Life on the Gender Border:

A Qualitative Analysis of the Experiences of People with a Non-Binary Gender Identity

Caitlyn Drinkwater

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Abstract

While the transgender community has experienced increased visibility over the last decade, most of the attention has been focused on transgender people who identify as either men or women. However, there is also a significant proportion of the transgender community who do not identify as either male or female who are often referred to as non-binary (Matsuno & Budge., 2017). Non-binary people present a challenge to the assumption in contemporary Western society that people are either male or female. This leads non-binary people to have some unique experiences and to also face their own specific difficulties in their lives.

This research thesis examines the lived experiences of 10 people who identify as non-binary. It does this through the qualitative research method known as photo elicitation, which involves the participants taking photographs of people, scenes and objects that they feel are important to them, which are used to generate discussion during an interview. A narrative analysis was then conducted on the transcripts of the interviews, and several common "milestones" were identified. These milestones were labelled "pre-coming out identity", "developing awareness of oneself as non-binary" and "living as non-binary". These milestones were used to create a framework through which each of the narratives that were presented by the participants could be examined. The findings of this study are presented in a case study format.

While all the participants identified as non-binary, they varied greatly in how they understood their identities and how they interacted with the world. In particular, the participants had very different relationships with their bodies, with some having a strong need to physically transition while others feeling no discomfort with their bodies. All participants discussed the challenges and discriminations that they have faced from both institutions and the larger society. Through analyzing these narratives, a greater understanding of the experience of living as non-binary can be gathered, which can help to inform how to better meet the needs of the non-binary community.

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Glossary

Assigned female at birth (AFAB): A term that refers to people who were assigned the sex of female at birth; replaces the earlier terms of "natal female" and "genetic female".

Assigned male at birth (AMAB): A term that refers to people who were assigned the sex of male at birth; replaces the earlier terms of "natal male" and "genetic male".

Binder: A vest-like garment that is used to conceal the appearance of breasts.

Binding: The act of concealing one's breasts, either through the use of a binder or through more rudimentary methods, such as using non-elastic bandages.

Cisgender: A term to refer to people whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth.

Cisnormative: The assumption that all or at least the majority of people are cisgender and that their experiences should be treated as the default state of human beings.

Gender binary: A term that is used to refer to the Western cultural norm that dictates that there are only two genders, male and female.

Genderqueer: A term that refers to people who have a gender identity that does not fit normative assumptions of male or female. It can be used as an umbrella term, or a specific identity.

Gender-affirming healthcare: A term referring to medical services that help people physically transition to their identified gender. This can include the use of HRT and surgical interventions.

Gender-affirming surgery: Refers to surgical interventions that are used to help transgender and non-binary people's bodies more closely reflect their identified gender. This can include genital surgeries, surgeries to masculinize the chest or to feminize the facial appearance.

Gender fluid: Refers to someone whose gender identity and presentation shifts between male and female.

Gender variant people: A phrase referring to all people who do not fit into the strict male–female gender binary.

Heteronormative: The assumption that all or the majority of people are heterosexual and that being heterosexual reflects the default state of being.

HRT: An acronym for "Hormone Replacement Therapy", the use of hormone treatments to either masculinize or feminize someone's physical experience.

Intersex: A term that refers to people who are born in a body that does not fit the normative social constructions of male and female.

LGBTQIA+: An acronym that refers to people within the Western culture who identify with either a non-heterosexual sexuality or a non-cisgender gender identity. It stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual.

Medical/physical transition: Terms used to refer to the use of HRT or gender affirming surgeries to alter one's sex characteristics to reflect one's identified gender.

Third gender: A term that is used to refer to subpopulations within cultures where it is acknowledged that there are more than two gender identities.

Transition: When related to transgender and non-binary people, this refers to the process of altering one's gender expression to reflect their identified gender. May or may not include medical interventions to alter one's sex characteristics.

Transsexual: A term referring to people who do not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth, and often seek medical intervention to realign their physical sex.

Transgender: A term referring to people who do not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. Often used as an umbrella term, which includes people who identify as transsexual, genderqueer, or with an indigenous third gender identity label. Often shortened to "trans".

Non-binary: An identity label that refers to people who do not fit the normative assumptions of male or female and may reject the gender binary entirely. This term is becoming more common than genderqueer, although both are used interchangeably.

Queer: An umbrella term that refers to non-heteronormative sexualities; it may not be used by everyone.

Chapter 1: Introduction

"Gender is the poetry each of us makes out of the language we are taught."

- Leslie Feinberg

In the early 21st century, public visibility around transgender people increased exponentially. While most of the attention has tended to be focused on either trans men or trans women, there is also a growing focus on people who identify with a gender that is outside of the male–female gender binary. One example of these other genders is gender fluid, referring to a gender identity that varies over time. Another example is agender, meaning that they do not identify with any gender (Oliphant et al., 2018). Collectively, gender identities that are neither male nor female are referred to as non-binary. The emergence of non-binary gender identity as a concept presents a challenge to how Western society understands gender, it is commonly understood in Western societies that gender is a discrete binary of male and female and that one's gender is analogous with one's sex. The existence of the concept of non-binary identity creates the possibility that an individual could be neither male nor female, which unsettles the preconceived concept of the gender binary. This has created some confusion on how non-binary individuals fit into a world that is so frequently divided into men and women, and raises questions about what it "means" to be non-binary in a binary gendered world.

Given that the prominence of non-binary gender identities is a recent development, research with people who identify as non-binary is a small but growing field (Matsuno & Budge, 2017). This study adds to this growing research by analyzing the accounts of 10 non-binary individuals from Aotearoa New Zealand. The study looks at how several individuals came to understand themselves as non-binary, the challenges they are confronted with, and how being non-binary has enriched their lives. Through taking this approach, the study aims to inform the reader of the lived experiences of people who identify as a non-binary gender and also offer some suggestions for how communities and institutions can better accommodate this group.

Before discussing the study that was conducted, this thesis will summarize the relevant literature. This will include a look at the emergence of the discourse around non-binary gender

identities in the nineties before offering an overview of the quantitative data that has been gathered on people from this group. Following this, there will be a discussion of studies that have focused on more individual experiences. Finally there will be an overview of some proposed developmental models for non-binary gender identity.

A note should be made about the use of terminology. Given that the non-binary community is relatively young, the terminology is still evolving, and so a glossary has been provided to give definitions for how the words are used within this thesis. At times, this thesis may refer to terminology used in older studies, which is now outdated, and in these cases, the outdated terms are marked with quotation marks.

While the gender binary is often considered to be the norm, examples of people who do not fit strictly into the male or female categories can be found in many cultures and also in the history of the West (Feinberg, 2005). Examples include the Samoan fa'afafine or the Tongan fakaleiti, both of which are identity labels that are applied to male sexed individuals who function in feminine social roles (Schmidt, 2016). While some theorists like Feinberg describe these individuals as being precursors to contemporary trans and non-binary people, this line of reasoning has also been critiqued for imposing Western understandings of gender onto other cultures (Towle & Morgan, 2002). In their rebuttal to Feinberg's work, Towle and Morgan argued that it is important to analyze the cultural context in which these diverse gender identities and expressions are represented. By doing this, it becomes possible to understand what role these gender variant people take in their own cultures.

In the cultural West, people's understandings of individuals who identified with a gender that was not congruent with their birth sex were influenced by Christianity, which viewed any deviation from heteronormativity to be immoral (Roscoe, 1996). In the 19th century, science arose as the cultural authority in the West, and some scientists began to take on the role as experts of both the mind and human sexuality. Many of these early sexologists attempted to redefine gender and sexual variant behavior as a psychological pathology rather than a moral failing, with the implication that

such individuals should be treated rather than punished (Oosterhuis, 1997). In the early 20th century, medical transitioning services were occasionally available in parts of Europe and the US, but these services were experimental, of inconsistent quality, and often illegal (Stone, 1994). Throughout the early 20th century, gender transitioning remained a mostly hidden phenomenon, but this changed with the popularization of Christine Jorgensen's story in the news media of 1952. Her story not only allowed the concept of sex change to enter the popular consciousness, but also saw an increased number of people seeking to transition medically (Meyerowitz, 1998). Portrayals of Jorgensen (and other early media portrayals of transgender people) tended to focus on transgender women and would elicit sympathy by portraying their subjects as heteronormative, cisnormative, and middle class, while any display of masculine or gender variant attributes were treated with derision (Serlin, 1995). This attitude of demanding gender conformity from transgender individuals was also present in medical professionals who specialized in gender affirming healthcare. Professionals gave access to medical intervention only to those who could adhere to stereotypical understandings of what it meant to be a woman or a man (Serano, 2016). People who did not adhere to these standards were viewed as a "failure" by clinicians, to the extent that the lack of "successful" outcomes was used to shut down the Johns Hopkins gender-identity clinic in 1979 (Siotos et al., 2019).

While transgender people became more accepted towards the end of the 20th century, the transition journey of moving from cisnormative male to cisnormative female, or vice versa, continued to be the most prominent and socially accepted (Lovelock, 2017). This led to a popular understanding of trans people as being "born in the wrong body", and that transitioning was a way to give trans people the "right" body – a narrative that was frequently reinforced by both medical literature and the biographies on transgender people, which were released to the general public (Stone, 1994).

In 1990, Judith Butler published her book *Gender Trouble*. This book was one of the founding texts in queer theory, which challenged the popularly held assumption that gender was an innate quality and instead argued that gender is a social construct performed through culturally

influenced acts. Butler argued that people construct their gender by performing the cultural script that defines what it is to be a “man” or “woman”. For some transgender people, queer theory was seen as liberating, as it not only argues that all genders are equally valid, but it also encourages people to explore their identity outside of their socially prescribed roles (Prosser, 1998). However, others found the interpretation of their identity as performative to be invalidating and dismissive of their struggle to have their identity recognized, which led to debates around who could be considered to be transgender (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007). While some queer theorists have seen transgender identity as a disruptive identity, which challenges cultural gender norms, others have argued this is not the case. Some have argued that as transsexual narratives have been popularized, the concept of “transgender” becomes a site in which all gender nonconformity is contained, thereby reinforcing the conventional gender binary (Stryker, 2004). This argument states that, rather than challenging gender norms, “transgender” has become a catchall “other” category in which all deviation from gender norms is contained. This allows gender norms amongst cisgender people to go unchallenged as transgender people are seen as a distinct “other” that cisgender people can treat as having no relevance to their own personal experience.

In the nineties, conventional cisnormative narratives of gender identity came under criticism from within the transgender community. One of these criticisms came from Leslie Feinberg who wrote the 1993 novel *Stone Butch Blues* based on her own experiences. Rather than telling a conventional “born in the wrong body” narrative, Feinberg’s novel tells the story of an individual who transitions from a woman to a man before coming to a conceptualization of being neither. Feinberg also wrote *Transgender Warriors* (1996), a non-fiction book that looks at examples of gender nonconforming individuals across cultures and from historical accounts. Alongside Leslie Feinberg, there was the emergence of transgender theory written by transgender people themselves. This included transgender feminists such as Julia Serano (2016) and Sandy Stone (1994), who criticized how transgender women were expected to conform to stereotyped notions of womanhood to receive healthcare. Another example is Jack Halberstam whose 1998 book *Female Masculinity*

gave an historical account of gender nonconforming women within Western culture. These theorists were often influenced by Butler's (1990) theory that gender was constructed through performative acts. Collectively, these theorists argued that transgender people should not be seen as a pathology but rather they should be seen as a normal variation of human experience.

Alongside the growth in transgender theory, there began to be a growing prominence of people who used new identity labels to state how they do not identify as male or female. Some of these identity labels came from culture-specific backgrounds, such as the use of the term "two-spirit" by gender variant Native Americans in the early nineties (Jacobs, 1997). Others developed out of the transgender and queer cultures of the time. The most prominent of these identities is "genderqueer", which came to prominence in the mid-1990s (Nestle, Howell, & Wilchins, 2002). "Genderqueer" is defined as a distinct gender identity that is neither male nor female. While the term genderqueer initially had more prominence, over time the term "non-binary gender" came to be more popular (Richards et al., 2016). Discussions around these diverse gender expressions were facilitated by online spaces, such as Tumblr, which contains a significant gender minority subculture who use the site to share news, art work, and opinions (Fink & Miller, 2014). Non-binary gender identities have also found acceptance in more mainstream social media sites, such as Facebook, which offers 74 gender options for its users (Williams, 2014).

When looking at non-binary people in contemporary times, data is limited. Previous positivist research into non-binary gender identity has been hindered by the fact that research has often grouped all gender variant people under one label (such as transsexual). This can exclude or silence the experiences of individuals who do not fit those categories (Sanger, 2008). From a researcher's perspective, there has also been difficulty in recruiting non-binary participants for a sample that is large enough to draw meaningful statistical conclusions (Frohard-Dourlent et al., 2016). This has led to some apprehension to addressing issues around gender identity in quantitative research. A recent example of this was the recent New Zealand census that did not address transgender and non-binary issues due to a perceived inability to design a sufficient set of questions (McDonald, 2017).

Despite these limitations, there have been some attempts to gather some population statistics on non-binary people. One study looked at a Dutch population sample of 8064 participants and found that 4.6% of assigned to the male gender at birth (AMAB) people, and 3.2% of people assigned to the female gender at birth (AFAB) reported feeling like they had an equal identification with both male and female genders. AMAB people numbering 1.1% and 0.8% of AFAB people reported a stronger identification with a sex other than the one that they were assigned at birth (Kuyper & Wijsen, 2014). Another study looked at two population surveys of people who belonged to a "sexual minority", one of 1832 Flemish people, and one of 2472 residents of Flanders, Belgium (Van Caenegem et al., 2015). The term "sexual minority" was used to include people who did not identify with the LGBT community, and recruitment for the study portrayed the study as being about "sexual health" in general. The researchers found that the prevalence of identification with a non-binary gender was 1.8% amongst AMAB people who belonged to a sexual minority, and 4.1% amongst AFAB people who identified with a sexual minority (Van Caenegem et al., 2015).

Studies that have focused on the transgender community have found that non-binary people are a significant proportion of that community. A study of an online sample of 292 transgender people found that 72.3% of the sample identified with more than one gender, indicating that transgender people's understanding of their identity may not fit into discrete categories (Kuper, Nussbaum, & Mustanski, 2012). In a study by Kuper et al. (2012), they found that non-binary people tended to be white, younger, and had attained higher levels of education. Sixty-one percent of the sample who identified as non-binary were AFAB, 38.4% were AMAB and 0.7% were assigned intersex at birth. A recent study administered an online survey to 1138 transgender and non-binary people based in Aotearoa New Zealand (Veale et al., 2019). This study found that 45% identified as non-binary. The results of the survey by Veale et al. reflect the findings by Kuper et al. that non-binary participants tended to be younger, as just under half of all non-binary respondents in Veale et al. were under 25 years old.

Some research suggests that non-binary people are predominantly AFAB. For example, Grant and Herman (2012) found that in a sample of 860 transgender identified people who did not identify as either male or female, 73% were AFAB. This was further supported by the *2015 US transgender survey* report, which indicated that 73% of the approximately 9700 respondents who identified as non-binary were AFAB (James et al., 2016). This trend appears to be reflected in Aotearoa New Zealand, as the study by Veale et al. found that 78% of non-binary participants were AFAB while 22% of non-binary participants were AMAB.

