth (2008), and Diamond et al. (2012): transition is not a linear, one-time event but an evolving renegotiation of meanings and boundaries.

Corporeal acts of redefinition included processes of embodiment. Authors such as Judith Butler, Julia Serano, and Susan Stryker have written at length about how embodiment is a foundational aspect of the gendered human experience. Stryker (2008) defines embodiment as, “that contingent accomplishment through which the histories of our identities become invested in our corporeal space” (p.153-4). The way one styles and decorates (“marks”) the body is one of the techniques through which gender is performed and enacted (Nayak & Kehily, 2006). Likewise, participants engaged in processes of active embodiment in a number of ways such as altering their forms of dress, wearing makeup, walking differently and changing their posture, and cutting or growing out their hair. However, Devor (2004) states that “in order for persons to legitimate their gender identity claims, they must ultimately have bodies which match their gender claims in socially expected ways" (p. 45). In the case of these nonbinary individuals, their cultural context does not provide “socially expected ways” to perform a nonbinary gender.

It is thoroughly important to highlight the barriers that the participants reported feeling and encountering during these processes. As highlighted above, all of the participants lacked access to nonbinary role models with which to contextualize and develop their gender identities in childhood and adolescence. Due to this, one of the most significant barriers reported in this study is the lack of access to diverse and positive trans and gender diverse narratives which overtime had become internalized. MK for example, recalls how the only trans visibility in popular media focused on negative portrayals of transwomen, to the point where they, “didn’t even know trans men existed”. MM reported a similar experience, stating that until university, the only things they knew about the LGBTQ community were, “flamboyant gay man is a “locaza” and what a drag queen was.” Ultimately this lack of diverse narratives led participants such as A to question whether they “met the criteria" to be considered trans:

> That basically in the end the goal is to try to be like cis people…I have internalized things from this more traditional version of trans, which is still the prevailing one, but I mean there are things that sneak into my head too, things like I have to do X things to be trans, to be more valid as trans, to fit into trans the trans label.

What is reflected here is the phenomenon of prototypicality or in-group normativity, through which in-group membership is defined in accordance with what are perceived to be the embodying qualities of a group (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). When individuals do not meet this criteria, their belonging to the group is in question. Both MM and V both highlight how the predominant narrative surrounding the medicalization of transition caused them anxiety. MM in particular notes how the access to alternative narratives–:there are trans people who don't use hormones, that don't get surgery, that are nonbinary–helped ease their discomfort despite later choosing to take HRT. This speaks to the importance of actively visibilizing a diversity of trans narratives.

If theme 3 focused on the private, individual process of understanding one's self, theme 4 explores the process of becoming intelligible to others and the realities of existing in the public sphere. Devor encompasses these processes in steps 9) acceptance of transsexual or transgender identity, 11) transition and 13) integration. Rather than view these as discrete steps, this work sought to reveal that these events in gender identity discovery are not linear; that indeed one may come out several times, or transition in multiple ways (Devor does not include what we might consider "social transitioning"). Likewise this work calls into question whether or not integration is a necessary or useful goal. In stating, "most people who have undergone gender and sex transitions become seamlessly integrated into society at large," (p.63) Devor presupposes the intelligibility of the post-transition body and experience, no doubt informed by his focus on binary transitions. Jones and Harris (2016) prompt us to ask what to make of the unintelligible in the public sphere where–despite the existence of queerness visible in the mainstream–certain manifestations of gender and sexuality remain misunderstood and hidden; what is of "the monstrous"?

According to Canakis (2015) intelligibility is a central aspect of coming out narratives, in the sense that as coming out narratives become more mainstream, this in turn progressively improves intelligibility through increased visibility: as the visibility of a group increases, so does its normativity. Participants reported numerous types of coming narratives, with many participants coming out more than once as they continued to explore their gender identities and in varying different contexts. However, a unifying theme throughout their testimonies is the discernment employed when choosing when, where, and to whom to come out. The participants reported having a successful coming out to their social circles, and were readily embraced and supported. This is, as participants such as A, L, MK, and V state, due to having previously established community support systems with individuals who are either trans kin, or who have been previously unambiguously supportive of LGBTQ people. All participants were aware of the reported dangers of existing as gender diverse in public, demonstrating varying levels of fear anxiety regarding their own personal safety while coming out. The literature is unambiguous in reporting how trans and gender nonconforming people suffer from increased likelihood of facing verbal, physical, and structural violence (Wilchins in Nestle, 2002; Koyama, 2003; Scott-Dixon, 2006, Grant et al. 2011, Harrison et. al, 2012). Participants reported fearing loneliness, social rejection, lack of intimacy due to their "monstrosity", fear of losing their financial security, and fears of verbal and physical violence. In the case of L, for example, these fears manifested into reality, having suffered from physical assaults on the street. Because of this, the caution with which one comes out is paramount and it is understandable that some participants have chosen not to come out in certain environments and with certain people.

However, coming out to family for some participants was more difficult, with even children of self-reported progressive families encountering resistance, and reflects attitudes also seen in the 2022 nationwide survey regarding the lack of safety felt in familial environments. . Participants such as L, MK, and MM who had previously come out as gay or bisexual to their families with relative ease found that acceptance of dissident sexualities did not translate to an inherent support of trans people within their own family structures. While there is much more limited research analyzing homophobia and transphobia separately, there is some existing literature which shows the ways in which gay and lesbian sexualities have become more normative at the

expense of trans rights and inclusion, in many cases perpetuating transfobia (Gomez Herrera, 2023). Indeed, the gay and lesbian rights movements of the 60s onward have "queered up the world" in the words of Canakis (2015), however this calls into question exactly who has the LGBTQ movement liberated in the past several decades, and suggests that more work should be done analyzing specifically transphobic attitudes to address the concrete needs and challenges of trans and gender conforming individuals.

Though slowly gaining visibility, existing as a minority within a minority poses particular challenges for nonbinary people (Monro, 2019; Stone et. al 2020). It is particularly difficult to navigate social interactions when a large degree of these interactions are mediated by heterosexist and cisgenderist presuppositions that all people fit into two binary, strict social categories (Riggs & Treharne, 2017; Hopkins, 2019). People who are comfortable within the gender binary may not understand the meaning of the terms nonbinary, gender, or may not be familiar with the existence and use of alternative pronouns; the theoretical chapter of this work described such gaps in linguistic resources as a hermeneutical injustice. While there has been some limited work on how epistemic injustice may further entrench and amplify existing socioeconomic inequalities (Kidd, Medina, and Pohlhaus, 2017), as well as some work describing the detrimental effects of epistemic injustice in healthcare settings specifically (Bhakuni & Abimbola, 2021) most of the discussions around hermeneutical injustice are philosophical in nature and few connect hermeneutical injustice to material ones. In this study however, testimony reveals how a hermeneutical injustice can materialize in minority stress, a phenomenon which as measurably negative consequences. (Frost, Lehavot, & Meyer, 2015; Tan et al., 2019)

Having understood that their nonbinary identities are socially unintelligible, participants were often faced with the unique challenge of taking on–often begrudgingly– the role of educators in their families, places of work and study, and peer groups. Much as with coming out, respondents often had to "meet people where they were" adopting an educational strategy that was tailored to their environment and the recipient's capacity to understand. Participant L, for example, chose to limit the information given to their grandmother to simply accepting a name change, stating " I also don't think I can give them more than what they can handle, I try to take into consideration not just their

capacity to assimilate [information] but also their capacity to act." Because of the dangers associated with coming out, some participants such as MM, MK, and A have created personal databases of resources online which they can share with people remotely without the stress of an in-person interaction. In practical day to day matters, some participants such as MK found themselves defaulting to a binary gender in order to avoid inconvenience or intrusive questions. MM specifically mentioned the stress associated with this expectation to educate in every social interaction:

> It's one of the things that has disturbed me the most. Before it was all very easy. i.e. nobody thinks [about this]... Now it's a whole world unto its own. How do I say it? When do I say it? It's a new permanent stress factor for your whole life that wasn't there before.

This, we can identify as a form of minority stress, which contends that (a) LGBT people face unique stressors due to stigma and prejudice and that (b) these stressors cause adverse physical and mental health outcomes (Kelleher, 2009; Meyer & Frost, 2013). In this case in particular, this stress is a direct result of a hermeneutical injustice. This connection is particularly relevant given that: 1) the ways in which hermeneutical injustice affects the health and well-being of individuals is poorly described and 2) this grounds discussions of hermeneutical injustice in the lived realities of trans and gender diverse people, and avoiding the "weightlessness" that plagues much of the writing on gender identity. Discussing words, linguistic, and interpretative resources may seem frivolous within the context of human rights. However, providing real testimonies of epistemological injustice– for example Fricker's original case study in defining Carmita Wood's sexual harassment–allow for the theoretical to become grounded in material reality. We are reminded of Berger's (1972) analysis of visibility, by which Western cultures link what is visible with what is "known". In this sense, this works aims to contribute to this process of "knowing" about the tangible effects of hermeneutical injustice.