It is commonly assumed that physically transitioning from one gender to another is the primary goal of all transgender people to help alleviate gender dysphoria (APA, 2013). This is an assumption that invisiblizes all people who do not identify with a "traditional" transsexual narrative (Spade, 2011). Non-binary people will often have atypical presentations of gender dysphoria, which can be seen in discussions around physical and social dysphoria (Lawrence & Mckendry, 2019). Physical dysphoria refers to an individual's discomfort with their body, while social dysphoria refers to someone's discomfort with feeling that they have to conform to a particular gender role in society. Amongst non-binary people, it is possible to see individuals who may have more social dysphoria than physical dysphoria, or vice versa. Some non-binary people also report having varying levels of dysphoria and do not want to see their bodies fully masculinized or feminized. Because of this, a diverse range of goals can be seen when it comes to transition. A study by Factor and Rothblum (2008) looked at a sample of 166 transgender adults that included 64 people who self-identified as "genderqueer". Of the "genderqueer" participants in Factor and Rothblum's sample, 34% were taking hormones. Kuper et al. (2012) found that most of their non-binary respondents had no current plans for surgery, and that non-binary participants who were AMAB were more likely to be receiving hormone therapy. Some non-binary people have reported that medical services were not accommodating towards their gender identity, and often required them to conform to stereotypical gender norms; they felt pressured to undertake interventions they did not want (Vincent, 2016). It has also been argued that medical services also require people to adhere to a form of gender expression

that closely mirrors cisgender and heterosexual norms rather than what reflects a person's actual goals for their body (Vipond, 2015). To address this, Richards et al. (2016) have proposed that when non-binary individuals seek medical interventions, they should have access to close consultation with counsellors and endocrinologists when they discuss their goals for their physical body.

Another way that non-binary people express their gender identity is through the use of gendered pronouns. It should also be noted that non-binary transgender people often find that the English language is incapable of meeting their needs due to the lack of gender-neutral pronouns (Corwin, 2009). To help compensate for this, some people have attempted to create new gender-neutral pronouns, such as "zie" and "hir" (Darr & Kibbey, 2016). Another option is the use of the singular "they, their, themself" pronoun, which avoids the issue of having to teach people new and unfamiliar words (Shlasko et al., 2015). However, some argue that there is an issue with the fact that the singular "they" still invokes male imagery (Merrit & Kok, 1995). There is also some issue with the vagueness inherent in the use of the word "they", as it may confuse some people who mistakenly believe that it refers to an unseen group (MacKay, 1980). Most of the time, these non-binary pronouns are introduced at an individual level, and are often treated with suspicion and hostility; people may also struggle with adopting the new language (Darr & Kibbey, 2016). Given that the introduction of non-binary pronouns is a relatively new concept and not universally accepted, non-binary people often struggle to have their identity acknowledged. This was portrayed in the study by Veale et al. (2019), which showed that non-binary people were more likely to have an incorrect gender marker on one or more documents.

Alongside struggling to have identity recognized, non-binary people often report significant experiences of discrimination. For example, a study by Harrison, Grant and Herman (2012) examined the discrimination experienced by respondents to the USA National Transgender Discrimination Survey and compared the response of non-binary people to binary transgender people. In a study by Harrison et al., it was found that 32% of non-binary respondents suffered physical assaults, compared to 25% of binary transgender people. Similar discrepancies were found

amongst rates of sexual assault (16% to 11%), police harassment (31% to 21%), unemployment rates (76% to 56%) and tendencies to avoid healthcare due to fear of discrimination (36% to 27%). Non-binary identifying people may also experience additional discrimination due to their gender nonconformity. Some non-binary gendered people have reported experiencing a degree of acceptance when presenting as the “opposite” gender to the gender they were assigned at birth, but then experiencing rejection when they violate the gender norms of the gender they are perceived as (Evans, 2010).

There has also been research showing that people with a non-binary gender identity may experience significant mental health concerns. One study by Rimes et al. (2017) looked at an online survey that included 105 transgender women, 210 transgender men, 93 non-binary participants who were AMAB and 269 non-binary participants who were AFAB. The study by Rimes et al. (2017) found that AFAB non-binary people and transgender men reported higher rates of mental health conditions, experiences of self-harm, and experiences of childhood sexual abuse, while AMAB non-binary people, and transgender women, reported higher rates of being targets of physical assault due to being visibly gender nonconforming. One distinct difference that Rimes et al. (2012) found between non-binary and binary transgender people was that binary transgender people reported lower life satisfaction. This was supported in the survey by Veale et al. (2019), which showed that non-binary people were less likely than binary-gendered transgender people to report that their life had improved after coming out. This was in contrast to a more recent study that looked at a sample of 388 transgender people aged 16 to 25 and found that non-binary people were at increased risk of suffering anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem compared to binary transgender people (Thorne et al., 2018).

Given that identifying as non-binary can be an individual experience, it can be useful to look at how they personally define gender identity. One study interviewed 10 AFAB individuals who identified as genderqueer and lived in the San Francisco Bay Area and found that all the participants viewed gender as fluid, however, nine participants made a distinction between sex and gender and

six participants viewed gender as a social construct (Evans, 2010). Another interesting finding from the Evans study was that eight of the participants adjusted their gender expression based on their social context. Some preferred to identify as having a sexually variant identity, rather than a gender variant identity, in social contexts where they felt that their variant gender identity would not be understood. The participants also noted that they had often tried to conform to a binary gender identity in their past due to not knowing about the possibility of non-binary identity. In developing an understanding of their non-binary identity, participants noted that online spaces were often helpful, along with experiences such as leaving home to undertake tertiary education or entering a romantic relationship with people who are part of the non-binary community.

A case study by Bilodeau (2005) focused on the experiences of two transgender students at an American mid-west university who preferred to identify outside of conventional understandings of gender. It was found that when these participants reflected on their life stories, they both constructed a narrative that was a subversion of the conventional transgender narrative, while at the same time they also expressed disappointment with conventional gender identities and expressed a desire to maintain the qualities of both conventional masculine and feminine identities that they viewed as positive. The participants in Bilodeau's study also showed an affiliation with activism that helped shape their understandings of identity. This was reflected in later research, which showed that online non-binary communities tended to have active debate over issues of social justice (Fink & Miller, 2014). Another more recent study by Tejada (2016) looked at the experiences of four gender-diverse college students from the USA. The study found that the narratives shared were diverse and portrayed how the participants' understanding of their gender identity evolved over time. Tejada argued that current social constructions of gender were needlessly inhibitive, particularly for those whose gender does not match the one that they were assigned at birth who often found it difficult to find their place within their social surroundings.

Bradford et al. (2019) conducted a more recent thematic analysis of the narratives of 25 adolescents and adults from the USA who identified as "genderqueer". The study identified several

themes, one of which was the participants' descriptions of their internal experiences of being genderqueer. Participants discussed the social landscapes that they operated in and the co-construction of identities between their internal experience and the social landscape. Participants described a diversity of experiences and a resistance to normative, binary understandings of gender transition. The authors discussed how the participants' deviation from both cisnormative and transnormative narratives often meant that they felt that their identities were not easily understood when they interacted with others. The participants in Bradford et al.'s study also spoke of how they often felt social pressure to conform to either a male or female gender presentation.

In their review of the literature, Richards et al. (2016) identified several "strategies" that non-binary people used to create new narratives around gender. This included attempts to make established gender categories more flexible, a concept known as "stretching" (Connell, 2005). Another common strategy was to attempt to "diversify" gender by introducing the concept of a gender continuum (Monro, 2007). Some activists have also attempted to deconstruct popularly assumed ideas around differences between sexes, in an attempt to create a "non-gendered social order" (Monro, 2010). A more recent study conducted a narrative analysis of responses to an online survey of 197 adults who identified as "gender variant" and portrayed several narratives participants used to describe their gender identity (Galupo, Pulice-Farrow, & Ramirez, 2017). The survey included respondents from the USA alongside many other nations including Canada, Australia, the UK, Aotearoa New Zealand, Costa Rica and Norway. These narratives included participants describing themselves as existing somewhere on a continuum between male and female, as shifting along this continuum, describing themselves as existing "beyond" the gender binary, or disregarding the gender binary altogether. Interestingly, some participants viewed their transgender identity as being "distinct" from their non-binary identity, relating the non-binary side of their identity to their understanding of their own identity, while relating the transgender aspect to their experience of their physical bodies and desire to transition.

While there have been attempts to create a model for identity formation of transgender individuals, most of these focus on a binary concept of an individual moving from one gender identity to another (Matsuno & Budge, 2017). There has also been a tendency to treat coming out and transitioning as a linear process, when people may experience different stages at different times or repeat going through some stages. When attempting to formulate a model that incorporates both binary and non-binary transgender individuals, Rankin and Beemyn (2012) identified eight crucial milestones:

> (1) feeling gender different from a young age; (2) seeking to present as a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth; (3) repressing or hiding their identity in the face of hostility and/or isolation; (4) initially misidentifying their identity; (5) learning about and meeting other trans people; (6) changing their outward appearance in order to look more like their self-image; (7) establishing new relationships with family, partners, friends and co-workers; and (8) developing a sense of wholeness within a gender normative society. (p. 3)

When Rankin and Beemyn (2012) discussed specific milestones for the subgroups they addressed, most of these milestones described the transgender individuals defining themselves as separate from mainstream culture, while the specific milestones for "genderqueer" people involved defining themselves as being distinct from conventional transgender culture, with the final step involving the individuals finding their place outside of mainstream transgender and LGBTQIA+ communities. The genderqueer and gender-nonconforming participants felt isolated from the larger transgender community and found more support online. The participants also indicated that they found mainstream society was also hostile towards them, with many facilities and institutions being divided amongst gender lines and dismissive to any attempt to address these concerns. Rankin and Beemyn (2012) also noted that their genderqueer participants were less likely to seek medical interventions but would rather present their gender identity through different clothing styles, or through other ways of shaping their bodies (such as bodybuilding or electrolysis) and use non-binary pronouns.

There has been some debate about the role of psychology and psychiatry in the care of transgender people. As previously stated, psychologists acted as “gatekeepers” to gender affirming healthcare, as they would assess who was “suitable” to undergo transition (Siotos et al., 2019). Robert Stoller, a psychiatrist who created the term “gender identity”, was of the opinion that gender affirming healthcare is something that should only be used as a “last resort” when all other methods of treating gender dysphoria had shown to be unsuccessful (Green, 2010). These other methods included psychoanalysis, although Stoller acknowledged that psychoanalysis was seldom successful in treating gender dysphoria. This led to a growing sense of distrust of psychologists amongst transgender people (Serano, 2016). At times, the prioritization of the clinician’s perspective over the client’s perspective has had disastrous consequences, as can be seen in the “David Reimer” case, where psychologist Dr John Money’s attempts to condition a young cisgender male to adopt a female gender identity proved to be unsuccessful (Colapino, 2000). As we can see in these examples, attempts by clinicians to be the authority on their clients’ gender identities have proven to be both ineffective and potentially harmful.

In recent years, some therapists have proposed an alternative approach that is more collaborative. While attempts at using psychotherapy to turn a transgender person into a cisgender person have proven to be unsuccessful psychotherapy has been useful in helping transgender people to manage psychosocial stressors that they are confronted with (Fraser, 2009). While an obvious area for intervention would be during coming out, Fraser found other life stages when psychotherapy was useful, such as helping transgender people adjust to their lives post-transition or helping adolescents navigate the difficulties associated with puberty. There have also been developments in the therapy models used with children and adolescents who are still developing their sense of gender identity. An example of this can be seen in “True Gender Self Therapy”, which aims to encourage the child to develop their own personal understanding of their gender identity in a healthy and non-judgmental way (Ehrensaft, 2013). Overall, there has been a push towards making services more trans affirming, with the clinician’s role being to respect the client’s self-identification and to help

them navigate any challenges that may confront them during their transition (Chang, Singh & Dickey, 2018).

Chapter 2: Methodology

In this thesis, I take the stance that the development of how an individual's understanding of themselves as non-binary is an experience that is shaped both by the individual's own understanding of themself and the socio-cultural factors surrounding them. To better collect the breadth and diversity of the experiences that the participants shared, this study took a qualitative approach. This thesis also acknowledges that the journey towards coming out and living in the world as a non-binary person is a personal one that can be specific to the individual.

To help facilitate a collaborative approach, this study used a method called photo elicitation, where photographs are used during interviews to generate discussion between the interviewer and participant (Sitter, 2017). Not only does this method allow for more collaboration, it has also been found to be useful in producing more detail in participants' response than would be seen in a standard interview (Harper, 2002). This study also uses elements of photo elicitation, where the participants are the ones who took the photographs that were used to generate discussion during interviews, helping to further focus the study on the participants' perspective (Delgado, 2015). While photography was a crucial part of the research process, the focus of the analysis was not on the photographs themselves but more the discussions that they generated.

There have been earlier attempts to use this methodology to address LGBTQIA+ issues, with one study focusing on the experiences of 15 LGBTQIA+ youths in Ontario (Klein, Holtby, Cook, & Travers, 2015). The results of the study questioned the linearity of conventional coming out narratives, especially amongst youth with both sexual and gender variant identities. Many participants criticized what was derisively labelled as the "good gay" narrative, which was described as "straight acting". The "good gay" archetype was criticised for not only its adherence to heteronormative and cisnormative norms, but also for the portrayal of coming out as "brave," when many young people viewed it as a necessity. They also felt that the portrayal of being "out" as a state of almost self-actualisation was unhelpful, given that many LGBTQIA+ people continue to experience harassment, discrimination and difficult life circumstances after coming out. Another

photo elicitation study by Louisa Allen (2015) argued that LGBTQIA+ people often lived in conflicting narratives, where they were contextualized as both “heroes” due to their visibility and also “victims” due to the hostility they were often confronted with. Allen describes how neither of these narratives are “truer” than the other narrative, but rather they reflect different aspects of the individuals’ lived experience.

Other photo elicitation studies focused explicitly on the experiences of gender diverse people. One such study was performed by Sze May Lim (2012) who looked at the experiences of transgender students on college campuses. In their study, the participants took photographs of locations and objects that had a deep emotional resonance for them. For example, Ava took photos of locations where she had experienced a significant amount of emotional turmoil while attempting to process the issues surrounding her gender identity. Jen took a photo of her laundry, while reflecting on the experience of having to wash both men’s and women’s clothes at different stages of her transition. While there were some photos of their bodies, they tended to be small, compartmentalised portions, such as their wrist, to symbolise how they had begun cutting, or their legs when they were wearing fetish boots to represent their early experimentation with their identity. Lim (2012) concluded her study by stating that the research showed college campuses were a place of freedom where people could experiment with their identity, but they could also be quite a hostile place for young transgender people to navigate.

Another photo elicitation study looked at the experiences of five AFAB transsexuals and the healthcare system in the USA (Hussey, 2006). This study was performed to highlight how healthcare services are often cited as being poorly suited to meeting the needs of female to male “transsexuals’” specific health needs. The photographs contained negative, oppressive themes such as the theme of vulnerability and the theme of invisibility. But there were also counter themes of perseverance and activism, where the participants were shown to be having sites of resistance to the oppression they experienced. The authors discussed how the results of their study could be used to further develop the healthcare centres to be more suitable for transgender service users. A similar

study was performed in India with transgender people, and men who have sex with men, with the aim to get a closer understanding of their lived experience (Boyd & Hajra, 2011). At the end of the study, the authors found that the lives and identities did not match the static models of transgender identity that are often portrayed in HIV awareness campaigns, and they argued that the new insights gained by the photo elicitation could inform future outreach programs.

Following on previous research, this study aimed to look at non-binary people within Aotearoa New Zealand. After looking at previous research and consultation with my supervisor, it was decided that 10 participants would be an appropriate number to collect a sufficient amount of data to meaningfully analyze while also being manageable within the limitations of the thesis.