However–given the stress and difficulties in making one's self intelligible to others– this work questions whether being understood is fundamentally needed to achieve the sociopolitical goals necessary for trans and gender diverse people to live with all the

freedoms and rights required to live well. More than one respondent addressed their discomfort at having to provide an explanation of the term nonbinary--and by virtue of this their own identities--often to complete strangers. It is important to reiterate that there is no one way to be nonbinary, and that this umbrella term is purposefully broad. These conversations more often than not take on a metaphysical nature: who is (or is not) a man or woman? Or what makes someone (or not) a man or woman? How do you *know* you're nonbinary? Dembroff (2015) questions the usefulness of metaphysics in dealing with these matters, as most metaphysical arguments about social kinds ultimately revolve around the conditions of group membership, which for most people are externally imposed and are nearly impossible to influence or change. Similar criticisms have been made by authors such as Monro (2005), McNay (2014), and McQueen (2014) who state that metaphysical discussions of gender and gender theory are socially weightless, that is that they are divorced from the lived realities of trans and gender diverse people. While metaphysical questions are intellectually interesting, they do little to grant access to healthcare or protect from violence. As our Spanish Speaker M mentioned in their interview, perhaps nonbinary people do not need to be understood, but simply addressed with respect.

How do nonbinary individuals engage with hermeneutical dissent?

This question was posed having made two theoretical assumptions: 1) that language has both the capacity to influence and to be influenced by social realities and, 2) that trans and gender diverse individuals are often victims of hermeneutical injustice. Language plays a particularly important role in shaping the realities and the gender possibilities present in a given social imaginary. According to some recent theorists, language plays a reflexive role in which it not only reflects cultural conventions and patterns of thought, but as such shapes and creates the limits of our understanding (Boroditsky, 2009; Deutscher, 2010). Non-binary people exist in these liminal spaces of understanding, where they do not exist in the social imaginary and are thus rendered unintelligible.

Throughout the interviews participants were encouraged to consider how they define themselves, how they define themselves to others, what resources provided these

definitions, and how those definitions and labels have changed over time. Early on, two participants reflected how an early barrier to their gender expression was a lack of vocabulary to describe their experience. This lack of vocabulary, resources, and testimonies was later identified as a barrier to transition as identified in our earlier discussion on theme three. These reported barriers and deficiencies echo the literature on how LGBT persons suffer from epistemic injustices. Hermeneutical injustice–one of the two forms of epistemic injustice–is characterized by a deficit in collective tools for social interpretation, whereby an individual's experiences are not well understood by themselves and by others. Aside from a lack of vocabulary, participants also reported the lack of positive and diverse trans narratives. No participants reported seeing non binary representation in media or in their immediate environments, and when there was trans representation it was highly alienating: trans feminine people were either comic relief or sexual deviants, and trans masculine people often have no representation at all. The literature on epistemic injustice describes how this particular type of injustice limits the capacity of the individual to trust their judgment, their beliefs, their ability to trust in their perception of phenomena, and their capacity to act (Pohlhaus, 2017; El Kassar, 2021). This last limitation is supported by the data collected in the participant interviews, as many participants reported becoming fully committed to transition upon being able to linguistically identify themselves with a gender label.

Participants reported a number of contentions with language, and reflected on the ways they attempt to create their own epistemologies and meanings. Participant L for example critiques the way in which masculine words are assumed to be neutral both formally (ie: the use of the masculine plural for mixed groups) and informally (the use of the word “dude” as a neutral). Participants V and MK, who use feminine and masculine pronouns respectively, contend that pronouns are not indicative of gender identity and that this in particular is difficult for laypeople to understand. Participant A stressed how even in a language with no grammatical gender such as Basque, they still had to create a gender neutral term to describe their relationship to their nibling. These are examples of what Goetze (2018) refers to as hermeneutical dissent, whereby marginalized groups generate their own collective interpretative resources. Participant L in particular emphasizes the creation of these new interpretative tools, looking beyond presentation and language:

> That's the error that people make and why trans people, a gender people, nonbinary people, genderfluid people have the need to constantly correct or present themselves in a particular way. I know people who have never had to correct me because I don't seek their identity in their gender assignment. I know I have to look beyond that, to see the person in how they move, how they express themselves, the way they communicate.

This creative example in Basque also reveals the potential for additional research. Euskera/Basque is one of five nationally recognized languages in Spain, the others including Castillian, Catalan/Valencian/Balear, Galego/Galician, and Aranese/Occitan. Besides these officially recognized languages, there are a number of dialects such as Andaluz which diverge significantly in cultural context, history, and lexicon to merit investigation. In fact, no participants from Andalusia were present in this work at all and limits its applicability even nationwide. While most participants spoke both Castilian and another regional language, hermeneutical injustice and dissent are poorly described in other Spanish linguistic communities. Given this study's limited population, and given Spain's linguistic diversity, here is potential for exciting new work investigating hermeneutical injustice and dissent in different autonomous communities and the creative ways language evolves across the peninsula.

There is an understanding among the participants that language is limited, and that any attempt to express the whole of one's human experience through language will always be reductive and insufficient. Undoubtedly, language is important to participants such as V, who emphasizes the power of sharing her experience through writing with the hopes that other questioning youth obtain the resources necessary for their own gender discovery, despite stating that, "I don't think there's a word to define [my experience] in any language." Participant A shared a similar ambivalence, who while believing it's critical to address people correctly with regards to their gender identity, they also state that, "I don't know to what extent it is important or not important because there are times when I think that language is very important, and there are other times when I think 'well it's a set of sounds and that's it'".

As more than one participant mentioned, there will always be people who misgender others, most times innocently, and it is not a good use of one's time and energy to assure everyone with one comes in contact with them to gender them correctly. Correct language is not enough to catalyze revolutionary social perspectives. Elisabeth Anderson (2012) highlights how it is undeniably positive that hermeneutical injustice be resolved on an individual level by providing individuals with the interpretative tools to make sense of their own experience, what is ultimately required is a structural, paradigmatic change in institutions systems at large:

> In the face of massive structural injustice, individual epistemic virtue plays a comparable role to the practice of individual charity in the context of massive structural poverty. Just as it would be better and more effective to redesign economic institutions so as to prevent mass poverty in the first place, it would be better to reconfigure epistemic institutions so as to prevent epistemic injustice from arising. Structural injustices call for structural remedies. (p.171)

This recognition of the limitation of language poses a core question which has emerged over the course of this study: how much understanding is needed for a respectful coexistence?

While it is true encountering new terms such as "nonbinary" or "transgender" or "genderqueer" provide moments of revelation and clarity, the general consensus among many participants is that these terms orient rather than make concrete. Labels are flexible; and as respondent V noted, the importance of definitions is not the definition itself, but the conscious transgression of those definitions which characterizes one as nonbinary. If we were to characterize the relationship participants had to their gender identity with one word, an appropriate choice would be dynamic. All participants had multiple ways to refer to themselves over the course of their lifetime dependent on context, resources available, and evolving sense of self. As participants came into their own and developed more confidence in their experience, they concerned themselves less with defining and labeling, coming to accept the ambiguity and unintelligibility of their experience. Participant MM explicitly states that understanding isn't necessary for respect:

> Well, you don't have to understand it either, right? You just have to respect it and that's it. It's hard to understand it from the outside, because gender can't be explained and I don't understand it deep down either…But I couldn't make an argument about why it's like that. It's an act of faith.

MM's use of the word "faith" is worthy of discussion. The concept of faith is widely understood–or intelligible–, in religious and non-religious contexts. Among the definitions the Merriam-Webster dictionary provides for the word faith we find the following: "firm belief in something for which there is no proof." Indeed, people believe in things they don't understand everyday; why must the lives of trans and gender non-coforming individual depend on their intelligibility? For several decades the LGBTQ community has rallied around the politics of representation and visibility with great success. However, this increased visibility has rendered trans and gender nonconforming more visible to hate groups, religious and political conservatives, and has created the space for opposition and regression (Strangio, 2016; George, 2018). There are more online resources, trans public figures and celebrities than ever before, and yet internationally the rights of trans and gender diverse individuals are still threatened. This work also highlights that nonbinary people are capable and informed agents of their experience and have increasing access to interpretative resources and engage in hermeneutical dissent As more and more individuals begin to identify with marginalized genders, it is likely that forms of hermeneutical injustice such as effacement, isolation, and separation will become less relevant to nonbinary people.

There is significant value in promoting visibility and access to a diversity of linguistic resources and queer narratives as a means to combating hermeneutical injustice and unintelligibility. However, the conclusions of this work ultimately pose an ontological contradiction to be addressed in future research. This work set out to explore the ways in which different linguistic and social resources available to an individual contribute to their identity development, and hoped to contribute to the growing body of qualitative centering trans and gender nonconforming narratives. However, beyond the positive benefits that increased visibility offers, this work does not question why this understanding is necessary in order for trans and gender diverse people to avoid stigma

and harm. If participants are able to accept the ambiguity and dynamism of their own genders, why is this so difficult for participants in cisheteronormativity to assimilate? Certainly this work has confirmed that nonbinary people suffer from hermeneutical injustice, specifically hermeneutical obstruction, by which while some groups outside of the nonbinary community have the interpretative resources to make sense of their marginalized existence, but it fails to enter the collective resource due to the ignorance and resistance of some dominant groups. This work suggests that in order to promote epistemic and hermeneutical injustice and improve the material conditions of trans and nonbinary lives, greater emphasis should be places on the still very poorly described hermeneutical obstruction phenomenon. While nonbinary individuals may be capable of becoming intelligible to themselves and their communities, they remain unintelligible to most people outside of that community. To do this, I propose not studying trans and gender diverse individuals, but instead focusing on individuals and systems that are resistance to this dissidence. Trans and nonbinary people have long carried the onus of having to explain themselves within a socio-cultural paradigmatic framework that is unsuppportive of the diversity and expansiveness of human existence. In fact, many nonbinary people who I approached during recruitment rejected participation due to having been asked to participate in numerous studies and dissertations, reduced to interesting subjects of study and often faced with uncomfortable and transphobic interactions with researchers. Given the little attention that has been given to understanding why those who are resistant to gender diversity hold those views, and what beliefs and systems prevent individuals from accepting trans and nonbinary people as reliable narrators of their own experiences, future research in hermeneutical injustice would to well specifically on how to tackle systematic obstruction.

As authors such as Kuhn (2012) and García (2008) have suggested, perhaps what is required is not to fill a knowledge gap, but to embrace a new ontological paradigm shift, by which future research moves away from "understanding" nonbinary identities, to investigating what conditions are necessary for one to accept the unintelligible: what is it that makes the unintelligibility of God divine and the unintelligible gender monstrous? How do we shift the core beliefs of binary thinking, not only with gender, but with any number of social phenomena? The world is innumerably diverse, and future research would do well to investigate the limitations of binary thinking and seek

to propose strategies that promote empathy without understanding, and hopefully reduce the epistemological burden on trans and nonbinary individuals moving forward.

V. ANNEX

Participant Portraits

The researcher interviewed six self-identifying Spanish nonbinary people between the ages 20 and 33 between 2018-2019. The following narrative portraits of each participant are intended to "humanize the experiences and to help the reader understand and feel the essence of their storied lives." (Bizjak, 2017) The concept of the "gem" in phenomenological research for which a researcher "mines" is described by Eatough and Smith (2017) as "a singular remark which jumps out at the researcher or a small extract from an entire interview that the researcher is drawn to and has a hunch might be key to understanding a person's grasp of their world". However, prior to this "mining" of the content of each participant's interview, it is in the spirit of this work to introduce each participant as a whole person which the reader can humanize with greater ease. .

V is a 22 year old nonbinary woman, model, and activist who lives primarily in Barcelona and uses feminine (ella) pronouns. She was raised as an assumed boy in a small catalan town in Girona, Catalunya, speaking both Castilian Spanish and Catalan. V recognizes she was very aware of her identification with femininity even from a young age stating, "*It was clear to me that I was always interested in femininity…I was much more interested in what being a girl was than what being a boy was.*" V. found both the aesthetics associated with traditional femininity and feminine people themselves appealing in a way she could not yet explain. Just as V's femininity was clear to her early on, it was also evident to her family. V explains having perceived that her father and grandfather were not very pleased initially that V would play with barbies, paint her nails or wear heels. Despite this, V reports having loving or supportive parents stating that, "*my father would tell me that I was very special, and that my femininity never bothered him…they never made me feel as though it was bad. And I always felt as though my father treated me more like his daughter than his son."*

V's experience at school was significantly different, however, and she reports having been a victim of bullying, particularly about her presumed identity as a gay male, with peers referring to her as a "dick-sucker" as early as 10 years old. School teachers and staff were unhelpful and negligent, stating that, *"There were many conversations with my mom, the headmaster, a lot of people…and nobody was able to stop it…the worst was feeling as though the teachers didn't care."* V states that these experiences made her wary and distrustful of authority figures, declaring that *"Authority [figures] have never been on my side…just because you have a position of authority doesn't mean you deserve respect."* Despite struggles at school and with peers, V credits the unconditional support from her parents as critical to having survived experiences with bullying. *"Despite all the negative feedback from everybody else, my parents always told me I was perfect…after tolerating so much abuse, I would always come home and be happy,"* she states.

While V was already aware that her gender identity and sexuality were not considered normative, she truly began to conceptualize her gender after being exposed to gender diverse content on social media such as Tumblr.com where she began to follow trans and nonbinary content creators. She states that around the age of 16/17 she began to identify as nonbinary person, despite retaining a stereotypically masculine presentation, looking to genderbending celebrities such as Madonna or David Bowie to inform her own self discovery. However, while recovering from an eating disorder at 19, V decided that she needed to live and manifest her gender identity. This was not without fear, both of violent retaliation but also because of what is expected from a gender transition:

> For whatever reason they're going to make my life impossible, they were going to judge me, kill me, hit me, you have to have all kinds of surgery, your face, your boobs, your vagina. I struggled a lot at the beginning and I became paralyzed…I thought my life was going to become a never ending series of surgeries and it caused me a lot of anxiety.

Despite these initial troubles, V reports having been thoroughly supported through her coming out process by both her biological family, as well as found family and friends,

as well as the queer community she has cultivated around her. *"Honestly, I was surprised by how many [people supported me],"* she said, *"how much everybody understood, even my grandparents…everyone was so kind and cheered me on."* V claims to be at a very happy point in her transition, stating, *"I am very comfortable with my sexuality and gender in a way I never have before. I am comfortable with both my masculine and feminine side, something I hadn't felt until now."*

MM is a 27 year old Master's student and activist living in Santiago de Compostela who identifies as an agender man who uses both neutral (elle) and male (él) pronouns. They speak both Castilian and Gallego. MM was born in Madrid and raised as an assumed girl to civil servants. MM describes their parents as very socially progressive and leftist, who were very keen on equal division of labor in the home and who apparently made a concerted effort not to impose gender roles on MM early on: *"my parents didn't make an effort to construct a gender role in me…in photos I seemed half boy, half something ambiguous…I wore a tiara and sweat pants…my mom would cut my hair very very short."* Despite this, MM found themselves drawn to masculinity. MM is a lifelong fan of role playing games and storytelling, particularly masculine characters, stating, *"I've always been into making up stories with male characters…it didn't even occur to me to make female characters."*

Despite this, MM states they initially did not question the female gender which had been assigned to them, spending time at primary school with other girls, and indeed identified as a girl at the time. Their relationship to their gender changed when entering adolescence, as MM became increasingly frustrated with how girls surrounding them expressed their normative femininity, which caused MM to seek community with other social outcasts (frikis). Around this time, MM began to experiment with a consciously masculine presentation, stating, *"I remember being 11, 12 years old and looking into the mirror and thinking how good looking I would be if I were a boy, and I started wearing masculine clothes. People would confuse me with a boy and it would excite me, that I could pass for one."* While this sort of gender transgression was generally well accepted, MM states how they received significant criticism about their choice to not remove their body hair, even from their parents: *"they called me Chewbacca, didn't like*

going to women's public bathrooms because I would get nasty looks…I was ashamed people could see my hair."

MM first began to identify as queer after reading an article by trans philosopher Paul Preciado on queer theory, stating, *"I don't remember it being traumatic in any way, I read it and thought to myself 'I'm queer!' and that was it. From then on I was 'queer', not a boy or a girl."* However, MM originally rejected a trans identity, as they believed at the time that transgender people only served to reinfore the gender binary:

> Ideologically I was against gender….it was a political position too, that we have to 'abolish gender'. So I thought trans people legitimized gender. Like 'who cares? Why are you doing so much to change genders when it doesn't even matter?' I would be critical with them, it didn't even occur to me that I could be one of them.

MM continued to explore taking on a masculine identity through live role playing games (LARPing) with friends, until ultimately they made the choice to experiment with people referring to them with masculine pronouns in 2016. Soon after they encountered a book called "work in progress" which highlighted trans (both binary and nonbinary) bodies in transition. MM describes this book as their "Pandora's box": *" I realized trans people were not what people had told me: there are trans people who don't take hormones, who don't have surgery, or who are nonbinary…that's when I had to rethink everything."*

MM first came out as agender, then as nonbinary, and finally as an agender man. These various "coming-outs" were generally very well received amongst friends and family. However they became very distressed when faced with resistance from their family once they had made the decision to begin a medical transition. MM was particularly wounded because *"they had taken the other news so well,"* and because they would talk to other trans people and *"almost all trans people have a bad relationship with their families". "I've always gotten along with my family and they were an important part of my life,"* they say, *"that was a very dark time for me."* To attempt to repair the relationship with their parents, MM compiled a document full of information and trans

narratives that they had found online and emailed it to their parents. Today they report a tenuous, yet improving relationship with their family.

L is a 23 year old, nonbinary, textiles student from Madrid, is studying in Amsterdam, and uses neutral pronouns in English/feminine pronouns in Castilian. L was born to divorced parents, has four siblings and was assigned male at birth. L reports having few to no gender expectations thus allowing them the freedom to explore with their gender early on: *"I think I was 4 or 5..I alway found myself to be more comfortable with the girls of my glass..the games they played, the way they moved…I wore sweaters on my head to look like long hair."* These gendered choices were positively reinforced by L's family, who encouraged them in their pursuit of long hair and bought them dolls. Queerness was not unfamiliar to L's family, as they have two lesbian aunts and their parents had many gay friends. However, L did believe they expected them to become a gay man, and that they had not originally considered a trans identity for their child.