Recruitment

Recruitment was implemented through an online advertisement that can be found in Appendix A. The advertisement framed the study as an exploration of the experiences of people who have either currently or previously felt uncomfortable identifying as either male or female. The phrase "uncomfortable identifying as either male or female" was used to capture a broad spectrum of potential participants. We also asked about "currently or previously" in an attempt to incorporate people's evolving understanding of their own identity, however, all of the chosen participants identified with a non-binary identity. The study also described the method used as "photo elicitation" stating that we were asking participants to take photos of scenes or objects that seem important to them, and that these photos will be used to elicit conversation. The study also specified that participants needed to be over 16 and be able to speak English. The advertisement was distributed through organizations that are known to cater to the needs of gender minorities. This included Rainbow Youth, an organization that caters to the needs of young LGBTQIA+ people, and Tīwhanawhana Trust, a takatāpui community group. The advertisement was also distributed through Facebook groups that were targeted towards Aotearoa New Zealand's gender diverse community, including Genderbridge NZ, Agender NZ, and the University of Auckland's Trans on Campus. Members of the Facebook groups also distributed the advertisement through their personal networks.

Participants

Ten people who identified with a non-binary gender identity took part in the study. Due to concerns around anonymity for participants from a relatively small community, it was decided that the exact ages of the participants would not be disclosed, only the general age ranges. The participants of this study skewed to a younger age, and amongst the older participants it was felt that more precise age categories could be potentially identifying. For this reason, the broader "Above the age of 35" category was used for older participants. At the time of the study, there were two participants in their late teens, two in their early twenties, one in their late twenties, two in their early thirties and two participants above the age of 35. Nine participants were AFAB and one was AMAB. Seven participants were NZ European, one participant was European from overseas and one participant was of Māori descent and one participant was of NZ European and Māori descent. Four were employed, while two were unemployed, and four were students. Given the ethical sensitivities of this study, all participants had to be over 16 years old. At the time of the study, all but one participant lived in the greater Auckland region. Initial contact was made over email where arrangements for the initial meeting were made.

Data Collection

Before the initial meeting, participants were provided with a participant information sheet, which can be found in Appendix B. The participant information sheet outlined who was involved with the project, the aims of the study and how their confidentiality would be handled. It was decided to give participants disposable cameras instead of using digital photography as this limits the number of photos taken, which encourages thought before each photo (Milne & Muir, 2019). In the initial meeting with the participants, they were told that the study was looking at documenting how they understand their sense of gender identity, and how they interact with the world as a non-binary person. The initial meetings were kept brief and not used in the data analysis process as they were intended solely for the purpose of handing over the cameras. Participants were also asked to sign a consent form, which can be found in Appendix C. After consent was obtained from the participants,

they were given disposable cameras and asked to take photos of scenes, objects, and people that they felt were important to their sense of identity. After a two-week period had passed, the cameras were collected and the photographs were developed. Once the photos were developed, a follow-up interview was arranged with participants. They were asked a series of questions about each photo along with some general questions about their own identity. The content of the photographs was not a focus of analysis, but rather the conversations that were elicited by the photographs. These follow-up interviews were audio recorded. Each participant was assigned a letter from "A" to "J". The recordings were then transcribed by an external transcriber, following which I proofread the transcripts while listening to the recordings to make sure the content matched. Following the proofreading, the transcripts were further anonymized to remove any identifying information. A gender-neutral name beginning with the assigned letter was then attached to each participant to help ease the reading of the transcripts.

Interview Protocol

Since the intention behind the use of photo elicitation was to allow the participants to choose to photograph what they felt was important to them, it was decided that the initial meeting should be kept brief to avoid influencing the participants to focus on specific areas. Specifically, the participants were not asked questions about their identity and experiences to avoid shaping their understandings of what photos they "should" be taking. For this reason, the information delivered during the initial meeting consisted of a brief description of their involvement with the study, along with the instruction to take photos of "images and objects" that they felt were relevant to their experiences of their own identity.

Most of the follow-up interviews were conducted on the premises of the University of Auckland. For participants who could not make it to the university campus, the interviews were conducted within their own homes. The participants were invited to talk freely, with the interviews usually taking around an hour. The participants were asked to describe each photo, what the photo represented to them, and how it spoke to their experience of their identity.

Following the discussion of the photos, the participants were occasionally asked follow-up questions around their experiences of coming out, what they had found to be positive and what they had found to be negative. These questions were not always asked as the participants usually discussed these topics while discussing the photographs.

Finally, the participants were asked a list of demographic questions. These were kept to the end of the interview to avoid shaping the discussions around their identity. During this part of the interview, the participants were given the option to label their sexual and gender identities to see if there was any definition they found was accurate for them. The demographic questions included: Age, Gender Identity, Pronoun Preference, Cultural Background, Religious Identification, Sexuality, Work Situation and Living Situation.

Narrative Analysis

It was decided that the data produced by the participants would be best analyzed as case studies. One reason for this was because the case study approach allows for a rich amount of detail to be included (Burton, 2000). Another reason was because it was felt inappropriate to generalize the results of the study due to the small sample size, and so a thematic analysis would have been inappropriate. Since the study aimed to explore how people came to develop their understanding of their own gender identity, a narrative analysis was conducted. The method of narrative analysis this research projected used is informed by Murray (2003).

The first step in constructing a coherent narrative of the interviews was paraphrasing and arranging the participants' accounts into a coherent timeline to get a stronger understanding of the participants' life narrative (Murray, 2003). It is important to acknowledge that the narrative that is produced during an interview is co-constructed between the interviewer and the participant. Verbatim quotes from the interview (including the researcher's response) were used in the construction of the narratives (Riessman, 2008). Following this, the narratives were re-read and several common "milestones" in the narrative were identified, which led to the development of a three-act structure that was common amongst all the narratives within this study (Rankin & Beemyn,

2012). The first of these was “pre-coming out identity”, which refers to the stage before the participant was aware of the terminology and narratives around non-binary gender identity. The second stage, “developing awareness of oneself as non-binary”, is when the participants first became aware of the concept of non-binary gender identity and how they came to identify with it. The third stage is “living as non-binary”, which looks at how participants interact with their world as a non-binary person. A more detailed analysis of each of these stages follows. The participants’ transcripts were then reanalysed using this three-act structure so that comparisons could be made. The findings of this process were then presented in a case study format.

Some of the excerpts in this thesis were edited for clarity and anonymization. Such edits are noted within the excerpts with […] to indicate where details have been removed.

Reflexivity

When conducting qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to address how their own perspectives and assumptions and how they may influence the reading of the research (Roberts & Sanders, 2005). For myself I feel that there are two specific areas of my background that could potentially influence my reading of the research. The first is that of my background of being a transgender woman and the second is my training as a clinical psychologist.

Historically, most research into non-binary people has been conducted by cisgender researchers who sit outside the non-binary community, although more recently there has been a growth of research conducted by non-binary researchers (Vincent, 2016; Tejada, 2016). My own identity as a trans woman means that I am both an insider, since I am a member of the transgender community, and an outsider, given that I identify strongly with a binary gender. This means that while I can identify with the experiences of what it is like to be a gender variant person in this society, I cannot identify with the experience of society not having a place for someone of my gender. It is also important to note that there are marked differences between the experiences of binary gendered and non-binary gendered trans people. While there is often a goal of “passing” as an identified gender amongst binary transgender people, non-binary people often have a goal of being

visible and having their gender identity validated. It has also been noted by some researchers that medically transitioning is often seen as a valued goal in transgender spaces, and non-binary people who do not wish to medically transition often find this value confronting (Vincent, 2016). Overall it is important to acknowledge that while both myself and my participants identify as transgender it is possible that we have different values and understandings about what it means to "be" transgender, and this could possibly have influenced my interpretations of their narratives.

I completed this thesis as part of my training to become a clinical psychologist, and that training may also have had an impact on my interpretations. As previously noted, clinical psychology has not always had a positive relationship with the transgender community, as the field has often pathologized transgender people and operated as "gatekeepers" (Siotos et al., 2019). While my own experience as a transgender woman would have made me aware of the history and actively attempt to challenge it, the way information is shared amongst psychologists may have had a subtler and more pervasive effect on my interpretations. Psychologists are frequently trained to think in the terms of diagnostic criteria and to categorize the people that they work with, and given I was immersed in this training while doing this research it is possible I ended up taking a categorical lens towards those I was working with. While this categorical approach can have its uses in health care settings it can also lead to understandings of people that lack subtlety and nuance. One of the reasons I decided to take a narrative approach to my research was to resist this tendency towards generalization and categorization.

Ethical Considerations

When conducting research with people with a non-binary gender identity, we must take into account that this is a social group that experiences significant harassment and discrimination, as was discussed in Chapter 1. To protect the anonymity of the participants, this thesis does not publish the photographs that the participants took during the course of the study. However, even without the photographs, the use of detailed qualitative interviews risks the possibility of a participant being recognised by the details of the interview (Braun & Clarke, 2013). For this

reason, all potentially identifying details within the presented sections of the participants' transcripts were anonymized. Given that I am a member of the trans and non-binary community myself, it was important to consider the possibility of co-occurring relationships with my research participants. While some researchers have found that this intimacy with participants has generated interesting research, it has also been noted to cause problems with confidentiality and difficulties with avoiding bias in the interpretation of data (Taylor, 2011). For this reason, I decided that it was best to choose participants who I had no pre-existing relationship with and to also limit interactions outside of the research process. The methodology of the study was approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC) on the 26th November 2016.

Chapter 3: Case Studies

Adan

Adan is a NZ European individual who is above the age of 35. When asked to describe their identity, they described themself as a genderqueer who uses "they/them" pronouns. Adan was assigned female at birth. Adan worked part time and lived with their long-term partner in a house they owned together. Adan described their sexuality as "asexual heterosexual", stating that they had some difficulty defining their sexuality but was using this label as their partner was a cisgender man.

Pre-coming out narrative

When discussing their life before coming out, Adan did not identify as always having understood themself as being non-binary. Rather, they described how they grew up feeling pressure to conform to feminine gender norms:

> *In the past, particularly when I was younger, I tried very hard "how am I supposed to be a good female?" I tried to learn about what is acceptable and what is good and I would try to fit that into how I was. Because when I was younger I didn't realise, it was only in the last couple of years that I realised that I could be anything other than one or the other. While I always had a slight tendency towards the male it was never that strong. I do remember when I was younger, even up until my mid-twenties, I would listen and I would look to see how females were perceived, what was considered good, how would they act, and I would try and be that, because I wasn't really being myself because I was trying to be something that I thought society thought I should be, even though it clearly didn't work because often people would say to me, "Oh, you are a bit of a freak, aren't you?" or "Oh, you are a bit eccentric?" So obviously it didn't work, but I tried really hard to overcome, really since my mid to late twenties, to be more just me and not worry about what other people thought or how I should be perceived.*

Adan described how, in their childhood, they accepted the socially prescribed identity of "woman" uncritically, and they worked to find a way that they could best meet the social norms associated with being a woman. While Adan initially accepted this role without question, they also found that they were still considered an "outsider" to this role, and was referred to as being a "freak" or "eccentric". In response, Adan began to move away from their socially prescribed role.

Developing awareness of oneself as non-binary

Over the several years prior to the interview, Adan became exposed to concepts of non-binary gender identity through online spaces. While Adan had previously heard of transgender people, they had never considered themself transgender:

> *I was aware of it just in context of what you might see in the media of transgender celebrities or in television programmes. I didn't know if anyone that I met was transgender; I can't say they weren't because you know I didn't know they weren't.*

In their late twenties, Adan began to hear discussions around non-binary gender identities in the online media they consumed:

> *…they would talk a lot about gender identity and expression and I would think "there is more than…". That's when I started to tweak in my head slowly, "there is more than one or the other – this is interesting". It didn't immediately catch me; it was quite slow and obviously my brain started communicating, because it was something that was just talked about and it was accepted that this was fine. And over time, I found that my mind kept going back to it all of the time so I started intensive research about "what is this?" and while you can't pinpoint exactly how you would define it, you can start to get an idea and do those silly quizzes about "Are you a man or a woman?" It all seemed silly but it just started lots of things thinking.*

Before this, Adan was only exposed to the mainstream narrative of gender being "male" or "female" but this new narrative suggested to Adan a way of identifying that better fit their lived experience.

Eventually, Adan began looking for outside confirmation, which led to the beginning of their contact with the LGBTQIA+ community:

> *I almost needed outside confirmation so I actually called OUTline and had a chat with one of their phone counsellors and they said, "Look, you clearly have done a lot of research and from what I hear from you, you definitely identify that way and what I would suggest to you is start getting involved with non-cis people to get out there". And I was, like, "Yeah".*

Adan reported that, while they initially resisted the idea, the concept of having a non-binary gender identity was a narrative that they felt helped them to make sense of their previous experiences of feeling like they did not fit preconceived notions of femininity. The discovery of the terminology around non-binary identity also gave Adan access to a wider community where they could hope to meet more like-minded individuals.

Living non-binary

By identifying as non-binary, Adan felt they could assert an identity that they felt was more representative of their own lived experience. Following coming out, Adan changed their name to something more masculine and started using gender neutral pronouns. Adan also started wearing more gender-neutral attire. Adan described this change in presentation to have had a positive effect on their self-esteem, as they felt that they were able to free themselves from previous conceptions of what it meant to "be" female.

> *I was always… very uncomfortable with the way I looked, in particular with my breasts. Okay, I'm still not pleased with them and I would like them to get reduced, but that costs quite a lot of money and it is not covered by health insurance, so that's something but the way I... I don't wear a binder because I find it too warm and I just overheat but I find that two of those Bendon crop top things seem to do the job quite well and they seem to be quite comfortable and I always had an issue with that. Maybe if they had been smaller, maybe I wouldn't but that has always been a problem for me. I never really liked people looking at them […] In regards to*

my hips, yeah, okay, fine. I have that sort of hourglass figure – what can I do? It's just the way it is. I need to find clothes that work for me and while it isn't really to do with how I look, I always had a real issue with my period. It was just horrible. It would be just a section of time that if I could get rid of, I would.

When discussing their current appearance, Adan expressed a strong sense of approval with how they present themselves now, indicating that being able to openly present themselves as non-binary has had a positive impact on their self-esteem.

I wanted to do one of me cheesily with my camera next to me. Just from the point of view of obviously this is about being genderqueer and that's one of me. I love how I look these days. I love my haircut, I love my style choices. I'm just very much happy with how I look and umm, this is me and it is awesome.

Alongside adapting their physical presentation, Adan would also perform their non-binary identity using neutral pronouns, and Adan gave an example of how their friends began using gender neutral pronouns with them:

I've told them and one of my friends is really onto it and is really good, you know, really understanding. The other friend struggled with it, the comprehension of it. I don't think she struggles with how I am – I think she struggles with the comprehending how it works [...] I sort of told them and my friend said, "Don't be silly – we love you no matter what!" That sort of thing is really nice that I can just go along. It doesn't really matter – the friendship is still the same. Like I said, one of my friends struggles a bit but she is trying and I can't fault people for trying. I'm human, after all and I make mistakes as well.