Having such strong support at home, L felt confident and resilient enough to withstand the much harassment they experienced at school. They state, *" Even though the kids in class messed with me, I've never let myself be victimized…I have the right to defend myself from anyone attacking me, and that's something I learned from my parents."* However, adolescence was difficult as they found themselves in an abusive relationship from ages 14-17 with a person who repressed the feminine aspects of L's presentation. This taught L to be more selective when choosing relationships and friendships, stating, *"I always avoided getting close to people who I knew would not accept me as I am, because the only thing they do is cause problems."* Once abandoning this relationship, L was one again free to explore their gender through clothes, makeup, and art, and finally identified as nonbinary at 17

A few months later, when L went to art school in Amsterdam, they truly began a social transition, choosing their name and pronouns. Even though L's friends and family were supportive of their coming out, L's family especially struggled with adapting to the name and pronoun changes. Adapting to a new pronoun in Castilian was also challenging for L: since they haven't lived in Spain since coming out as trans, they

haven't had the opportunity to explore pronoun usage in Spanish. Thus, for simplicity, they continue to use feminine pronouns with family and friends back home, while using neutral pronouns in English.

Life in Amsterdam has not been easy for L, who explains the city's residents are not as open minded as it may seem. *"I receive plenty of insults on a weekly basis, before it was daily,"* they report, "*Physical and verbal violence…they've thrown stones at me, they've thrown bottles, coins. I've been pushed. I've been recorded on the street."* L's struggle extends to their university studies as well, as their academic institution's faculty and staff repeatedly misgender L and ignore requests to correct their behavior. Despite these challenges, L has been able to cultivate a queer found family and community in Amsterdam, both socially and academically, which have allowed them to thrive.

MK is a 20 year old nonbinary trans man and university student from Asturias, uses masculine pronouns, and still lives in his family home with his parents. MK was raised assumed to be female in a large, working class family in a small town in Asturias before moving to Oviedo as a young child. MK's parents were fairly liberal in their upbringing, and didn't seem to explicitly enforce any gender roles regarding appearance and behavior, stating that, *"as long as I had clothes and socks on, they kind of let me do whatever I wanted."* However, MK didn't feel particularly alienated from their identification with girlhood at the time despite his tendency to identify with male cartoon characters, claiming that, *"I'm not one of those people who had it very clear from early on, it's something I started realizing a bit later in life."*

At about 14, MK came out of the closet as bisexual and it was well received by his family: *"I thought, well, this label will do and I clung to it for a long time. Today my gender identity is much clearer to me than my sexuality but it's what worked for me at the time."* MK found it difficult to identify with society's portrayal of trans people, due to negative portrayals in traditional media such as television and tabloids, but because he only ever saw trans women represented: *"Trans people in TV shows were always transwomen, and always as comedic relief or as a sexual degenerate,"* he said, *they're selling you this sort of a drag queen sex criminal"*. It was not until MK created a

Tumblr account around the age of 15 that he became aware of the term agender and other nonbinary trans identities. Social media provided MK with his first queer community, stating, *"originally, if you had a gender identity that was lesser known, you could go to Tumblr and find someone just like you, and you'll find someone to talk to about it, and it was like the island of misfit toys".* However, most of the information that MK had access to was in English, a language that he feels comfortable reading in.

When MK headed off to university his friend group changed dramatically and he found himself in a period of personal crisis during which he began to more intensely question his gender identity. He particularly struggled with coming to terms with his masculinity, citing negative perceptions and personal experiences with masculinity: *"It's always been hard to identify with a masculine gender because my experiences with men hadn't been at all positive, I thought to myself 'I don't want to be them' and so I denied myself that part myself for many years.".* Over the years MK identified as agender and genderfluid before finally coming to the conclusion he could be both a transman and nonbinary, a label which gives him "great satisfaction".

By this point, MK was ready to come out to his family and friends for the third time, and while conceptually this last time was the most difficult for his loved ones, he received full support to start HRT. He has established a social group filled with other queer youth who are *"really young people with brilliant and super coherent ideas"* and whom he claims as his role models

A is a 33 year old non binary English teacher from Euskadi (Basque Country) who uses neutral pronouns in both Castilian and English. A also speaks Basque, a language which does not use linguistic genders. A was born to a working class family in Euskadi who assumed them to be female at birth. Unlike some of the younger respondents, A did not question their gender identity until adulthood stating, *"I've heard of other trans people being aware [of their transness] from the time they're really little, and even people who had a clear sense of identity from very early on, but I truly don't remember any such thing."* Despite this, A developed a keen sense for identifying differences in how "boys" and "girls" were expected to look and behave. Even from birth, A states that her gender presentation was always in question:

> I've always been criticized for being hairy, simply because I grow a lot of hair, something I have no control over…Literally since I was born. As a child my mom would always tell me a story…that when I was born, I was placed in her lap and she said "is this my daughter or a monkey?"...then my sister would make fun of me because of my body hair.

As a teenager, A began to feel discomfort around many of the gendered expectations they encountered. When going out with friends, they noticed girls were expected to maintain a certain amount of decorum in social situations, boys were not expected to be accompanied at all times, girls were sexualized very early, stating, *"I was called a whore for the first time at 12 which is an ugly thing, no matter your gender. But obviously when a boy acts in a similar way, he doesn't get judged the same way,"* and other such gendered experiences. A became very resistant to these gendered expectations, participating in feats of strength demonstration against boys, as well as refusing to remove their body hair. In doing so, they opened themselves up to public scrutiny, and reports being harassed and photographed in public.

At about 24 or 25 years of age, A met a transwoman and they began a friendship. A reports this being a critical moment of self discovery: by learning about their new friend's experiences with gender transition, A began to question their own gender identity: *"I remember going through a phase where I would look in the mirror and ask myself, 'What about me? Am I a woman? Do I identify as a woman?' And the answer was always silence."* A decided to explore these doubts through crossdressing at an event with friends, and reports how liberating it was to adopt masculine mannerisms and mode of presentation. With Pandora's box now open, A took to the internet to do more research, discovering the terms "agender" and "nonbinary" and began establishing more relationships with trans people and trans communities online and eventually gained the confidence to socially transition. A describes the revelatory moment with a lot of joy:

> I cut my hair and I wanted it short short…I have a photo from a day I was coming home from work and I had a pants, jacket, and backpack and I looked in the mirror and I thought I looked like a guy and I thought it was so cool….then that night I don't know if I dreamed something, but the point is I woke up

> suddenly with the a very clear idea 'I may not know what gender I am, but I know I'm not a cis woman, and so I must be trans'. There was no way to deny it anymore.

A states that their transition was well received and supported, but only because they were cautious with whom they shared the information. Unfortunately, the already strained relationship between A and their family became even more so following their transition and they do not maintain a relationship with their parents. A has even come out to their students. They began to go exclusively by neutral pronouns and began to change their name and seek counseling with trans-specific psychologists and medical providers. A lives with chronic health problems which has made their plans for seeking a medical transition more difficult, however does not rule out the possibility of a mastectomy to continue the embodiment of their gender.

MA is a 31 year old nonbinary engineer from Aragón who is currently finishing their PhD studies in Norway, and uses primarily neutral and feminine pronouns but is comfortable using any pronouns. They were raised as the eldest child in a family which had an atypical family structure at the time, as their mother was the primary breadwinner while their father was in charge of childrearing and taking care of the home. MA's first memories of gender enforcement date back to preschool, where boys and girls were identified with different colored robes, and they recall the wanting to be a boy because they identified more closely with their roles and expectations: *"[The teacher] wanted to separate me [from the boys] because I was a girl and had to play with girls and she didn't like me playing with boys. She would try to separate me from them because I played football with them and tried to be with them but they wouldn't let me."*

This enforcement continued throughout their school years and became more pronounced in adolescence, reporting that while children may be able to get away with gender exploration gender roles became much more rigid after puberty:

> I think it's one of the more difficult moments in childhood because even though it may have bothered some [adults] that I didn't fit into my gender assigned at birth, whether I liked it or not, there's the justification that they're just children,

> they're supposed to play, be imaginative or creative. But when you're 12, you're obviously not so much a child but a preteen and those norms become even more rigid.

All of this gender enforcement ultimately negatively influenced MA's mental health and self-esteem. In addition to their difficulties with their gender identity, MA has also realized that they were attracted to women. At the time MA had little exposure to people with diverse gender and sexuality, and the only lesbian representation they had been exposed to had been overwhelmingly negative. Discouraged, MA retreated into themselves and began to perform normative gender roles and compulsory heterosexuality.

It was not until MA was in their early twenties and had gone to university that they began to critically examine feminism, gender, queer theory, and seeking out queer role models primarily online. In response to the many years of repression, MA began to reject femininity in all its forms stating, "*I wanted to perform everything that had been denied me in childhood.".* In their late twenties, MA discovered the term nonbinary and identified strongly with it, as their rejection of femininity waned and they came to accept the coexistence of both masculinity and femininity within themselves. It is around this time that they also began experimenting with pronouns.

While coming out to their friends was relatively simple as they had surrounded themselves with a safe LGBTQ chosen family, coming out to their parents was more difficult. Their mother, out of fear and ignorance, tried to dissuade them from what they saw was a path to marginalization and violence. With time, however, MA was able to inform and work with their mother in order to reach a point of understanding and have a positive relationship with her today. At work, MA reports working in a male-dominant, and misogynistic environment and struggles to reconcile their gender in this environment, and they report resorting to subtle ways of challenging gender norms in the workplace.

REFERENCES:

Abrams, D., & Hogg, M. A. (2006). Social identifications: A social psychology of intergroup relations and group processes. Routledge.

Ahearn, L. M. (2001). Language and agency. *Annual review of anthropology, 30*(1), 109-137.

Álvarez Bernardo, G., Lara Garrido, A. S., & García Berbén, A. B. (2017). Acoso escolar LGB-Fóbico. Implicaciones y estrategias para combatirlo.

Anderson, E. (2012). Epistemic justice as a virtue of social institutions. *Social epistemology*, *26*(2), 163-173.

Arnot, M. (2002) Reproducing Gender: Selected critical essays on educational theory and feminist politics. London: Routledge- Falmer.

Ashmore, R. D., & Del Boca, F. K. (1979). Sex stereotypes and implicit personality theory: Toward a cognitive—Social psychological conceptualization. *Sex roles*, *5*(2), 219-248.

Auchmuty, R., & Freedman, R. (2018, August 17). Women's rights and the proposed changes to the Gender Recognition Act. OxHRH Blog. http://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/womens-rights-and-the-proposed-changes-to-the-gender-recognition-act/

Bandura, A., Ross, D., & Ross, S. A. (1963). Imitation of film-mediated aggressive models. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 66, 3-11.

Baril, A. (2016). Francophone Trans/Feminisms: Absence, Silence, Emergence. *Transgender Studies Quarterly, 3*(1-2), 40-47.

Barker, M-J. (2016). Nonbinary genders. Goldberg, A.E. (Ed.), *The Sage Encyclopedia of LGBTQ Studies.* Sage Publications, Inc.

Bartholomew, T. T., Joy, E. E., Kang, E., & Brown, J. (2021). A choir or cacophony? Sample sizes and quality of conveying participants' voices in phenomenological research. *Methodological Innovations, 14*(2), p.1-14.

Bauer, H. (2009). Theorizing female inversion: sexology, discipline, and gender at the fin de siècle. *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, *18*(1), 84-102.

Bem, S. L. (1981). Gender schema theory: A cognitive account of sex typing. *Psychological review*, *88*(4), 354.

Bem, S. L. (1993). The lenses of gender: Transforming the debate on sexual inequality. Yale University Press.

Bengoechea, M. (2015). Cuerpos hablados, cuerpos negados y el fascinante devenir del género gramatical. *Bulletin of Hispanic studies*, *92*(1), 1-24.

Benjamin, H. (1966). The transsexual phenomenon. Ace Publishing Company.

Benner, P. (1994). The tradition and skill of interpretive phenomenology in studying health, illness, and caring practices. *Interpretive phenomenology: Embodiment, caring, and ethics in health and illness*, 99-127.

Berlant, L., & Warner, M. (1998). Sex in public. *Critical inquiry, 24*(2), 547-566.

Berger, John, Blomberg, Sven, Fox, Chris, Dibb, Michael and Hollis, Richard (1972) Ways of Seeing. London: BBC and Penguin Books

Bevan, M. T. (2014). A method of phenomenological interviewing. *Qualitative health research*, *24*(1), 136-144.

Bhakuni, H., & Abimbola, S. (2021). Epistemic injustice in academic global health. *The Lancet Global Health, 9*(10), e1465-e1470.

Binnie, J. (2004). The globalization of sexuality. Sage.

Blank, H. (2012). Straight: The surprisingly short history of heterosexuality. Beacon Press.

Blodgett, S. L., Barocas, S., Daumé III, H., & Wallach, H. (2020). Language (technology) is power: A critical survey of" bias". Retrieved from: https://arxiv.org/pdf/2005.14050.pdf

Blumer, H. (1986). Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method. Univ of California Press.

Blumer, H. (2012). Symbolic interactionism [1969]. Contemporary Sociological Theory, 62.

Bockting, W. (2015). Internalized transphobia. *The international encyclopedia of human sexuality*, 583-625.

Boyce, C., & Neale, P. (2006). Conducting in-depth interviews: A guide for designing and conducting in-depth interviews for evaluation input (Vol. 2). Watertown, MA: Pathfinder international.

Braidotti R (2002) Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bramley, N., & Eatough, V. (2005). The experience of living with Parkinson's disease: An interpretative phenomenological analysis case study. *Psychology & Health, 20*(2), 223-235.

Branco, K. J., Williamson, J. B., & Miller, A. G. (1982). In the eye of the beholder: Contemporary issues in stereotyping. Praeger, New York

Bryant, A., & Charmaz, K. (Eds.) (2007). The SAGE handbook of grounded theory. London: Sage.

Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2005). Identity and interaction: A sociocultural linguistic approach. *Discourse studies, 7*(4-5), 585-614.

Butler, J. (1986). Sex and gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex. *Yale French Studies*, (72),35-49.

Burke, P. J. (1980). The self: Measurement requirements from an interactionist perspective. *Social psychology quarterly*, 18-29.

Byskov, M. F. (2021). What makes epistemic injustice an "injustice"?. *Journal of Social Philosophy*, *52*(1), 114-131.

Callero, P. L. (1985). Role-identity salience. Social psychology quarterly, 203-215.

California Safe Schools Coalition (2004). Safe place to learn: Consequences of Harassment Based on Actual or Perceived Sexual Orientation and Gender Non-Conformity and Steps for Making Schools Safer. Retrieved from: http://www.casafeschools.org/SafePlacetoLearnLow.pdf

Cameron, D., & Kulick, D. (2003). Language and sexuality. Cambridge University Press.

Campbell, M. (1959). Social origins of some early Americans. *Seventeenth-Century America*, 63-89.

Canakis, C. (2015). The desire for identity and the identity of desire: language, gender and sexuality in the Greek context. *Gender & Language, 9*(1), 59-81.

Carrera, M. V., DePalma, R., & Lameiras, M. (2012). Sex/gender identity: Moving beyond fixed and 'natural'categories. *Sexualities, 15*(8), 995-1016.

Chalmers, A. F. (1999). What is this called science. Glasgow: Bell & Bain Ltd.

Chapman S (2006) Thinking about language; Theories of English. Palgrave Macmillan, New York

Cohen-Kettenis, P. T., & Van Goozen, S. H. (1997). Sex reassignment of adolescent transsexuals: a follow-up study. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 36*(2), 263-271.

Cope, E. D. (1870). On the hypothesis of evolution: physical and metaphysical (No. 4). CC Chatfield & Company.

Cope, E. D. (1888). The relation of the sexes to government. New York State Association opposed to woman suffrage.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Crompton, R., & Lyonette, C. (2005). The new gender essentialism–domestic and family 'choices' and their relation to attitudes. *The British journal of sociology*, *56*(4), 601-620.

Csaposs, B. C. (2022). Making meaning of the shared experience of participants in an undergraduate LGBTQ+ mentorship program (Doctoral dissertation, University of Arkansas).

Dawe, A. (1970). The two sociologies. *The British Journal of Sociology*, *21*(2), 207-218.

Deaux, K. (1992). Personalizing identity and socializing self. *Social psychology of identity and the self-concept*, 9-33.

de Gabriel Fernández, N., & Rivas, M. (2010). Elisa e Marcela: más allá de los hombres. Libros del silencio.

Dembroff, R. (2018). Real talk on the metaphysics of gender. *Philosophical topics*, *46*(2), 21-50.

Dembroff, R. (2020). Beyond binary: Genderqueer as a critical gender kind. *Philosophers' Imprint, 20*(9): 1–23.

Denzin NK, Lincoln YS (2000) *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2nd edn. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA

Deogracias, J. J., Johnson, L. L., Meyer-Bahlburg, H. F., Kessler, S. J., Schober, J. M., & Zucker, K. J. (2007). The gender identity/gender dysphoria questionnaire for adolescents and adults. *Journal of sex research, 44*(4), 370-379.

Devor, A. H. (2004). Witnessing and mirroring: A fourteen stage model of transsexual identity formation. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy*, 8(1-2), 41-67.

Diamond, L. M., & Butterworth, M. (2008). Questioning gender and sexual identity: Dynamic links over time. *Sex roles*, *59*, 365-376.

Diamond, L. M. (2020). Gender fluidity and nonbinary gender identities among children and adolescents. *Child Development Perspective*s, *14*(2), 110-115.

dickey, l. m., Hendricks, M. L., & Bockting, W. O. (2016). Innovations in research with transgender and gender nonconforming people and their communities. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity, 3*(2), 187-194.

Doan, P. L. (2016). To count or not to count: Queering measurement and the transgender community. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 89-110.

Downing, G. 2013. Virtual Youth: Non-Heterosexual Young People's Use of the Internet to Negotiate Their Identities and Socio-Sexual Relations. Children's Geographies, 11(1), pp. 44–58.

Duggan, L. (2002). The new homonormativity: The sexual politics of neoliberalism. *Materializing democracy: Toward a revitalized cultural politics*, *10*, 175-194.

Eatough, V., & Smith, J. (2006). I was like a wild wild person: Understanding feelings of anger using interpretative phenomenological analysis. *British Journal of Psychology*, *97*(4), 483-498.

Eatough, V., & Smith, J. A. (2017). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. The Sage handbook of qualitative research in psychology, 193-209.