By telling this story, Adan portrayed how their communication of a non-binary identity allowed them to feel understood and accepted by their friends. Adan also discussed how the use of appropriate pronouns had become more important over time, that "in the beginning I was like 'fine, if people want to see me as female, whatever' but over time it's become more important to me to be gendered

correctly" but then elaborating it had become more important as time passed. Adan told a particular story where they felt they had to assert their preferred pronouns when visiting their local restaurant:

> *One of the people serving there is very "ma'am", "sir" and every time we go there you can see it really hurts on the inside in a way. I have since done it – since I took this photo – come up with the courage to say, "Please don't call me ma'am". That was a big thing for me to do that.*

This story shows how visibility had become more important for Adan over time, which has led Adan to asserting their pronouns in the general public. This indicates that while coming out as non-binary was originally used to make sense of their own personal experience over time it has become important for Adan to have their identity acknowledged by the world around them.

While Adan may feel that identifying as non-binary is more validating for them, it has also exposed them to new stressors that are part of identifying as a gender minority. Adan discussed how they were particularly nervous around experiencing rejection from their loved ones, and the first person Adan came out to was their male partner. This was a process that filled Adan with concern about the potential rejection they may have faced, but they found their partner to be accepting:

> *While I didn't think it would be an issue for [Adan's partner], there is always that risk that it might trigger something in him and it might end the relationship and we talked about that as being a real and valid risk in doing that and it took time for [Adan's partner] to process it and understand it and he did research on these sorts of things and in the end he was like, "Yeah, it's you! It's not the fact that you've got breasts or a uterus that attracts me – it's you".*

By disclosing their non-binary identity to their partner, Adan risked experiencing rejection, however, what they found instead was that their partner was accepting of their identity and affirmed to Adan that they loved them unconditionally for who they were. For Adan, this unconditional acceptance appears to have encouraged a deepening of the connection they felt for their partner, as they felt their partner understood and appreciated a more nuanced understanding of themselves.

While Adan found their partner to be supportive, Adan found their relationship with their mother to be more difficult to navigate, and their mother had a confrontation with Adan after they came out:

> *…a few days afterward and she said, "I've got this thing on my mind and I have to get it off my chest" and she went on a giant rant about how filthy my house was and how she will never come into the house ever again until I tided and all these sort of things. It went on for about 10 minutes and I'm like, "Oh yeah" and I am just nodding and trying not to cry because it was really quite horrible.*

Adan found reciting this memory to be particularly painful as it was one of their earlier experiences of overt harassment due to belonging to a gender minority. In this story, Adan describes how they felt that their mother was uncomfortable in directly addressing their non-binary gender identity and instead attacked their housekeeping, which Adan took as indirect criticism. This experience of feeling criticized may have been particularly salient since the criticism focused on what could be considered stereotypical "women's work", thereby reminding Adan of their earlier experiences of feeling judged for their inability to adhere to conventional stereotypes of femininity.

Despite this negative reaction, Adan and their mother later reconciled. Adan also described how they had difficulty with their partner's family members expressing transphobic sentiments, discussing one conversation that they overheard:

> *I don't know how but it segued into Caitlyn Jenner. Anyway, the bile, bigoted horrid rhetoric that I had to hear on their thoughts on transgender people was terrible. It was the first conversation in my life that made me physically ill. It was that bad I don't want to repeat any of it because it was just so, so horrible. [Adan's partner] happened to be out of the room at the time talking to his nephew and didn't hear it but after we left, I explained it to him and I said, "Oh my god. Your family is so bigoted, it's terrible".*

In this passage, Adan describes how their non-binary gender identity had exposed them to new pressures and discriminations as a gender minority. By coming out as non-binary, Adan had found affinity with the transgender community, which meant that these comments were felt as a more personal attack. Since Adan's partner's family expressed transphobic opinions of transgender people in the popular media, it also meant that they could potentially be openly hostile and transphobic towards Adan. By openly identifying as non-binary, Adan found their previously reliable family dynamics now potentially unsafe. This has led to Adan taking measures to be less transparent about identifying as non-binary with their partner's side of the family, which Adan portrayed with a story about how their partner dealt with his family finding out about Adan's name change. In this story, Adan's partner was questioned about the name change and he responded, "It's just a name, it doesn't matter", hiding from his family that Adan is non-binary.

In the narrative that Adan tells, they described how they spent most of their life feeling pressured to conform to a female gender ideal that they felt they did not fit. While identifying as non-binary has enabled Adan to more clearly articulate their experience of themselves, it also has opened them up to potentially experiencing harassment and discrimination due to being categorised as a "gender minority". This creates the opportunity for feeling closer to people, as can be seen in Adan's discussion with how their partner accepted them; it can also lead to creating distance due to fear of being harassed for being a gender nonconforming transgender person. As a strategy to protect themself from this harassment, Adan has found themself concealing their gender identity from people who they expect to hold transphobic opinions. This meant that while coming out as non-binary allowed Adan to liberate themselves from normative understandings of what it means to be a "man" or "woman", it also has exposed them to potentially experiencing discrimination for no longer adhering to cisnormative standards.

Blair

Blair is a person of Pākehā and Māori heritage, although he asserted that his Māori heritage has "not been a major influence in my life". Blair was in his early 30s during the study. When asked to describe his identity, he stated that his gender identity was androgynous but he had previously used "gender-fucked fairy boy" and stated that he was comfortable with "any" pronouns. For ease of reading, they/them pronouns will be used throughout. Blair was assigned female at birth. When asked about his sexuality, he stated, "I tend to like masculine people".

Pre-coming out narrative

When discussing their early childhood, Blair portrayed their gender nonconformity as fitting with their own family's pattern being "unconventional" and gender nonconformity within their family. Blair described their mother as "very much a tomboy" and talked about how they had seen "pictures of her as a child and in her teens where she's wearing boy's clothes". Blair also describes how their sister came out as lesbian and was always understanding of Blair being non-binary. However, Blair's family's history of gender nonconforming behaviour was also seen as an outlier in the larger community. Blair noted that their mother came from a more conventional family, stating that "on my mum's side of the family, I'm the gay cousin". When describing their relationship with their family Blair portrayed their gender nonconforming behaviour as being something that they shared with the women in their immediate family, and that together they all were inclined to resist normative gender roles.

Developing awareness of oneself as non-binary

When talking about their own personal experience, Blair discussed how while they had a desire to physically alter their body to be more masculine, they did not have much desire to take on a male role in society:

Even like a lot of binary trans people don't get it, especially because I made [a] physical transition, it's been very important to me whereas social transition it's something I would have liked not to have done but that's not actually the way that either most binary trans people or people in the society at large actually understand gender. Even on the internet, I'd find loads of people who had very little physical dysphoria but were very, had quite acute social dysphoria but there was no-one who was, like, can't stand the way my body is.

This description of their dysphoria shows a marked distinction from what was presented in Adan's narrative. While Adan described having little experience of physical dysphoria and focused more on working towards taking on a gender-neutral social identity, Blair was happy with a feminine social presentation but preferred to have a masculine body. Despite both identifying as non-binary, Adan and Blair appear to have two distinct versions of how they presented and interacted with the world.

When coming out as non-binary, Blair found some members of their family to be very accepting, which Blair attributed to their own pattern of gender nonconforming behaviour. However, Blair found that their mother found accepting Blair as non-binary to be a bit more difficult, which surprised Blair given her mother's own history of gender nonconforming behaviour:

…For her, my gender presentation was entirely normal for a young woman and coming out as transgender was quite, was something that she didn't expect although literally everybody else did. […] To everyone else, it wasn't particularly strange except to my mother and at first, she was, like, "No, we're not discussing this. This isn't a thing." And eventually, when it became obvious that it was a thing, she, I think, tried to kind of accept it in the ways that she knew how.

This created some tension between Blair and their mother, as Blair described their mother being unable to accept Blair's stated identity. While Blair had portrayed their mother as being gender nonconforming herself, he also felt that his mother struggled to accept Blair's transition. Blair described how they mother did her own research.

> *She did do a lot of reading, which, you know, just completely independently of me about transgender history and people. […] she has now both accepted my gender transition and is very confident with explaining to people who ask about me in my previous life that I'm now this person and that I'm living in [home city] and doing this kind of thing, that it's not a big deal. But I think it was the only way I could really explain to her that it was in traditional kind of transsexual-type terms, that because she had no real understanding of either trans people or gender variance that trying to get the idea that no, I'm not a boy stuck in a girl's body that actually I'm this in-between type of person was more than she could actually kind of grasp.*

In their conversations with his mother, Blair felt that their mother had struggled to understand non-binary gender identity. To help to communicate their lived experience and need to transition, Blair found themself relying on older, more conventional narratives of transgender identity to explain themself to their mother. While this narrative was not an accurate representation of Blair's lived experience, they found that this narrative was useful as a form of compromise to make their experience intelligible to those around them.

Living non-binary

While Blair described their ideal presentation as having a masculine physique and a feminine social role, they often found that this was hard for many people to understand, so he found that they were relying on the older "trapped in the wrong body" narrative to explain themself to others.

> *…Well, socially at least, transitioning from female to male. That rather than transitioning from female to somewhere in the middle I just went, okay, it's so much easier to explain, […] it's so much easier to explain that I'm a boy trapped in a girl's body than actually I'm not trapped in my body at all…*

While this narrative allowed Blair to have an easier time when explaining themself to others, they also found it to be a reductive way of explaining his lived experience, and led people to have expectations of Blair to perform masculinity in a way that was never their goal:

I'm just, you know, wanting to change it to be more comfortable with myself and socially things aren't actually going to be that different, but everyone expects them to be super different.

By using the "boy trapped in a girl's body" narrative to reassure their mother, it also led them to making decisions that would have an impact on their transition, as Blair found that their mother pressured them into choosing a conventionally male name on his legal documents:

The name I chose my mother hated, absolutely loathed. I could understand where she was coming from with that because it was not a traditional name and she always had been particularly not enamoured of non-traditional kind of names. […] I ended up kind of taking the name I wanted as my middle name and just going with what she'd decided on […] when my parents thought they were having another boy.

The need to present their gender as a conventional female-to-male narrative was also experienced by Blair when seeking medical intervention for their transition. In an early interaction with a doctor, Blair was attempting to obtain access to hormones and found that the doctors they interacted with had very gender-normative attitudes, and so Blair felt pressured to perform masculinity to access these interventions:

So I might as well just kind of try and fit into this other box even though it doesn't quite fit, well, significantly more comfortable than being in a different one and of course bringing it back to medication and things. The medical kind of model says if you want to transition physically you're going to have to show up as one of the binary genders especially with the doctor I saw first […] he had treated all of the trans people […] and had no clue about anything. His regular thing for trans-masculine people was he'd ask, "Why do you want to be ugly?" because he had this idea that men essentially were ugly, and he asked me that and I said, "I'm going to make the prettiest boy in the world, thank you", which I think surprised him a bit. He also didn't quite understand the idea of […] being a trans woman who was

interested in women or being a trans man who was interested in men and yeah, he would routinely mis-gender his other patients and it was a little bit weird to try and deal with and I knew the only way to deal with him was to show up looking like a member of [conservative political party].

Blair also described the challenges that confronted them as a masculine-bodied individual who was looking to perform femininity:

I'd like to. But as everyone I think who's tried to perform femininity knows that it's actually quite difficult. It takes time and it takes effort and also because I'm now living and working, people seeing me as a cisgender male that breaking out of that becomes a little bit dangerous that you can be seen by the wrong person or you can show up in the wrong manner and it becomes something you have to explain or something that they assume things that aren't actually true. And so I've always worn the kind of clothes that I tend to like, which are just comfortable but unfortunately again as a social thing that masculine code of clothing is more comfortable than feminine clothing and things like that so trying to present in an authentic way becomes more difficult the more entrenched I've got into the path of least resistance.

While Blair found that transitioning led them to be more comfortable in their body, it also opened them up to being vulnerable to experiencing the harassment which comes with being seen as a feminine man. Once again, Blair experienced pressure from outside sources to conform to a more binary gender presentation.

Blair also has sought some legal recognition of their gender ambiguous status, telling a story about how they were thinking of applying to have an X as a gender marker on their passport. However, they were reluctant to do this because of the limitations it would place on their travelling:

That's like a weird kind of thing for me because getting it was obviously a really big deal of having all this information you could not just get a Statutory Declaration to change your gender identity on your passport from like to any of the three categories, like M or X rather

than if you had changed before you could only get an X and I didn't know how to go, okay, well, I actually want an X on my passport. I also didn't know how it would be travelling with a passport with an X on it. So I ended up basically just going, okay, well, I guess I'm going to end up with a passport with an M on it even though it still doesn't fit as well, it still fits, it's wrong in the same way that my passport with an F on it would have been because I didn't know what the effect of actually asking for an X would be…

While Blair viewed an "X" as being a more appropriate gender marker on her passport, they neglected to go for it because they "didn't know what the effect of asking for an X would be". This indicates that Blair viewed every disclosure of their non-binary status as being a social transaction, which carried a potential risk. Blair developed this idea of disclosure as being potentially compromising in his discussion of non-binary pronouns:

I really honestly don't mind what pronouns you use. I like all pronouns. I think all of them fit me but there was not very much of that, so it became a kind of where am I fitting again. […] it becomes very hard to break out of that especially if you don't continually want to be defined by it.

While other participants such as Adan emphasized the importance of pronouns in respecting their gender identity, Blair was concerned about the unintended consequences of always being identified as non-binary. Blair portrayed this concern when talking about the descriptions of a prominent non-binary person in Aotearoa New Zealand media:

Every article about them […] featured a bit about how they were transgender and gender nonconforming and didn't use he or she pronouns and things like that. It was like you couldn't deal with the actual issue that they were talking about without explaining this thing first and it became a kind of, well, if I end up being more open about non-binary that becomes the defining feature for a lot of people in their minds.

For Blair, this story portrays how the cost of being open about being non-binary is being defined by being non-binary. Given that Blair is uncomfortable with their non-binary gender identity being their only defining character trait, they compromise by being less open about this facet of their identity.

In telling these stories, Blair portrayed how they have experienced both legal and social barriers in getting their gender identity recognized. Because of this, Blair described his current life as taking "the path of least resistance":

> *I suppose it's made life a lot easier just going okay, well, I'm just going to pick one and ignore the rest of it but it's still not quite, it still feels a bit weird but again when you kind of, I feel like I've picked the path of gender of least resistance and just gone okay, whatever, I can deal with this.*

While Adan presented their transition into a non-binary gender identity as a journey of liberation, Blair portrayed their journey as one of compromise. Given that Blair has found it difficult to present in the gender-ambiguous manner that they would prefer, they have settled on presenting as a young gay man, describing it as a compromise between the presentation that they would prefer and what they see as viable within their social environment.

Cody

Cody is a person who identifies as "agender", which they define as an "individual who does not identify with a particular gender". Cody also expresses an affinity for the term "trans-masculine", as they tended to have a masculine presentation. Cody was assigned female at birth. Cody uses they/them pronouns and describes their sexual orientation as "pansexual". Cody was in their early 20s at the time of the interview. Cody is of NZ European background. At the time of the interview, Cody was not working and had just moved into shared rental accommodation.