Eisenberg, D. (1999). La escondida senda. Homosexuality in Spanish history and culture. Spanish Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes. *A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*, 1-21.

El Kassar, N. (2021). The powers of individual and collective intellectual self-trust in dealing with epistemic injustice. *Social Epistemology, 35*(2), 197-209.

Epps, B. (2008). Retos, riesgos, pautas y promesas de la teoría queer. *Revista Iberoamericana*, *74*(225), 897-920.

Escohotado, A. (1989). Filosofía y metodología de las ciencias sociales. Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia.

Fahs, Breanne. 2011. "Dreaded "Otherness" Heteronormative Patrolling in Women's Body Hair Rebellions." *Gender & Societ*y, *25*(4), 451–472.

Fahs, B., & Delgado, D. A. (2011). The specter of excess: Race, class, and gender in women's body hair narratives. In Embodied resistance: Challenging the norms, breaking the rules (pp. 13-25). Vanderbilt University Press.

Falbo, A. (2022). Hermeneutical injustice: Distortion and conceptual aptness. *Hypatia, 37*(2), 343-363.

Fassinger, R. E., & Arseneau, J. R. (2007). "I'd Rather Get Wet Than Be Under That Umbrella": Differentiating the Experiences and Identities of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People. In K. J. Bieschke, R. M. Perez, & K. A. DeBord (Eds.), *Handbook of counseling and psychotherapy with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender clients* (pp. 19–49). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/11482-001

Farquhar, S., & Fitzsimons, P. (2011). Lost in translation: The power of language. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *43*(6), 652-662.

Feinberg, L. 1998. Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue. Boston, MA: Beacon Press

Felman, S. & Laub, D. (1992). Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History. New York: Routledge.

Fernandez-Llebrez, F. (2015). Democratización de las identidades, transgenerismo y malestares de género. *Desafíos, 27*(2), 99-143.

Feyerabend, P. K. (1969). Linguistic arguments and scientific method. *Telos, 1969*(3), 43-63.

Fisher, A. D., Castellini, G., Ristori, J., Casale, H., Giovanardi, G., Carone, N., ... & Maggi, M. (2017). Who has the worst attitudes toward sexual minorities? Comparison of transphobia and homophobia levels in gender dysphoric individuals, the general population and health care providers. *Journal of endocrinological investigation, 40*, 263-273.

Flowers, P., Smith, J. A., Sheeran, P., & Beail, N. (1997). Health and romance: Understanding unprotected sex in relationships between gay men. *British Journal of Health Psychology, 2*(1), 73-86.

Fluvià, A. (2003) *El Moviment Gai a la Clandestinitat del Franquisme*. Barcelona, Laertes.

Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical inquiry*, *8*(4), 777-795.

Friesen, N., Henriksson, C., & Saevi, T. (Eds.). (2012). Hermeneutic phenomenology in education: Method and practice (Vol. 4). Springer Science & Business Media.

Frost, D. M., Lehavot, K., & Meyer, I. H. (2015). Minority stress and physical health among sexual minority individuals. *Journal of behavioral medicine, 38*, 1-8.

Gámez-Guadix, M., & Incera, D. (2021). Homophobia is online: Sexual victimization and risks on the internet and mental health among bisexual, homosexual, pansexual, asexual, and queer adolescents. *Computers in human behavior*, *119*, 106728.

García, L. (2008). Aproximación epistemológica al concepto de ciencia: Una propuesta básica a partir de Kuhn, Popper, Lakatos y Feyerabend. *Andamios, 4,* 185–212.

George, M. A. (2018). The LGBT disconnect: Politics and perils of legal movement formation. Wis. L. Rev., 503.

Giorgi, A. (2005). The phenomenological movement and research in the human sciences. *Nursing science quarterly, 18*(1), 75-82.

Giwa, S., & Greensmith, C. (2012). Race relations and racism in the LGBTQ community of Toronto: Perceptions of gay and queer social service providers of color. *Journal of Homosexuality, 59*(2), 149-185.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967).Discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research. Chicago: Aldine.

Golsworthy, R., & Coyle, A. (1999). Spiritual beliefs and the search for meaning among older adults following partner loss. *Mortality, 4*(1), 21-40.

Goetze, T. S. (2018). Hermeneutical dissent and the species of hermeneutical injustice. *Hypatia, 33*(1), 73-90.

Gómez, A. B. C., & Cáceres-Feria, R. (2023). «Hay niñas con pene y niños con vulva». Asociaciones de familias con hijos e hijas trans: avanzando hacia nuevas maneras de comprender la transgeneridad. *AIBR: Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana, 18*(1), 139-160.

Grant, M. (1998). The Founders of the Western World: a history of Greece and Rome. Barnes & Noble Books.

Gray, J. (2002). Men are from Mars, women are from Venus: How to get what you want in your relationships. Zondorevan.

Greco, L. (2012). Production, circulation and deconstruction of gender norms in LGBTQ speech practices. *Discourse Studies, 14*(5), 567-585.

Grosz, E. (2005). Time travels: Feminism, nature, power. Duke University Press.

Guasch, O. (2013). La construcción cultural de la homosexualidad masculina en España (1970-1995). *Minorías sexuales en España (1970-1995): textos y representaciones* (pp. 11-25). Icaria.

Guasch, O., & Mas Grau, J. (2014). La construcción médico-social de la transexualidad en España (1970-2014). *Gazeta de Antropología, 30*(3). Articulo 06.

Gumperz, J. J., & Levinson, S. C. (1991). Rethinking linguistic relativity. *Current Anthropology, 32*(5), 613-623.

Hannon, M. W. (2014). Against heterosexuality. *First Things, 241*, 27-34.

Halberstam, J. (1998). Transgender butch: Butch/FTM border wars and the masculine continuum. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies, 4*(2), 287-310.

Halperin, D. M. (2003). The normalization of queer theory. *Journal of homosexuality, 45*(2-4), 339-343.

Hanks, W. F. (1996). Language form and communicative practices. *Rethinking linguistic relativity, 1,* 232-270.

Harrison, J., Grant, J., & Herman, J. L. (2012). A gender not listed here: Genderqueers, gender rebels, and otherwise in the National Transgender Discrimination Survey. *LGBTQ Public Policy Journal at the Harvard Kennedy School, 2*(1), 13.

Hartsock, N. (1990). Foucault on power: a theory for women?. In L.J. Nicholson (Ed.) *Feminism/postmodernism* (pp. 157-175). Routledge.

Hayashi, T. (2019). Mattering across generations: Engaging LGBTQ elders and young adults through co-mentorship. *Chronicle of Mentoring and Coaching*, *3*(1).

Heckathorn, D. D. (1997). Respondent-driven sampling: a new approach to the study of hidden populations. *Social problems, 44*(2), 174-199.

Hefferon, K. M., & Ollis, S. (2006). 'Just clicks': an interpretive phenomenological analysis of professional dancers' experience of flow. *Research in Dance Education*, *7*(2), 141-159.

Heron, J. (1981). The philosophical basis for a new paradigm. In P. Reason & J. Rowan (Eds.), Human inquiry (pp. 19-35). New York, NY: Wiley. Retrieved from http://www.human-inquiry.com/Experiential%20Research.pdf

Higate, P. R. (2003). 'Soft Clerks and Hard Civvies': Pluralising Military Masculinities. In Military masculinities: Identity and the state (pp. 22-42). New York: Greenwood.

Hogg, M. A., & Abrams, D. E. (1993). Group motivation: Social psychological perspectives. Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Hogg, M. A., Terry, D. J., & White, K. M. (1995). A tale of two theories: A critical comparison of identity theory with social identity theory. *Social psychology quarterly*, 255-269.

Husserl, E. (1970). The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology: An introduction to phenomenological philosophy. Northwestern University Press.

Ingraham, C. (1994). The heterosexual imaginary: Feminist sociology and theories of gender. *Sociological theory*, 203-219.

IPSOS (2023) España, entre los países del mundo con mayor población LGTB+. Retrieved from: https://www.ipsos.com/es-es/pride-month-2023-9-of-adults-identify-as-lgbt

Jacquemet, M. (2005). Transidiomatic practices: Language and power in the age of globalization. *Language & Communication*, *25*(3), 257-277.

Jackson, S. (2006). Interchanges: Gender, sexuality and heterosexuality: The complexity (and limits) of heteronormativity. *Feminist theory*, *7*(1), 105-121.

Jagose, A., & Genschel, C. (1996). Queer theory (p. 47). Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Janicki, K. (1990). Toward non-essentialist sociolinguistics (Vol. 56). Mouton de Gruyter.

Jarman, M., Walsh, S., & De Lacey, G. (2005). Keeping safe, keeping connected: A qualitative study of HIV-positive women's experiences of partner relationships. *Psychology & Health, 20*(4), 533-551.

Jones, S. H., & Harris, A. (2016). Monsters, desire and the creative queer body. *Continuum, 30*(5), 518-530.

Kagan, J. (1964). Acquisition and significance of sex typing and sex role identity. *Review of child development research, 1*, 137-167.

Karp, I. (1986). Agency and social theory: A review of Anthony Giddens. *American Ethnologist, 13*(1), 131-137.

Katz, J. N. (2007). The invention of heterosexuality. University of Chicago Press.

Kelleher, C. (2009). Minority stress and health: Implications for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) young people. *Counselling psychology quarterly, 22*(4), 373-379.