Pre-coming out narrative

When discussing their childhood, Cody contextualized themself as being a "tomboy" from a young age, which reflects the pattern within the "accepted nonconformist" narrative:

> *I was very tomboy and so growing up, yeah, the tomboy, you don't mind getting dirty and things like that. And I was the honorary guy in the group of guys at school and things like that.*

Like Blair, Cody viewed their gender nonconforming behaviour as a "family trait" and discussed their siblings as being similarly nonconforming:

> *My brother is very gay […] He is very feminine, and he always likes the more kind of … he likes baking and he liked playing with dolls as well. And I always liked rolling in the mud. So even then there is kind of, like, your stereotypical tomboy or the gay kind of thing. We kind of fit into it.*

While Cody did not learn these terms until adolescence, they did feel that they had earlier experiences of physical dysphoria. Cody described how these experiences of dysphoria developed:

> *I think at about eight years I kind of was kind of starting the idea I want to look a little more masculine and it kind of progressed to I would like to be able to grow facial hair and it eventually progressed to like I want to actually transition fully to masculine because that's how I identify on the inside. I identify more with the masculine frame, even though I would say my behaviour and the kind of way I think and the things I like would be stereotypically more feminine.*

Cody's pre-coming out narrative has similarities to the conventional narrative surrounding binary transgender people – that of being someone who did not fit a stereotypical understanding of femininity and who also expressed a desire to have a more masculine body. However, Cody distances themself from the conventional narrative by describing and putting emphasis on their more feminine characteristics.

Developing awareness of oneself as non-binary

When asked about when they first learned of the concepts around non-binary, Cody identified that they weren't sure when they first heard the term agender:

I don't know how I learnt the term. I don't think I was on Tumblr at that stage, no, not at intermediate. It wasn't until high school. But I somehow, I think it was a friend told me about it, about, yeah, gender fluid and bisexual and stuff like that. And I knew I was bisexual then. I definitely liked, kind of had, kind of dating or that kind of experience with females. So, I knew I was bisexual then. Me and a friend, we were both bisexual. And then I learnt about gender fluid and I knew it was very much like a bridge between the masculine and femininity and the way that is expressed like that more than the other cis girls at my age like that.

Cody described how when they got older, they began to desire masculine characteristics more strongly and this developed into being a desire to "transition fully" as they felt that such a transition would reflect who they are "on the inside". However, Cody also viewed themself as having some feminine characteristics and spoke of their identity being more "fluid". Cody's portrayal of their gender identity reflects elements from Blair's narrative, as they both felt that they would be more comfortable in a physically male body but also felt that they did not fit with conventional stereotypes of masculinity.

Cody described how their feelings of physical dysphoria got to be so intense that they went to their mother for support. In contrast to Adan and Blair, Cody found their mother to be an important source of support.

I eventually told mum because I was getting so stressed out about it. [...] I told her how much it was stressing me out, how much [...] the body dysphoria and dysphoria of living in this kind of, especially with cleavage and things like that. And she said, "Okay, it's fine. We can go to the doctors. We can ask them what steps it takes" – like that.

Cody identified physical transition and presenting with a "masculine frame" as being an important part of their transition. At the same time, they expressed feelings of discomfort with taking on the male role as they felt that this did not reflect their innate sense of self. Because of this, Cody was attempting to find a role in society that was a more accurate representation of their own understanding of themself.

Living non-binary

Cody described life as a non-binary person as a life where you are under constant examination where you frequently must defend yourself and your identity. During the interview, Cody expressed dissatisfaction with cisgender people's response to their identity, stating that "[cisgender] people always have an opinion about your body; it's kind of like […] they think that their opinion on my body is more valuable than mine." Cody had feelings of frustration with how they experience judgements around their body and how they choose to express themselves. Overall, Cody has a desire for self-determination around self-expression and the ability to define themselves on their own terms.

Cody also described how they handled disclosure around gender-related concerns to people in their lives, and in doing so, they expressed feelings of concern around the assumptions of others:

> *Like, one of the first things I mentioned [to a new flatmate] was that "I'm trans, I am transitioning, is it an issue?" He said, "No, I don't see why it would be," and he's, like, sweet. He got a bit, like, we were talking to someone and he was kind of confused what pronouns to use. He was, like, "Ah, dude", and I was, like, "Sweet". I think it confuses him that I wear any kind of clothing I want, like I don't gender clothing or colour. So, he sees me, like, wearing board shorts and a T-shirt and then he seems me wearing a shirt or a dress or what have you or very feminine cut clothes and he's, like, I think he gets a bit confused by that.*

In the above passage, Cody expressed some concern about the potential judgements of others. Because of Cody's frequent experiences of meeting people who don't understand them, they have found themself frequently taking on the role of an "educator" in interactions:

I had a guy come over once and he was talking about how, "Oh, what's the point, a guy can't grow boobs," and I was, like, "Actually, he can with hormones," and he's like, "Really?" "Yeah". He's like, "Well, you know," because he thought they could only get them surgically, like, you had to have a breast implant. I'm like, "No, you can do that with hormones". He's like, "Oh really?" And he was saying all this stuff like, "What's the point if ... oh, well, you can't grow facial hair". I'm like, "Actually, I have already started, like I have shaved a few times from hormones". He's like, "Really?" I'm like, "Yeah."

Cody also found that their interactions with medical officials was similar to interactions to other people that they met in their life in that they found themselves being asked to conform to a particular form of gender presentation. Cody described how this also happened in spaces which handled the healthcare of transgender people:

When I first went to the clinic, they were like do you value more being able to dress as a man or physically changing to look like a man? And clothing is obviously ambiguous and like ungendered as it is for me it is kind of like trying to decide. And I thought I will dress however I want. I will wear a dress if I want. I will wear typical guys clothing if I want.

Cody described how they felt pressured to conform to a stereotypical male presentation and in doing so, they found themself being pressured to conform to a new set of gender stereotypes. Cody found that their treatment was being postponed due to their gender nonconformity and so they became frustrated with the medical process. This led to Cody taking a more assertive stance in their interactions with clinicians.

They ended up [delaying hormone treatment]. I finally got my first [hormone treatment] because I said, "I'm not waiting any longer. I'm not letting you dick me around any longer" and even the counsellor [...] was like, "Yeah, they shouldn't be making you wait that long".

And I kind of got the understanding that was because I was agender. [The transgender-focused medical specialists] still see everything as male and female and, like, binary. I think transgender is being a girl who strictly wants to become a guy or a guy who wants to become a girl. There are so many more variants and so it wasn't me that they wanted to make sure. They were unsure that this is what I wanted. So eventually I [said], "You need to stop putting these roadblocks in my way […] have I said anything to you that makes you unsure that I am ... competent?" and they [said], "No". "Then why are you making me do all these extra steps. Did you change it from one [counselling] visit to three visits?" and stuff like that. […] They put so many extra steps in the way because of being strict on the binary.

If we compare Cody's interaction with health services with Blair's interaction with health services, we can see two different strategies. Blair took the stance of conforming to a stereotypical presentation of a transgender person to access services, while Cody is more open about identifying as agender. While Blair may have been confronted with less barriers when transitioning, we can see that both participants' access to gender-affirming healthcare is complicated by their non-binary status. This led them to feel that they needed to be strategic with their access to healthcare rather than allowing them to be open with healthcare clinicians.

Cody also identified how, by openly interacting with the world as non-binary, they were exposing themself to the possibility of violent encounters:

But the kind of fucked up part of my life is, I said, however […] I feel like I might be physically in danger because I have facial hair and I look like a man but I am dressing in a dress, so I feel like I might be in danger.

Throughout their discussion of the lived experience of being transgender, Cody described a fear of violent reactions from others because of their identity, and they communicated this to others when they came out:

I made a post on Facebook when I decided to come out as transgendered and one part of it is, like, there are literally people in the world who would want me murdered because of this decision.

Cody made repeated references to the threat of violence and harassment during their discussion. Much like Blair, they described how by physically transitioning they had made the possibility of expressing femininity to be a more challenging prospect. Despite this, Cody still decided to medically and socially transition, feeling that being able to express their preferred gender presentation was worth experiencing potential harassment. For Cody, identifying as non-binary appeared to be a crucial way of defining oneself outside of social norms.

Drew

Drew is a European non-binary professional who uses they/them pronouns. Drew was assigned female at birth. At the time of the study Drew was in their late twenties and had migrated from overseas. At the time of the interview, they were living in a flatting situation.

Pre-coming out narrative

Much like other participants, Drew described themself as being a "tomboy" when they were younger:

Well, I was considered like a tomboy when I was young, and I had two older brothers and even though our relationship looking back was really problematic and I was in a lot of situations where I was kind of helpless, like I'm bullied by them […] I got it extra because I was a girl […] and they knew what to do to make me scream. And so I was quite a tomboy, I wanted to be like them. […] I would wear their hand-me-down clothes. If my mum needed to put me in a dress or skirt for a fancy occasion, I would scream and cry and throw a tantrum and she just thought maybe I didn't like the dress. She didn't understand it was because I was humiliated in it. And it had to do with my gender identity even though I didn't know that at the time or didn't know what it was called. It was very clear that I wanted to be like the boys.

When describing their childhood as a tomboy, Drew contextualises it within their relationships to their brothers. However, while Blair and Cody talked about being accepted for their tomboy nature, of being the "honorary guy", Drew speaks about their tomboy nature with a sense of longing, a desire to fit in. Drew discusses how they were bullied because they "[were] a girl" and how they began to equate feminine attire with humiliation.

As Drew got older, they tried to adopt a conventionally feminine gender presentation, however, they felt they had no clear role model in this process:

So, when I started trying to feminize, I had no real, like, role model or, like, a healthy image of what it's like to be a woman and I didn't really get that from my mum either and I kind of had a lot of strife with my mum. A lot of it was struggle over my identity, thinking about it now. But so, I would look to these [teen magazine images] and it sounds so cliché, it's like the marketing got me, they won, it happened, and I would try to emulate these things.

Drew felt that adhering to the social norms around femininity led to them being treated with a lack of respect from their peer group, at times feeling either marginalised or exploited. This leads to the "feminine ideal" being seen, a status that is both difficult to obtain and unrewarding when it is obtained. In Drew's discussion of their life before coming out, they describe a life that was strictly regulated by the gender norms of society. In this environment, Drew seems to have internalised the messages that to be a woman is "less" than being a man.

Developing awareness of oneself as non-binary

When discussing gender, Drew expressed ambivalence towards the concept of "womanhood" and described themsel as being "different" from what they see most women being.

I feel like I am not even sure of what a woman is. I have an idea of what a woman is and sometimes like there is different ideas of what women are and I see myself as a different kind of woman of what I think most women are. And so maybe I can't even explain it. And when I say that, I don't mean I am better or above or I am different and that is a good thing and these

women are bad and I am the good kind. I don't mean it like that. But I mean, like, if I am a woman, like I am told all my life I am going to be a woman when I grow to a certain age, then all of a sudden, I will go, I'm a woman, or if I am a woman because of my genitals, if that's what makes me a woman ... I don't know. I don't know. It's like sometimes I feel close to the word but other times I feel like an imposter because I feel like my womanhood or femininity has always been something I was trying to do for others. And so now with my more kind of ... it's like I've kind of come to be gender neutral by realising that if I identified as female or if I identified as male for me, personally, it would be a performance.

Drew's statement reflects elements of Judith Butler's (1990) theory that gender is "performative". However, Drew appears to imply that it is possible to avoid "performing" gender by consciously resisting prescribed gender roles, which does not necessarily reflect Butler's theory of gender performance. Butler dictates that gender is constructed not just through performative acts and expression but also by how the surrounding culture interprets and reacts to these performative acts. Drew reflected in the interview that they felt that their gender was something they performed for others, which shows how societal pressures have had influence on how Drew expresses their gender identity. Drew appears to be attempting to escape the definitions of others through performative acts that are not associated with their assigned gender at birth, however, this is still operating within the same cultural environment that they found so confining.

Drew described how one of their earliest exposures to the concept of non-binary gender identity was through the celebrity Ruby Rose, who identifies as non-binary themself. Drew described how exposure to high-profile individuals, such as Ruby Rose, led them to view identifying as non-binary to be a valid gender expression.

I think that maybe that was the first time that I ever thought that it could be cool and then also that someone who was so famous and so admired was identifying this way. That was kind of encouraging. And to be entirely honest, thinking about it, part of the reason that it was

encouraging is because I knew that Ruby Rose is somebody who is desired by heterosexual men and somehow that made them more valid to me because that is something that I have always seen, like, if a heterosexual cisgender man approves of you, you are valid. One of the insidious messages that I picked up.

In the previous statement, Drew described how the increasing visibility of non-binary people made them feel more comfortable with openly identifying as non-binary person themself. However, they also acknowledged that the perceived social desirability associated with the role encouraged them to view the concept of identifying as non-binary as being "more valid". Drew appeared to be uncomfortable with the fact that the increased social desirability made it feel easier for them to identify as non-binary, acknowledging that the performative acts of their gender are still being shaped by the surrounding culture.

Drew was also critical about how they felt the concept of transgender identity had become medicalised over time:

But yeah, so it frustrates me a lot when people say that non-binary is a trend or people are trying to be trendy or cool because it's like, yeah, non-binary people are fucking cool, like, I don't know. I think that ... there is a lot of policing around the identity and I think that is probably part of the reason why I didn't know about it before or understand it before because there has been this medicalisation of transgender identity that you have to be a certain way to be a transgender.

Drew was critical of the interpretation of gender as a medical condition, stating that they felt it reinforced a particular "way to be transgender" that was focused around medically transitioning, which they felt did not fit their experience. This may be because they did not experience much discomfort with their physical self but more so with feeling uncomfortable with their socially prescribed role. For Drew, the focus on the medical aspect of transgender identity appeared to create

a role that could be as restrictive as cisgender norms and assumptions. Drew felt that this marginalizes people like Drew who do not see a need for physical transition.

Living non-binary

In their early adulthood, Drew found a supportive community in which they functioned as non-binary, however, when they moved to a smaller city with a smaller LGBTQIA+ population, they found themself modifying their appearance to be more normative:

> *When I dress really feminine, sometimes I like to go over the top like hypersexual [...] I feel almost like I am drag. But [if] I were to present that way in [new community] people would just think that I was presenting as a cisgender heterosexual female and maybe looking for attention. [...] when I first moved here, I had just come from [home] and I was in a new place, I knew I was going to a campus and campus spaces are generally normative spaces. And so, I felt pressure to kind of feminize, whereas at home I had been going more towards, in my opinion, a more masculinised or butch kind of appearance, or the way that I feel about those words. And when I came to [new city], it was kind of like oh no, it was like this weird dysphoria. I don't even know in which direction but like all over again, where I am like, well, I have to feminise now.*

Drew felt that in this new community, visibly gender nonconforming people were less visible and were less easily accepted. This change of environment had a shaping effect on Drew's gender presentation as they felt they needed to present in a more gender-conforming fashion to escape harassment. This reflects how Butler (1990) states that the performative acts of gender are shaped through the culture that they are enacted in. Drew also described how they had difficulty communicating their gender identity to others and described one story where they got into an argument with someone over gender:

> *... [He said to me] "Wait, you don't think there's more than two genders do you?" He's like, "Right", as if I was joking. And I was like, "Do you think there's only two genders?" And we*

had like this moment where I think he has a lot of insecurities too and we were both just like ... there were a lot of emotions in that room. He told me to give him one example of another culture or society where there is more than two genders and so I started listing them. And he told me that I was using buzz words and padding my statements and this, this and that and like that it was just ridiculous. And he told me, this is the best part, he told me I was closed minded for believing in more than two genders. […] I felt insecure to cry in my own house because maybe that was feminine, and it was going to invalidate me even more that this fucking macho jerk is telling me that I don't exist, and I am not real and here I am crying like a little girl. It was a mess.

In this previous excerpt, Drew had their identity challenged by a cisgender man who denied the existence of non-binary gender identities. This was a frustrating experience for Drew and it served as another example of how their identity was shaped by the environment they found themselves in. It also mirrors Drew's earlier statement about how the social approval of Ruby Rose by cisgender men made it easier for Drew to come out, as they were then confronted by a cisgender man who denied their identity. Drew described they felt "insecure to cry" due to it being perceived as feminine, indicating that Drew then found that they had to shape their own behaviour to avoid "invalidating" their gender identity. This indicates that rather than Drew being allowed to express themselves, uninhibited openly identifying as non-binary has instead led them to be confronted with a new set of rules and norms on how they have to perform their gender.