Kohlberg, L. A. (1966). A cognitive-developmental analysis of children's sex role concepts and attitudes. *The development of sex differences*, 82-173.

Kosciw, J. G., Diaz, E. M., & Greytak, E. A. (2006). The 2005 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools. New York: Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network. Lesbian & Straight Education Network.

Koyama, E. (2003). The transfeminist manifesto. Catching a wave: Reclaiming feminism for the 21st century, 244-259.

von Krafft-Ebing, R. (1894). Zur Psychopathia Sexualis. Fromme.

Kruijver, F. P., Zhou, J. N., Pool, C. W., Hofman, M. A., Gooren, L. J., & Swaab, D. F. (2000). Male-to-female transsexuals have female neuron numbers in a limbic nucleus. *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism*, *85*(5), 2034-2041.

Lakoff G, Johnson M (1980) Metaphors we live by. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago

Lamas, M. (1994). Cuerpo: diferencia sexual y género. *Debate feminista*, *10*, 3-31.

Lanzoni, S. (2009). Sympathy in mind (1876–1900). *Journal of the History of Ideas, 70*(2), 265-287.

Lerma, M. L. (2015). What Judicial Memory for the Amnesty Law of 1977?. In Europe at the Edge of Pluralism (pp. 191-206). Intersentia.

Liinason, M., & Kulpa, R. (2008). Queer studies: methodological approaches. *Graduate Journal of Social Science*, *5*(2), 1-4.

Lindesmith, A., & Strauss, A. (1956). Social Psychology. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Lipton, M. G., Sherr, L., Elford, J., Rustin, M. H., & Clayton, W. J. (2006). Women living with facial hair: the psychological and behavioural burden. *Journal of psychosomatic research, 61*(2), 161-168.

Livia, A., & Hall, K. (Eds.). (1997). Queerly phrased: Language, gender, and sexuality. Oxford University Press.

Llona, M. (2002). Entre señorita y garçonne: historia oral de las mujeres bilbaínas de clase media (1919-1939) (Vol. 40). Universidad de Málaga.

Lloyd, M. (2005). Beyond identity politics: Feminism, power and politics. *Beyond Identity Politics*, 1-208.

Locke, J.,(2008). Of identity and diversity. In J. Perry (Ed.) *Personal Identity. Second Edition* (pp.33-52). University of California Press.

Longhofer, J. L. (2013). Shame in the clinical process with LGBTQ clients. *Clinical social work journal, 41*(3), 297-301.

López, A. (2019). Tú, yo, elle y el lenguaje no binario. *La Linterna del Traductor, 19*, 142-150.

Lucy, J. A. (1997). Linguistic relativity. *Annual review of anthropology, 26*(1), 291-312.

Maccoby, E. E., & Jacklin, C. N. (1978). *The psychology of sex differences* (Vol. 2). Stanford University Press.

MacDougall, C., & Fudge, E. (2001). Planning and recruiting the sample for focus groups and in-depth interviews. *Qualitative health research, 11*(1), 117-126.

Malefakis, E. (1982). Spain and its Francoist heritage. From Dictatorship to Democracy, 215-230.

Martin, C. L., Ruble, D. N., & Szkrybalo, J. (2002). Cognitive theories of early gender development. *Psychological bulletin*, *128*(6), 903.

Martin, M. K., & Voorhies, B. (1975). Supernumerary Sexes. *Female of the Species*, 448.

Mayberry, R. M., Mili, F., & Ofili, E. (2000). Racial and ethnic differences in access to medical care. *Medical Care Research and Review*, 57(1), 108-145.

McCall, G. J., & Simmons, J. L. (1978). *Identities and interactions: An examination of human associations in everyday life* (Rev. ed.). New York, ao.

McKinnon, R. (2016). Epistemic injustice. Philosophy Compass, 11(8), 437-446.

McNay, L. (2008). The trouble with recognition: Subjectivity, suffering, and agency. *Sociological theory, 26*(3), 271-296.

McQueen, P. (2016). Post-identity politics and the social weightlessness of radical gender theory. *Thesis Eleven, 134*(1), 73-88.

Mead, G. H. (1934). Mind, self and society (Vol. 111). University of Chicago Press.: Chicago.

Medina-López-Rey, D., Benítez-Guerra, M. J., & Craig-Alisauskas, T. La asimilación académica de nuevas realidades: el género no binario como quiebre epistemológico en la lingüística española. *Cultura, 2*(2), 3-13.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) Phenomenology of perception. New York, Routledge & Kean F.

Meyer, I. H., & Frost, D. M. (2013). Minority stress and the health of sexual minorities. In C.J. Patterson & A. R. D'Augelli (Eds.), Handbook.of psychology and sexual orientation (pp. 252–266). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Meyer, E. J. (2015). Gender, bullying, and harassment: Strategies to end sexism and homophobia in schools. Teachers College Press.

Miguens, S., Preyer, G., & Morando, C. B. (Eds.). (2015). Pre-reflective consciousness: Sartre and contemporary philosophy of mind. Routledge.

Campbell, M. (1972) Social Origins of Some Early Americans. In SMITH, ed., 17th Century America. N.Y., p. 68.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2018). Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook. Sage publications.

Miller, R. A. (2017). " My voice is definitely strongest in online communities": Students using social media for queer and disability identity-making. *Journal of college student development, 58*(4), 509-525.

Mischel, W. (1966). A social-learning view of sex differences in behavior. *The development of sex differences*, *56*, 81.

Missé, M. (2013). *Transsexualitats: altres mirades possibles*, Editorial UOC.

Mol, A. (2015). Who knows what a woman is . . . On the differences and the relations between the sciences. *Medicine Anthropology Theory, 2*, 57–75

Monro, S. (2005). Beyond male and female: Poststructuralism and the spectrum of gender. *International journal of transgenderism, 8*(1), 3-22.

Motschenbacher, H., & Stegu, M. (2013). Queer Linguistic approaches to discourse. *Discourse & Society, 24*(5), 519–535. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926513486069

Morgenroth, T., & Ryan, M. K. (2021). The effects of gender trouble: An integrative theoretical framework of the perpetuation and disruption of the gender/sex binary. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *16*(6), 1113-1142.

Mustanski, B., Lyons, T., & Garcia, S. C. (2011). Internet use and sexual health of young men who have sex with men: A mixed-methods study. *Archives of sexual behavior, 40*, 289-300.

Nayak, A., & Kehily, M. J. (2006). Gender undone: subversion, regulation and embodiment in the work of Judith Butler. British Journal of Sociology of Education, 27(4), 459-472.

Nestle, J., Howell, C., & Wilchins, R. A. (Eds.). (2002). Genderqueer: Voices from beyond the sexual binary. Alyson Publications.

Nissen, U. K. (2002). Gender in Spanish. *Gender across languages: The linguistic representation of women and men*, *2*, 251-280.

Noble, J.B. (2006) Sons of the Movement: FtMs Risking Incoherence on a Post-Queer Landscape. Toronto: Women's Press.

Noy, C. (2008). Sampling knowledge: The hermeneutics of snowball sampling in qualitative research. *International Journal of social research methodology, 11*(4), 327-344.

Núñez Vidal, Esther (2001) Del tercer sexo a la disforia de género. Transexualidad, medicina y comunidades generodisidentes. Universidad de Barcelona, DEA en Sociología.

Oliver, K. (2001). Witnessing: beyond recognition. U of Minnesota Press.

Otis, L. (2008). Going with your gut: some thoughts on language and the body. *The Lancet*, *372*(9641), 798-799.

Papadopoulos, B. (2020). Una breve historia del español no binario. *Deportate, esuli, profughe*: *Revista telemática del estudio de la memoria femenina.* 31-39. Retrieved from: https://unive.it/pag/fileadmin/user_upload/dipartimenti/DSLCC/documenti/DEP/numeri/n48/07_Papadopoulos_Spanish.pdf

Patton, P. (1994). Foucault's subject of power. *Political Theory Newsletter*, *6*(1), 60-71.

Pauwels, A. (2003). Linguistic sexism and feminist linguistic activism. In J. Holmes & M. Meyerhoff (Eds.), *The handbook of language and gender.* (pp.550-570). Blackwell Publishing.

Pavlidou, T. S. (2015). Introducing the special issue on gender and the Greek language. *Gender and Language, 9*(1), 5-19.

Payne, D. E., & Mussen, P. H. (1956). Parent-child relations and father identification among adolescent boys. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 52*(3), 358.

Pérez-Testor, C., Behar, J., Davins, M., Sala, J. L. C., Castillo, J. A., Salamero, M., ... & Segarra, S. (2010). Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about homosexuality. *The Spanish journal of psychology, 13*(1), 138-155.

Perry, John, ed. 1975. Personal Identity. Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press.

Piedra de la Cuadra, J., Ramírez Macías, G., & Latorre Romero, Á. (2014). Visibilizando lo invisible: creencias del profesorado de educación física sobre homofobia y masculinidades. *Retos: nuevas tendencias en educación física, deporte y recreación, 25*, 60-66.

Pohlhaus, G. (2012). Relational knowing and epistemic injustice: Toward a theory of willful hermeneutical ignorance. *Hypatia, 27*(4), 715-735.

Polkinghorne D (2007) Validity issues in narrative research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 13*, 471–478.