While Drew had difficulty finding people who understood their identity in their everyday life, they also found some acceptance amongst alternative communities. Drew discussed how they began to find a more comfortable community at an alternative festival that celebrates inclusion.

I think that when I first came into this kind of [alternative festival] community, and I saw trans and non-binary people, like, just existing in public, enjoying themselves for the first time in my life, and gay and lesbian people, people of all different backgrounds and lots of bright colours in the same place, when I first experienced that I started to take it on as some of my identity

and I thought, before I thought I'm non-binary, I thought, oh, I'm a hippy. This fits me. And to wear all the different colours and patterns for me and to wear more loose-fitting clothing and stuff that was transgressing female gender norms for me. And so, I felt more connected. Like, if I had to choose femininity, it was like kind of an earthy kind of femininity, like this kind of like, I don't know; maybe your name is Sunflower Moonstone or something. And I used to have real long curly hair and I felt it. Although throughout that period, I didn't realise at the time, but I was also dealing with dysphoria in different ways and it didn't, it still felt like something was off.

Drew found that it was through this community that they managed to form some close friendships that allowed them to reflect on their previously highly gendered upbringing. An example of this can be seen in several photos Drew took of a recent experience where they defaced a book titled *Growing Great Boys*. I asked Drew to explain this photo series to me:

This photo, there is a book that is open, and there has been a bloody vulva drawn on it [...] So, and in the other photo, I picked up the book and I spread my legs and I put the bloody vulva in front of my genital region and someone took a photo. That was probably the only photo in the bunch that was not taken by me because it is of me.

Drew explained the context of these photos by discussing how it was designed to be a statement made against the assumption that children being expected to fill normative gender roles was equitable to a "healthy" childhood:

So, the book, I drove up with a group of people and we stopped in this little town [...] and got coffee and relaxed for a moment and talked and there were books in the coffee store or café. And there were toys for kids and stuff. There was this little section. And there was this book called Growing Great Boys. *It was some fucked up bullshit. Sorry. But yeah, we were reading through it at the table, reading some of the things aloud, just being like, oh my God, this is so ridiculous – just the way that it reinforced gender norms and the things that it said boys are like this and girls are like this, so boys need this. And it was just like, oh, it's almost like ... the*

way I would kind of give an analogy, even if I can't directly relate it to what I think. It would be like being an atheist and reading the bible. It would be like, what the fuck, this is all wrong and this is harming people – just all these kind of realisations. Not only was it comical but it was actually causing me quite a bit of stress to think that this is only one book and a whole line of thought where there were lots of books and lots of information that are perpetuated and so many people are getting these messages. So, while we can sit and laugh about it, at a certain point it becomes, like, too real. And so, my friend brought the book from the coffee shop for $10 and she ended up burning it.

Given that Drew grew up feeling confined by normative gender assumptions, the book seemed to have been representative to them of everything that they felt was wrong with these assumptions. For Drew, the burning of the book by their friend was a form of catharsis, a way of discarding so many of the messages that they received in their childhood and that they felt were harmful. It also makes clear that Drew's rejection of gender norms goes beyond just a personal rejection to a societal rejection, implying that Drew views rejecting gender norms as beneficial for society in general to move beyond gender norms. In the aftermath of this catharsis, Drew discussed being non-binary with the women that they were with:

And we were sitting around that night and I guess another reason that I felt comfortable with those girls, those women and took that picture of them and stuff is because I think I did mention to them since I had the Polaroid camera with me like, oh, by the way, I am participating in this project. Oh, by the way, I have a non-binary gender identity and they were totally cool with it, totally open. No one was worried about it.

In the story above, Drew described a moment of catharsis followed by a feeling of acceptance and connection with the people around them. It is also interesting to note that Drew used their involvement in the study as a way to communicate their non-binary identity, indicating that Drew's involvement within the study has become part of their narrative around living as non-binary.

For Drew, identifying as non-binary seemed to function as a way of liberating themself from so many of the experiences of the past that felt harmful. However, it led to Drew being confronted with a new set of stereotypes and norms about what it means to "be non-binary" and by others invalidation of their identity. However, Drew also portrayed the critique of the gender binary as being helpful and liberating, not just for themselves but also for the wider society.

Ellis

At the time of the study, Ellis was a university student in their late teens of Pākehā heritage who uses the label non-binary, stating that "I just don't want to be a gender". Ellis was assigned female at birth. Ellis stated that they used "they/them" pronouns. They came out as queer when they were 14 and came out as non-binary when they were 17.

Pre-coming out identity

During the interview, Ellis identified the dissonance they felt with being identified as a girl at a young age, however, they found it hard to fully define this feeling when asked:

> *That was like me before I had come out as anything. That was me in intermediate. And at that point, I was questioning my gender but not in a way that I knew what gender even, like, was, or I could be anything else but just in the way that, like, something is not right. This isn't like ... like, people are calling me girl and, like, it doesn't feel right. I don't know why, but. But then, like, that being said, I did pretty much always conform.*

Ellis described how they always had a feeling of dissonance with the term "girl". At this time, Ellis had not yet learned of the language and concepts surrounding non-binary gender identities. They were unaware that openly identifying as neither male or female was possible at this time. Unaware of such a possibility, Ellis found that they instead tended to conform with socially normative understandings of what it means to be a "girl".

Developing awareness of themselves as non-binary

Ellis described how they first encountered concepts of non-binary gender identity through the media:

I started seeing more LGB people minus the T, really, like in the media and online and that was when I figured out that I was not straight as well. And then a little bit after that, that's when I started noticing, like, trans stuff, like in my circles on the internet and other people around me, like not necessarily people that I knew in person, but I was on Tumblr and some people that I was following, like they were discovering who they were and coming out as trans. And I was, like, holy shit, that might be applicable to me and like, yeah, I just did some reading and then eventually came to the conclusion that, well, this is actually more me than what I've been told in the past.

The statement "this is actually more me than what I've been told in the past" indicates that for Ellis, this new narrative they found allowed them to make sense of their own personal experiences.

After Ellis came to understand themself as non-binary, they came out as non-binary to their friends and family, with mixed results:

I came out to my friends before my parents and they were really supportive, like I wasn't expecting that at all, but it was really good, and then I thought since they were supportive then my parents would be supportive, but then that didn't work out.

Ellis reported that their parents were not accepting of their gender identity. This was a response that Ellis felt indicated that they saw their gender identity as disrupting their parents' socially conventional lifestyle.

My mum calls me selfish sometimes, expecting her to use the right pronouns, like, because she's known me as a certain way my entire life and now for me to expect her to change, but I don't really. I get that it's going to take time but it seems like she doesn't even want to try […] I guess it was like our family was like a mum, a dad, a son and a daughter and it was very, like, perfect in a way and I think, like, both my parents, they really wanted to keep that daughter, but they didn't want to have two sons or a son and a not anything kind of deal, like they wanted to have that one son, one daughter, like we want the perfect family kind of thing, yeah, and then I totally threw a spanner in the works.

As discussed earlier, Ellis came to identify as non-binary, which helped to make sense of their feelings of dissonance with the identity of "girl" that was imposed on them due to their assigned sex at birth. By coming out as non-binary, Ellis has been able to articulate their own sense of identity. However, by coming out Ellis has also challenged their family's understanding of who they are, and Ellis has found that their family has responded by refusing to acknowledge Ellis' identity. This places restrictions on how Ellis can express their gender identity as they live in their parents' home and openly expressing their non-binary identity could cause tension.

Living Non-binary

Despite their parents' disapproval of their non-binary identification, Ellis continued to experiment with masculinising their appearance. Ellis described how they and their gender nonconforming friend decided to purchase binders:

> *We learnt about it through the internet like with pretty much everything else and at first I didn't want to buy one because I was worried that my parents would see the package and then wonder what it was or if I would suddenly walk out with no boobs and they would be like, "What's happening there – why don't you have boobs?" But like, eventually I got up the courage and I ordered a couple from eBay and they were really cheap. They were, like, four dollars each including shipping. So it was like, oh, and I've had those for a couple of years and they're really good.*

Ellis reported that they felt wearing a binder helped reduce their feelings of discomfort with having breasts, and they considered seeking medical interventions to further masculinise their body but had been unable to do so due to financial and family reasons:

> *Ellis: As for like surgery and [HRT], I broached the subject with my parents about a year ago. I said I wanted to go on [HRT] and they were just really not happy with that so I kind of dropped it.*
>
> *Interviewer: So, you would like to start hormones, but it sounds like the family situation is kind of preventing that at the moment?*

Ellis: Yeah, and financial as well, like there is no way I would be able to afford it without them helping me so it's just entirely out of the question.

While Ellis was prevented from using hormones at that point, they did not seem to be too concerned with not being able to proceed with physical transition.

I mean, I am pretty much over it now. I don't think I would want to go onto it anymore, like, just I have more come to terms with my body. I am honestly less dysphoric now than I was a long time ago when I was less confident in how I identified. Like, I don't really care what I look like anymore.

Ellis' reference to their dysphoria diminishing over time does not fit the traditional developmental pattern of people who identify as transgender, as they usually state that dysphoria persists or even intensifies without medical treatment to physically transition. Like other participants such as Cody and Drew, Ellis also described how, while they had experimented with masculinising their experience, they still like to maintain a degree of femininity:

I like flowery things but then like, I don't know, I don't really know how to describe it that well. I also thought, like, you can kind of see my leg and it is hairy and it is, like, oh, goodbye gender norms. […] I try to mix things a lot. I always feel like a certain pressure depending on what I am going to be doing that day, like where I am going to be going, who I am going to be interacting with and how I should dress for them, I guess. Like for work, I am not out so I have to dress femininely.

While other participants had felt it was important to have some form of external expression of their gender identity, either through physically transitioning or by adopting an androgynous presentation, Ellis felt a degree of detachment from their gender presentation, comparing how the outside world sees them to a "costume" that they feel no emotional investment in:

It's weird. It feels like I am wearing a costume, like honestly. I mean, just because everyone calls me, like [name given at birth], and everyone refers to me as like she, her, girl, whatever,

and I am almost, like, desensitised to it there. I can enjoy myself there whilst still being mis-gendered because I feel like I've got a costume on, like it's not actually me there, which is so weird, but it works, I guess.

Ellis' story provides an interesting contrast to earlier participants as they show little discomfort from being physically "female" and report that their feelings of dysphoria reduced over time, to the extent that they seemed to be able to live in comfort with being treated as socially feminine. Given other participants (such as Cody) showed an intensifying feeling of dysphoria, this supports the notion that there are different ways to be non-binary and that the non-binary identity category may cover a wide range of lived experiences.

Frankie

At the time of the study, Frankie was a teacher in her late twenties who identified as genderqueer and was assigned female at birth. Frankie was of Pākehā heritage. She lived in a flatting situation. When asked about her pronoun preference, Frankie stated that "she is fine" and also made reference to the fact that that she often defaults to "female" on official paperwork.

Pre-coming out identity

Before identifying as genderqueer, Frankie had self-identified as a lesbian and continued to maintain significant involvement with the lesbian community.

When discussing her childhood, Frankie described growing up in a family that had quite liberal values and were accepting of Frankie's gender nonconforming behaviour:

My parents are really just super liberal, great, […] Occasionally mum will be like, "Oh, baggy shirts. Going through a baggy shirt phase, are we?" She didn't care. That's fine. But she has always wanted me to be more girlie, but I think she has just given up.

Frankie also described how she presented with some gender nonconforming behaviour from quite an early age, describing herself as "vaguely androgynous":

I guess, like, pretty much since probably since I hit puberty because I know mum said that I used to like prancing around in dresses when I was like eight and stuff, but I have just never

felt particularly feminine. I just don't feel very feminine. And I guess at times in my life I have always sort of tossed up being, like, does that mean that I am, like, masculine, but I don't feel particularly masculine either.

Frankie portrayed this alienation with what is culturally considered feminine with a photo of herself standing in a changing room holding a bra up to the mirror:

I took this photo because I was just really, really frustrated because all I wanted was a bra that would just sort of like look fine, you know. Like I don't necessarily want it to be, you know, like the most masculine thing in the world, but I don't want it to be like every single thing had, like, lace and frills and I'm, like, can I have something that is, like, attractive but not covered in lace? Is there a middle ground? Like, I don't want it to be a sports bra necessarily, but I also, like, don't want it to be just, like, some weird porn star bra. So, I was just feeling a bit frustrated at that.

Frankie appeared to be discussing a feeling of consistently being pushed to adhere to gender stereotypes, and whether or not these are hyperfeminine portrayals of what it means to be a woman. At the same time, Frankie also described feelings of discomfort with masculinity, and she identified certain masculine traits that she viewed as being undesirable for herself:

I don't want to be any of the traits that I associate with masculine, like loud, overbearing or taking up space or not listening to people or aggressive. I am really not aggressive. I don't really feel like any of those things either. But I also don't feel, I don't know, like, I feel like I feel like ... I feel like I feel feminine but on my own terms.

Frankie portrays her gender nonconformity as not only being what she innately feels comfortable doing but also as being consistent with her peers within the queer community.

I think probably I have always been a little bit of vaguely androgynous like my whole, well, since puberty, but then lots of other of my queer women friends were too because it's like a look and we were all in a similar boat.

Frankie's acknowledgement of androgyny being "a look" that was shared amongst her queer friends showed that expressing androgyny fulfils a specific social function for Frankie, in that it signified to others her queer sexuality.

> *Like, I want to look queer, like, be recognizably queer, like part of it obviously because otherwise, like if girls don't know that you are queer then they won't hit on you.*

Frankie describes androgyny as part of the aesthetic of the lesbian community of which she is proud to affiliate with. However, Frankie also identified that she was exposed to some negative portrayals of lesbians in the past, which she actively rejected.

> *I guess I kind of grew up with some, well, what I see as quite narrow stereotypes of what lesbians were, which is sort of like the big butch fat one in man clothes and short hair and then the skinny, you know, little femme one with a high voice and high heels, right. I always really rebelled against those stereotypes. I really hate that a lot. It just feels so, I don't know, what does it feel? It just feels like play act at being heteros or something.*

Frankie also noted that her attempts to resist the butch dynamic is related to her own concerns about her body image:

> *I guess part of me would rather be trans than be what I see as, like, a fat butch person, you know. […] I have always noticed that when I have been worried about being trans, I have also been worried about my weight, so it is probably tied up with that, like not wanting to have that stereotype shoved on me, sort of thing.*

In this passage, Frankie expresses an active resistance to the stereotype of the butch lesbian, which has carried negative connotations around body image and also of being an attempt to mimic heteronormative standards rather than being its own identity. Frankie is also uncomfortable with how these stereotypes portray lesbian women as being defined by how masculine or feminine they are. Frankie's frustrations with these dynamics feeling ill-fitting led her to question if she is transgender. However, as previously stated, Frankie did not feel "male" either and described herself as being "feminine on my own terms". Frankie also referred to this feeling of being "overwhelmed by gender"

at times, which she described as a feeling of being pressured to conform to normative standards of gender:

I think, like, I always feel more, um, overwhelmed by gender when I am feeling overwhelmed by other stuff in life. So, like, over the first few months that I was up in [major city], I was feeling just very overwhelmed by everything and that made me feel overwhelmed by gender, but now that I am feeling more calm and relaxed, I just feel at peace with that as well.