Ortiz, E. R. (2018). Vírgenes, madres y doncellas. Ser mujer durante el Franquismo a través del humor gráfico de La Nueva España. *Asparkia: Investigació feminista, 32*, 75-93.

Oosterhuis, H. (2015). The Invention of Heterosexuality. In *The International Encyclopedia of Human Sexuality* (pp. 520-523). Wiley-Blackwell.

Ramirez, Valentina. 2015. "Reconocer un pronombre oficial para el género neutro en español," Change.org, http://www.change.org/p/real-academia-espa%C3%B1ola-crear-un-pronombreadecuado-para-el-g%C3%A9nero-neutro-en-espa%C3%B1ol-2 . Accessed September 2023.

Reisner, S. L., Greytak, E. A., Parsons, J. T., & Ybarra, M. L. (2015). Gender minority social stress in adolescence: Disparities in adolescent bullying and substance use by gender identity. *The Journal of Sex Research, 52*(3), 243-256.

República Argentina, "Administración nacional de la seguridad social resolución 418/2020," November 24, 2020, retrieved from:

http://www.boletinoficial.gob.ar/detalleAviso/primera/237689/20201125. Accessed September 2023.

Reskin, B. F. (2000). The proximate causes of employment discrimination. *Contemporary sociology*, *29*(2), 319-328.

Rhodes, J., & Smith, J. A. (2010). "The top of my head came off": An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the experience of depression. *Counselling psychology quarterly, 23*(4), 399-409.

Ricoeur, P. (1981). Hermeneutics and the human sciences: Essays on language, action and interpretation. Cambridge university press.

Rodríguez Menéndez, M., & Peña Calvo, J. (2005). Identidad de género y contexto escolar: una revisión de modelos. *Revista española de investigaciones sociológicas (REIS)*, *112*(1), 165-194.

Roughgarden, J. (2004). Evolution and the Embodiment of Gender. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies, 10*(2), 287-291.

Sabater, A. (1962). Gamberros, homosexuales, vagos y maleantes:(estudio juridicó-sociológico)... Edit. Hispano-Europea.

Said, E. (1993). *Culture and Imperialism: The T.S. Eliot lectures at the University of Kent 1985*. New York:Knopf.

Saldaña, J. (2013). The coding manual for qualitative researchers. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.

Sánchez Sainz, M., Penna, M., & De la Rosa, B. (2016). Somos como somos. Deconstruyendo y transformando la escuela. Libros de la Catarata, Madrid.

Sapir, E. (1929). The status of linguistics as a science. *Language*, 207-214.

Sauntson, H., & Morrish, L. (2012). How gay is football this year?: Identity and intersubjectivity in a women's sports team. *Journal of Language and Sexuality, 1*(2), 151-178.

Schilt, K., & Westbrook, L. (2009). Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity: "Gender Normals," Transgender People, and the Social Maintenance of Heterosexuality. *Gender & society, 23*(4), 440-464.

Schuller, K. (2018). The biopolitics of feeling: Race, sex, and science in the nineteenth century. Duke University Press.

Searle, J. (2019). Queer phenomenology, the disruption of heteronormativity, and structurally responsive care. *Advances in Nursing Science, 42*(2), 109-122.

Seidman, I. (2006). Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences. Teachers college press.

Sheran, N., & Arnold, E. A. (2012). Fairy godmothers and guardian angels: A qualitative study of the gay mentorship relationship. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services, 24*(3), 201-220.

Sifaneck, S. J., & Neaigus, A. (2001). The ethnographic accessing, sampling and screening of hidden populations: Heroin sniffers in New York City. *Addiction Research & Theory, 9*(6), 519-543.

Singh, D., Deogracias, J. J., Johnson, L. L., Bradley, S. J., Kibblewhite, S. J., Owen-Anderson, A., ... & Zucker, K. J. (2010). The gender identity/gender dysphoria questionnaire for adolescents and adults: Further validity evidence. *Journal of sex research, 47*(1), 49-58.

Smedley A. Origin of the Idea of Race. Anthropology Newsletter [Internet]. (1997). Available from: Public Broadcasting Service: http://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_04-background-02-09.htm.

Smith, J. A. (1996). Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: Using interpretive phenomenological analysis in health psychology. *Psychology and Health, 11*, 261-271.

Smith, J. A., Michie, S., Allanson, A., & Elwy, R. (2000). Certainty and uncertainty in genetic counselling: A qualitative case study. *Psychology and health, 15*(1), 1-12.

Smith J.A., Osborn, M. (2003) Interpretative phenomenological analysis. J.A. Smith (Ed.), Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods, Sage, London. p. 51-80

Smith, J.A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009) Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE

Solli, H. P. (2015). Battling illness with wellness: A qualitative case study of a young rapper's experiences with music therapy. *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy, 24*(3), 204-231.

Stachowiak, D. M. (2017). Queering it up, strutting our threads, and baring our souls: Genderqueer individuals negotiating social and felt sense of gender. *Journal of Gender Studies, 26*(5), 532-543.

Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2000). Identity theory and social identity theory. *Social psychology quarterly,* 224-237.

Stone, S. (1992). The empire strikes back: A posttranssexual manifesto. Retrieved from:https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=fab86f47df22fd346ba51296520c937b0546f761

Strangio, C. (2016) Staff Attorney, ACLU LGBT & AIDS Project, Presentation to the Columbia Law Sch. Sexuality & Gender Law Clinic (Apr. 5, 2016)

Stryker, S. (1968). Identity salience and role performance: The relevance of symbolic interaction theory for family research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 558-564.

Stryker, S. (1996). 11. My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage. In States of Rage (pp. 195-216). New York University Press.

Stryker, S. (2008). Transgender history, homonormativity, and disciplinarity. *Radical History Review, 2008*(100), 145-157.

Tajfel, H. (1959). Quantitative judgement in social perception. *British Journal of Psychology, 50*(1), 16-29.

Tajfel, H., Turner, J. C., Austin, W. G., & Worchel, S. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. *Organisational identity: A reader*, 56-65.

Takinami, E. P. (2016). Feminized Asians and masculinized Blacks: The construction of gendered races in the United States.

Talbot, M. (2008). 20 Gender Stereotypes: Reproduction and Challenge. *The handbook of language and gender, 25*, 468.

Tan, K. K., Treharne, G. J., Ellis, S. J., Schmidt, J. M., & Veale, J. F. (2019). Gender minority stress: A critical review. Journal of homosexuality. Retrieved from:

https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10289/12496/Gender%20minority%20stress%20-%20A%20critical%20review.pdf?sequence=15&isAllowed=y

Thoits, P. A. (1991). On merging identity theory and stress research. Social psychology quarterly, 101-112.

Tovar-Gálvez, J. C. y García, G. A. (2012). Investigación en la práctica docente universitaria: Obstáculos epistemológicos y alternativas desde la Didáctica General Constructivista. *Educação e Pesquisa*, *38*(4), 881-896.

Trotter II, R. T. (2012). Qualitative research sample design and sample size: Resolving and unresolved issues and inferential imperatives. *Preventive medicine, 55*(5), 398-400.

Turner, J. C. (1985). Social categorization and the self-concept: A social cognitive theory of group behaviour. Advances in group processes: *Theory and research*, *2*, 177-122.

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights:Discrimination and Violence Against Individuals Based on Their Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (Report No. A/HRC/29/23).

. Retrieved from https://undocs.org/A/HRC/29/23 2023.

Valdes, F. (1996). Unpacking hetero-patriarchy: tracing the conflation of sex, gender & (and) sexual orientation to its origins. *Yale JL & Human., 8*, 161.

Van der Toorn, J., Pliskin, R., & Morgenroth, T. (2020). Not quite over the rainbow: The unrelenting and insidious nature of heteronormative ideology. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences, 34,* 160-165.

Van Sant, A. J. (2004). Eighteenth-century sensibility and the novel: The senses in social context. Cambridge University Press.

Vincent, M. (1999, March). The martyrs and the saints: Masculinity and the construction of the Francoist crusade. In History Workshop Journal (pp. 69-98). Oxford University Press.

Warren, C. A., & Levy, K. A. (1991). Electroconvulsive therapy and the elderly. *Journal of Aging Studies, 5*(3), 309-327.

Weedon, C. (1997). Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory (2nd Edition). Oxford: Blackwell.

West, C., & Fenstermaker, S. (1995). Doing difference. *Gender & society, 9*(1), 8-37.

West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender & society, 1*(2), 125-151.

Whorf, B. L. (1944). The relation of habitual thought and behavior to language. Etc: a review of general semantics, 197-215.

Wilson, I., Griffin, C., & Wren, B. (2005). The interaction between young people with atypical gender identity organization and their peers. *Journal of Health Psychology*, *10*(3), 307-315.

Witt, C. (2011). What is gender essentialism?. In Feminist metaphysics (pp. 11-25). Springer, Dordrecht.

Wójtowicz, J. (2017). Identidades subversivas: la expresión del género no binario por hablantes de inglés y de español. *Cracovia: Universidad Jaguelónica de Cracovia*.

Zaner, R.M. (1970). The way of phenomenology. New York, Pegasus.

Zanghellini, A. (2020). Philosophical problems with the gender-critical feminist argument against trans inclusion. *Sage open, 10(*2), 2158244020927029.