Frankie's narrative conveyed a feeling of being constantly torn between several different cultural archetypes. While Frankie rejected conventional social standards around femininity, she was also uncomfortable with taking on a masculine role. Frankie also found herself dissatisfied with heteronormative stereotypes of lesbian relationships. In her narrative, Frankie found herself torn between different cultural understandings of what it means to be feminine or masculine, and of same-sex relationships and she found that none of these stereotyped understandings fit her.

Developing awareness of oneself as non-binary

While Frankie viewed androgyny as being a feature of her queer community, this did not immediately translate into tolerance for transgender and non-binary people. In fact, Frankie described herself as holding some transphobic views when she was at university.

I was actually a bit transphobic at university, which I realised in retrospect, of course. Like I remember because I was [at university] and we had a really strong queer community. There were heaps of us and lots of parties and it was really fun and you know everyone, and it was cool. But there weren't really any trans-people and I remember sort of, like, almost feeling, like, stressed or resentful or something, like some weird negative feelings towards trans-people in a kind of like, oh, everyone is just a bit gender something, they should just get over it. I distinctly remember feeling these feelings. I remember talking to one of my friends and probably saying something transphobic like, "Oh, I don't really believe that people are blah, blah, blah". And then I moved back up to [home city] and I came into contact with heaps of

trans-people. And I was just, like, oh, I am such an idiot. I just don't think I had ever really thought about trans stuff before. [...] I was like, oh, gender is a spectrum, amazing.

Frankie identified a shift in her cultural understandings of what it means to "be transgender". Previously, she viewed transgender as a medicalization of gender variance, but after she became immersed in transgender and genderqueer subculture, she began to view it as cultural. Through doing this, she ceased to view gender as being a set of discrete categories and shifted to viewing gender as a spectrum. This understanding of gender as a spectrum allowed for a more nuanced understanding of herself, which didn't rely on older stereotypes around femininity, masculinity or lesbianism.

Living non-binary

Compared to other participants, Frankie did not report much change in her own gender presentation after identifying as genderqueer. She had already been presenting in a way that disrupted traditional gender norms. For Frankie, adopting this identity label appears to be an attempt to articulate her own lived experience. Frankie also described how being "visibly queer" was an important value for her as it allowed her to be a positive role model for LGBTQIA+ youth:

So, I feel like when I was growing up, I never really knew anyone who was the next generation up of queer. I didn't know anyone. I didn't see anyone. And I think as well because we didn't really do internet stuff until probably when I started university. [...] I want to be the kind of person that young people can just sort of, like, look at and think, oh look, a queer person, that's nice. I guess part of the reason I quite want to, like, I want to look queer, like, be recognizably queer.

However, identifying as genderqueer does not appear to have allowed Frankie to be liberated from gendered assumptions, as she described a dynamic that developed in some of her relationships:

I dated a couple of, like, one woman and one person who identified as genderqueer. They were both really feminine and I feel really weirdly pigeon-holed by them as this masculine person and I really didn't like it. And at the time, I didn't realise why I felt so uncomfortable with lots of things that ... with lots of our interactions. And then after I had ended it with them and I

looked back on those relationships, I realised that that's what they had been doing. I really didn't like it. Just sort of throw away comments and things. It's just not the way I see myself.

Interviewer: So almost like you were trying to play more this masculine part or like the boyfriend.

Frankie: Yeah, exactly. It was really horrible. I really didn't like it at all. And while I was dating them, I felt really weird about my gender identity, because I was, like, am I trans, what's going on? And then as soon as I ended it with them, I felt so comfortable with myself, 100% comfortable because my next girlfriend after that just took me for exactly just me. It was just ... she never tried to slot me into a role. I immediately was just really comfortable. It was interesting. And it was funny because they were such queer activists.

While identifying as genderqueer was a way of articulating identity outside of conventional norms, it also seemed to have led to Frankie being confronted with a new set of gendered expectations. By coming out as a genderqueer person who is AFAB, she found herself placed into a position where it is expected that she take on a masculine role in a relationship. This does not sit well with Frankie and reflects previous feelings of pressure to adopt a "butch" lesbian role. As a gender nonconforming AFAB person, Frankie has found herself navigating the expectations of others while trying to self-define her own identity.

Gael

At the time of the study, Gael was in her early thirties and identified as a gender fluid person, which she defined as being someone who shifts between presenting as male or female at different times. Gael stated that she prefers male pronouns for when he is presenting as man and female pronouns for when she is presenting as a woman. Given that Gael presented as a woman throughout my conversation with her, female pronouns will be used. Gael also described her sexuality as "heteroflexible", stating that she can "only really see myself being emotionally satisfied by a woman" but also that she is "attracted to some men and I like the way that attraction kind of enables my feeling like a woman". Gael is of NZ European heritage and is AMAB.

Pre-coming out identity

Unlike the other participants in this study, Gael was AMAB, so Gael had different experiences growing up. Gael discussed how, for most of her life, there was no visible model of gender nonconformity in the popular culture for AMAB people:

> *I was born in the eighties and so it's not like it is now where you've got trans personalities in the media and it's a real common conversation topic among people and seems to be on everybody's lips at the moment and there is a lot of cultural points of reference. There wasn't that when I was growing up. If there were any, it was kind of trans crossdressers as the butt of a joke on a comedy show or something.*

Gael feels that the only examples of AMAB femininity that she saw growing up were ones that were treated with derision. Gael described how she continued to present to the everyday world with a masculine persona, unaware of other ways to interact with the world.

Developing awareness of oneself as non-binary

For Gael, the only easily accessible narrative around trans people growing up was one of derision. This led Gael to seek information from other sources:

> *When I was 14, 15, 16, I was tinkering around with computers and that enabled me access to information that I wouldn't have had otherwise. So, I found forums and chat sites and such that offered me access to their social networks of other gender-diverse communities and individuals. And that is something that has really grown and persisted, so I still engage with online networks that help me to meet new people and offer new perspectives. [...] Also, it's easier to share yourself online in a really truly anonymous way [than] in person, and that's what I did, and it was really important for me.*

Like other participants, Gael found online spaces to be useful in accessing resources and communities for people who felt that they did not fit the gender binary. Interestingly, Gael described the feeling of anonymity that came with online spaces as being important to her, implying that it allowed her to question her gender privately while also maintaining a presentable male persona in

her everyday life. In doing this, Gael appeared to have constructed herself as having a "dual persona": a masculine, public persona and a more private, feminine persona. When talking about what it means to be publicly gender nonconforming, Gael described the world as being particularly "hostile" to people who don't fit the male or female categories:

> *I mean, it has a lot of fear and anxiety associated with it. Frankly, in terms of how it will impact my future and my ability to be in a stable relationship with someone and the way that it might limit aspects of the way that I can exist in the world. The fear of just leaving the house, something as simple as that and what that might mean in a really kind of direct way, like am I going to get heckled on the street or sexually assaulted? There are certain realities that I think gender diverse people face and they are reflected in health and wellbeing statistics and the realities for any gender diverse person and some of them are really scary.*

Gael's portrayal of the world is one where presenting her feminine self is seen as a potentially dangerous act, due to how it exposes her to potential harassment. This is reflected in comments from other participants like Adan, Blair, Cody, and Drew, who reflected a belief that to be visibly gender nonconforming was to be vulnerable to harassment from others. Despite this, Gael also stated that it has become increasingly important to her to be visibly gender nonconforming:

> *It's increasingly important and that is a shift, actually. I think two years ago I would have said not very important, but I find myself now creating so much space to deal with it, think about it in myself. I want to be visible, I guess, as a gender diverse person and to represent being a gender diverse person, I guess, and yeah, I don't know how ... I guess like gendered language is more, how can I put this, noticeable to me than it has been in the past and I am starting to be a little bit uncomfortable with, like, if I am dressing in basically as a man but in an androgynous way, it kind of pisses me off when people call me bro and sir and stuff like that. And that never used to be the case. It's something that has changed in me and I am starting to dislike it. I guess that signals the importance of being visible as gender diverse, yeah.*

Gael described a growing discomfort with presenting with her masculine persona and a desire for her innate understanding of her own identity to be acknowledged. This is akin to the narratives discussed by other participants who similarly felt confined by normative understandings of gender and instead wished to be able to express themselves in a way that feels more accurate to their own innate understanding of their gender identity.

Living non-binary

Around the time of the interview, Gael had moved to a city with a larger LGBTQI+ community. Gael described this move as being an integral part of allowing her to explore her "feminine self" more deeply:

> *It's only the last year that I have felt sort of brave and comfortable enough to present in public as female. So, it's a relatively new thing for me. Up until that point, [male] was how I always presented and now that's how I usually present but not always. And now the balance is, it's hard to say, I guess, because it's quickly sort of shifting and I am able to find opportunities to present as female in public much more often and feel much more comfortable doing it. The balance is shifting quite rapidly now.*

Previously, Gael's "masculine self" was the predominant identity but Gael was finding that she was more predisposed to presenting her feminine persona. With this shift in identities, Gael also identified that she was developing a changing relationship to her own body:

> *I think I am mostly comfortable in my own body but the one aspect that I have struggled with, I guess, is my facial and body hair because I think my facial hair is my biggest tell if I am presenting as female. There have been real moments where I don't like it at all and I want it to be gone and the same is probably true with my chest hair and stomach hair, leg hair, to some extent. I have quite aggressive hair growth and it's a difficult thing to manage I guess in terms of wanting to present in an androgynous manner or present as female. […] So facial and body hair has held a really strong place in terms of where it sits in navigating my gender identity.*

[…] I have started to undergo laser hair removal or reduction and so I am in six months to a year not going to have to shave my face or upper body anymore.

While Gael had been further exploring her gender identity, it was not an exploration that occurred in isolation. Throughout Gael's involvement in the project, she experienced a breakup in her long-term relationship. This meant that reviewing the photos was a particularly poignant experience for Gael as many of the photos were either taken by her ex-girlfriend or featured her ex-girlfriend in them. At one point, Gael disclosed why they broke up:

Because the reason that she dumped me is that she is a lesbian and that is like a really confusing thing to digest, I guess, as to what ultimately was the definitive reason […] I think the upshot of it was that she wasn't able to see me as a woman and that was a difficult thing to take on board because I felt like if anyone could it was her.

While Gael developed a dual persona to accommodate her masculine and feminine elements, her rejection by her girlfriend seemed to present a challenge to her feminine identity. By having the person that she loved not accept her as a woman, Gael appeared to feel that the authenticity of her "feminine self" was challenged.

Since the breakup, Gael described how she had begun to ask questions about her identity and this led her towards seeking more opportunities to present as female while also working to access transition-based healthcare:

It also presented an opportunity to spend a lot of energy on myself and take that challenge and pour a lot of my energy back into working on those issues that it made me confront and I have been doing that very actively and very consistently over the last three months since she dumped me. Putting heaps of work into it and just accessing some healthcare that I haven't before and taking every opportunity to present as female in public that I have.

As a gender fluid person, Gael is someone who feels that she has both a masculine and feminine side to her identity. Since Gael grew up in a culture that is hostile to AMAB people with a feminine presentation, she has spent much of her life hiding this female side. The recent emergence

of discourse around non-binary gender identities allowed Gael to articulate this experience of a dual self and to find a supportive community where her feminine side can be explored. Gael acknowledged that the discourse around non-binary gender identity also allows for change, and Gael described how she is open to her identity further evolving in the future:

> *I don't call myself a transwoman. I would actually preface that by saying that gender fluid is something that is subject to change and maybe one day, I will call myself a transwoman or a woman. I am really open to that changing.*

Gael's description of her gender identity differs from what other participants described. While others talked about coming out as non-binary as revealing their innate identity, Gael describes her experience of being non-binary as being in a state of change, and is open to the possibility of that identity changing over time. Gael also gives a more personal narrative than other participants and gives less focus on issues with gender norms in society, which creates a contrast with participants such as Drew who discussed their critique of society's gender norms. This may be due to the fact that Gael had recently gone through a relationship breakup, which led her to reflect on her own journey and reconsider previously held assumptions.

Harper

At the time of the study, Harper was a student in their late teens who identified as "trans-masculine". They described themself as an AFAB individual who identified with the more masculine end of the spectrum. Harper preferred to use "he/him" and "they/them" pronouns. When asked about their sexual identity, Harper described himself as "asexual grey romantic with potentially homoromantic or polyromantic tendencies", which they defined as, "if I am attracted to people, which is rarely, and it's romantically rather than sexually, I tend to be attracted to masculine people […] I don't see it monogamously".

Pre-coming out identity

Harper portrayed their life before transition as contrasting with who they are now, to the extent of describing their younger self as a sort of "false self". Harper portrayed their younger self as

being “the school nerd, the mousy little one with glasses and then I just went, that’s not me”. During his discussion of his life before coming out, Harper described how he had been diagnosed with Asperger’s and how this impacted his interaction with others:

> *I used to be long frizzy hair, glasses, sort of. Because I have Asperger’s, people tended to regard me differently because I wasn’t capable of interacting at level with my peers. I basically took too much attention to detail and was far too interested in specific things and couldn’t stand stuff being incorrect, which in a group of five-year-olds doesn’t really work. And from then on, the label stuck, and I sort of progressed through school as the complete social recluse because no one really wanted to spend time with mousy nerd. And so that didn’t help with, hurray, anxiety, depression.*

Harper described how from a young age, they felt different from others around them. However, Harper did not contribute this experience of being different as being due solely to their gender identity, but also due to having Asperger’s and how that influenced their view on the world.

Developing awareness of oneself as non-binary

Along with the difficulty that Harper experienced with his peers, Harper also found puberty to be a stressful experience. Harper described how distressing they found developing a feminine figure to be and how it led to them being treated in an objectifying manner by other classmates. Harper described how they came to understand this as having an innate desire to be read as not female:

> *That’s sort of when it clicked why I felt so uncomfortable. And it wasn’t that I didn’t want to be perceived as a sexual object – I mean, granted, I didn’t want to be perceived [as that], but it wasn’t that, it was more of a, this is why I am not comfortable, because I wasn’t happy in my own skin with my own identity, because I didn’t want to be perceived as female. I didn’t like that whole concept. It just didn’t sit right with me. I prefer to be perceived as masculine and for the most part in normal society that involves being perceived as male. But I tend to ... I*

would rather have testosterone-based puberty. I would rather have the sex characteristics of a male assigned person.

Given that Harper expressed a preference for a masculine physique, they began to be interested in transitioning. However, they came across some difficulty with accessing healthcare services because of their age:

My age has been quite difficult because I wasn't very young in trans. I wasn't an adult in trans. I wasn't just pre-puberty in trans. I was post-puberty but not an adult and feeling uncomfortable in my identity and wanting to be perceived as masculine, and I already understood a lot of my identity because I researched it myself before I spoke to anyone because I don't like going to people with questions about my identity. I like to know who I am and go, "Hey, can you help me with X thing?" And so, for the system because I didn't follow all of their procedures for their tick boxes of yes, you are trans, it took a lot of effort to get through the system.

Harper found himself having to "explain" his identity to medical professionals, a process that he found frustrating as he was placed in the position of having to "prove" his identity to medical professionals. Harper also described how given that he came out during his adolescence, he had to navigate the relationship with his parents:

Coming out to my parents was interesting. I got the, "You are going through a phase". I got the, "You are only doing this to fit in with your friends at school", which is bullshit. Why would I pretend, in quotes, to be trans, to fit in? So, that was an interesting conversation with my father.

Similar to his interactions with health professionals, Harper felt that his parents were treating his identity as inauthentic. Once again, Harper was placed in the position of having to "prove" his identity to his parents. Harper also expressed frustration with how they had been handled in their interactions with professionals who he felt were supposed to support him.

…And from then on, there was various other counsellors, professionals, GPs who all had different reactions from clinical curiosity, which was clearly disconcerting because it was awkward questions and lack of understanding and sort of no appropriateness. […] I've also had some not so great experiences with the mental health system in which I went to a government-provided counsellor for six sessions for gender identity. The person I was working with seemed to have no understanding of being gender diverse or being trans at all and was a specialist at understanding addictions and sort of substance abuse, which doesn't really fit what I was there for. So, it was kind of a bit BS and then I found a counsellor that actually understands being trans and I am paying for that but at least I am getting the support I need.

Given that Harper found the resources that he was offered were lackluster in what they provided, he instead went private where he was able to find someone who he felt understood him. Harper described how he is consistently portrayed as being the "educator" of those around him, an experience that is frustrating for him when he is seeking support. However, this experience led to Harper having a degree of animosity directed towards public health services.

Living non-binary

Harper's affiliation with the queer and non-binary community was one that he was proud of. When sharing a photo of some of his attire, Harper pointed out how many of his fashion choices reflected this feeling of pride:

This photo is me wearing my beanie with my Pride ribbon and my Pride band. I sort of chose to take this photo to sort of express the fact that I don't hide my identity. I deliberately choose to wear subtle hints to it in my everyday wear because I don't like the idea of being in the closet and, given my circumstance, I can't be in the closet. So, I kind of have to sort of either act like it hurts me when people reference it or go fuck you, this is me. So, I tend to take the path of fuck you, this is me. So, I wear what I want, do what I want and sod the expectations. […] For me, I wear my identity as sort of armour because if you are open about something,

people don't actually think at all that you are insecure about it and therefore they don't tend to make as much effort to tear you a new one because of it.

Harper described how he draws strength from this presentation, particularly in contrast with the "mousy nerd" persona he described having in school. Harper has found that since openly presenting as trans-masculine, he has experienced more harassment at school:

It's a small […] school where everyone knows everyone and there is a largely homophobic population and homophobia extends to transphobia because people can't tell the difference. And so, I still get heckled when I go there. People used to, before I left, throw gum at me, shove me around the hallways, scream "fag" at me whenever I went past and generally pretend I didn't exist during group work, pretend they couldn't hear me, that they couldn't see me, that I wasn't there. They used to mess with my stuff and put horrible things and notes and things in my locker, on my locker. It was a pretty savage environment.

Before coming out, Harper felt ostracized due to being the "geeky kid" but at the time of the interview, he experienced more active harassment at school due to being visibly gender nonconforming. By openly identifying as non-binary, Harper experienced an escalation in harassment. Harper described how this had led to him becoming "severely depressed, really anxious". Despite experiencing this harassment, Harper still viewed coming out as non-binary as a positive experience that has enriched his life:

I think that I would be a whole lot less capable to interact if I didn't know who I was and how I interact with the world. I think it would have just made me so much less confident in who I was, which meant I wouldn't have met so many amazing people who I have and I wouldn't have made the friends that I did and I wouldn't be the same person because I would be so focused on quashing down a core part of my being and pretending that I wouldn't have time or space for anything else or anything more meaningful.

For Harper, identifying as non-binary was a way for him to state his identity on his own terms. While coming out has allowed Harper to more easily be able to state his own identity on his

own terms, it has also created more friction between themselves and those around them. Harper portrays himself as someone who is frequently placed in the position of having to justify his identity to others. However, Harper feels that coming out has given them more strength to interact with the world that he often finds is so unaccommodating of people like him.

Indy

Indy is a non-binary individual who uses they/them pronouns and was assigned female at birth. At the time of the interview, Indy was above the age of 35. Indy is of Māori heritage. At the time of the interview, Indy was not employed and they lived in rented accommodation.

Pre-coming out identity

Indy described having a difficult childhood, which had a formative effect on their adult life:

> *No one was there to help. No one was there to comfort. I had to do it myself. And so, it's a very big defining part of me because it's my one strength. Even when everything sucked, even when I was small and nothing was working, I did. I pushed through. I found hiding places. I told people. I yelled, I screamed, I threw things. I defended myself. So, it's a big thing. Sad story but big thing.*

From their description of their childhood, it is apparent that Indy came to value self-sufficiency and autonomy. Like other participants, Indy saw themself as being an outsider and described how their tendency to ask questions led to some difficult conflicts. Indy portrayed this by saying, "I like people. I just find that people don't seem to like me, or I am weird in a lot of different ways." This difficulty with interacting with others had led to some tense interactions with others, and in their adolescence, Indy began to view themself as being an "outsider" from the mainstream. This sense of being an "outsider" was also present in their experience of their gender identity:

> *I didn't present as anything but female at university because I barely understood it. I didn't know. Like, sexuality, when I was a kid I got really confused because I thought you could only be gay or straight. I didn't know there were other options and same with gender – I knew that I didn't fit the female box, but I didn't necessarily fit the male box either. And it's only the sort of*

last two or three years that I have realised that there are other words, there are other ways of describing it.

While Indy positions themself as being an "outsider" who is excluded from the mainstream, they also position the mainstream as being hostile to those on the "outside".

I started funnily enough doing psych, but that was second year, I think, behavioural psych. They said the definition of mental illness is a deviation from the norm and I am as not normal as you can be, and not be a psychopath or a rapist or whatever. As not normal as you can be without being dangerous. And it scared me. I thought, I am going to be studying people like me, so I didn't go any further.

In the previous excerpt, Indy portrays the world around them as one that is hostile to those who are different. While Indy had not come out as non-binary at this point, they understood themself as someone who did not fit the mainstream, so they felt that they had to be guarded against the world around them.

Developing awareness of oneself as non-binary

Indy came to understand their non-binary gender identity following a mental health crisis:

It's almost like it cleared the air, it cleared ... I have always had the noise of all the trauma in the way. I never really felt comfortable in the gendered world anyway, but it was almost like through the process of getting through the breakdown and starting to heal and getting funding to get counselling and blah, blah, um, it cleared the air in my head. And I started, it started getting louder. I heard it louder. I felt it louder. And then, of course, the internet exploded with all the, with Caitlyn [Jenner] and all that stuff. I started learning about all the words and found non-binary.

Indy described their experiences of coming out as an overall positive experience and it seemed to allow Indy to express their inner experiences to a world that they often found to misunderstand them. It was also through the non-binary community that Indy was able to find people who shared similar experiences.

I found other people that were feeling the same way. And I didn't ... once you find out stuff like that, find out you are not alone, that other people felt the way and other people have found a way of feeling better, you think, "Why not me?"

While Indy had always struggled with feeling like an outsider in the past, in the non-binary community they saw people who they felt that they would have a shared affinity with. Discourse around non-binary gender identity also opened up more positive narratives around difference, meaning that Indy saw possibilities of celebrating their difference rather than feeling persecuted for it.

Living non-binary

After coming to understand themself as non-binary, Indy felt that it was appropriate to come out to their family and social networks, and they found the concept of non-binary identity was a useful framework with which to communicate their understandings of their identity.

I actually came out first to my [mental health support group]; they found out first. And I came out to [family] after that and then I came out online officially. So that was a lot scarier, like I was really scared to come out publicly on Facebook and everything, but everyone was like, "So?", which is actually probably a good indication of the friends I've made, the quality of the friendships.

Coming out was a positive experience for Indy, as they felt they were accepted by their friends and family who did their best to understand what Indy had been through. Indy also expressed a desire to physically transition and decided to access hormones. Indy stated that they were surprised by the service given at the sexual health clinic:

The psych assessment was really long but I found out I could get a psych assessment through the sexual health clinic in [nearby city] for free because everyone is saying you have to get the psych assessment to get any help but there is very little funding for the psych assessment. So, I had to go to [nearby city] to see the sexual health clinic and they referred me and we spent about three hours on the assessment. That's a bit long. Not nearly as bad as the ACC

assessments I've had. She was really good and really kind and didn't ask any of the nasty questions I expected. So that's good. Surprisingly good. […] She was very kind and respected, like I told her about my trauma and, um, she avoided those subjects, subjects that obviously would trigger a flashback or whatever. It's actually not flashbacks was the problem. I expected her to talk about sexuality, you know. Apparently one of the things that people sometimes ask in those assessments is like your sexual fantasies and stuff. I thought, I don't really want to talk about that kind of stuff. And she avoided it once she found out that I am not active sexually.

While Indy had found hormone therapy to be easy to access, they found that other medical interventions are more cost prohibitive, and would likely require overseas travel:

It's not like we can get surgery in New Zealand. It's hard enough apparently just to get breasts off, which I think is ridiculous because they take breasts off people with cancer, so it should theoretically be the same operation. I wouldn't even care if I got all scarred and stuff. We'll see what happens with the system. I am lucky in that I am older, so I've got a lot more resources, emotional resources, patience.

For Indy, surgical interventions seemed inaccessible due to reasons of cost, which meant they were unable to get the body that they felt they would be most comfortable with. Therefore, Indy identified "patience" as an important strength that they had, and they portrayed this by comparing themself to a younger friend of theirs:

I've got a young friend […], she's in uni, and she is really uncomfortable and impatient and wants it fixed now. I think, well, it doesn't ... I am probably over-cautious. I don't want to do anything permanent until I know it's okay, although actually if someone offered to chop breasts off and take the inside bits out, I would probably go yes, sign me up right now.

Indy's "patience" related to their own body may also be informed by their own unique relationship with their body, as they experienced chronic health problems:

It's actually a contrast. I'm not my body. […] That's not who I am. Who I am is on the inside. So, it's helped to contrast. I think I couldn't have gotten through a lot of the dysphoria if I didn't disconnect, even a little, from my body because it's not me.

Indy's experience of their body shaped their experience of their gender identity. Their experience of illness led them to view their body as a separate entity from themself. This allowed Indy to tolerate any feelings of dysphoria and be open to defining their identity in a way that is not related to their current physical status.

Jules

Jules is an AFAB non-binary individual who said that they "don't know what gender I ascribe myself to" but stated that they prefer they/them pronouns. At the time of the study, they were in in their early twenties. Jules is NZ European. At the time of the interview, they lived with their parents and worked in retail.

Pre-coming out identity

Like other participants, Jules described themself as being gender nonconforming from a young age:

I was always a tomboy when I was younger, so I have never had to ... like my family has always understood that I have never been like a girlie girl or whatever, all those corny gendered terms. I think they just think I am a little bit weird. My dad is like, "Why do you always dress like your boyfriend, like you always dress in baggy clothes and stuff?" I am, like, "Because I don't want to be perceived as a girl, but I don't really mind". Like, my presentation is usually one that is kind of ambiguous and, like, androgynous.

Jules described how they were introduced to non-binary concepts in adolescence by their transgender friend, Logan. Jules described how, before either of them identified as non-binary or transgender, their friendship helped lead them to question their identity:

I went to school with [Logan] and a few years ago now, […] and by then I still thought that I was cis and stuff, and I told them when I was younger, like, I read all the time and I loved the

idea of, like, you know you would have young girls in books and they would bind their chests and go and run away on a pirate ship and stuff and I used to love that. And that just threw everything into question for them and they came out as trans a year later and they always accredited it, like the revealing of that part of themselves, to me as, like, I had flipped a switch or something and they realised that they did not have to be cis and stuff.

Jules portrayed the story that inspired in themself the possibility of coming out being stories of "young girls […] would bind their chest and go run away on a pirate ship and stuff", which appears to associate adopting masculine traits with finding freedom and adventure. Jules viewed their process of coming out as non-binary as being intertwined with their friend's own experience of coming out. Jules described their relationship with Logan as being in stark contrast to their school environment:

I've just been talking to [Logan] about what it was like and they came out, like, while we were at school still. […] It was very, like, narrow environment to be in. So weird. And by then, I already knew that I was bisexual and stuff and so I was aware of just being outside of the heteronormative norm and I was, like, oh, this is interesting. And it was just kind of a dawning awareness, I think, and I started to question it more and more and then I stopped thinking about it completely because I was really scared. I don't know if I was ever shamed but I know that I was worried about what it would mean, the fact that if I came out to my family or anything.

Jules defined their school as a "narrow environment", which they felt they did not entirely fit. In this environment, Logan's own narrative coming out as transgender appears to have provided Jules with a possible alternative to this, which allowed for more freedom and allowed them to be "outside of the heteronormative norm". At the same time, this pathway was potentially terrifying for Jules, due their concerns around the implications it would have for their personal life and family relationships.

Developing awareness of oneself as non-binary

During the interview, Jules described a significant event that led to them deciding to come out as non-binary:

> *I had, like, a really big meltdown at the beginning of the [then current] year. My dad had got me a bike for Christmas and it was purple and it had a little basket and it was a really feminine bike and I was so thankful for the gift, but I saw the bike and I was like, I just can't have this because it's so girlie. Like, I had never been girlie, and I thought it was so weird that he would pick that kind of bike out without asking me and stuff. Even though I was really thankful, I just had the biggest cry and I couldn't stop shaking. It was so weird. Like, I had never had such an extreme reaction to being gendered like that before. So that was like revelatory. I was like oh, I am really serious about this.*

In Jules' story, they portrayed a feeling of being pushed to confine themself to a rigid concept of what it means to be female and stated that they felt that this did not reflect themself and so they began to come out as non-binary to the people around them. Jules found that coming out was mostly a positive experience and stated that people tended to be quite respectful:

> *[My friend] she saw on Facebook that I was a part of this group on Facebook – it's like a closed group for trans people and she was like, "What's this?" And I was like, "Oh, it's for trans people. I'm trans, like, I'm not binary or anything, that's what it is". And we were on the phone to this other girl and she was, like "What?" Like, another good friend of ours and she was like, "What?" I was like, "Oh my God, I can't believe I just said that". And they were really nice about it. Obviously, they were so wonderful, like asked the appropriate questions and have been trying really hard with pronouns and stuff.*

Jules found their boyfriend to be their biggest support although this also led to some conflict with their boyfriend's father:

> *I felt really good when I told my boyfriend. He said, "That explains some things. I am really happy for you that you told me", dah, dah and I was like, "Cool". It didn't change anything*

except he's like really attentive to like my pronouns and stuff, which is good. I have never talked to his dad about it, but he's talked to his dad about it and his dad was like, "Really?" He talked to his dad about it and his dad was really, like, "This is ridiculous, this is stupid, it doesn't exist". And I'm like, oh, stupid man. Like it doesn't make me feel invalidated. It's just you are so close-minded. He's a close-minded person his dad.

By being more vocal about being non-binary, Jules opened themself up to the possibility of experiencing judgement from others, as their identity became something that is seen as "debatable". This led Jules being reluctant to be open with their family for fear of being judged by them.

I haven't really told my family. Well, I hint at it, but I don't know Like, I said I don't know if they pick up on the hints or take me seriously. [...] I am really scared about is being made fun of because that would just feel like shit – just completely feel crap because that would just be something that is quite bad, I reckon. [...] So, even though I am pretty confident in my gender identity, I would feel pretty crap if my dad was like ha, ha that is so lame, yeah.

This anxiety around being judged for being non-binary led to Jules taking a more passive stance to coming out, in an attempt to avoid conflict:

I just don't like doing it and I'm not sure why yet, but I told some friends and I was like, "You guys can tell our other friends". I don't want to be the one who has to have that conversation, even though I obviously have to get used to the idea because it's my thing to tell and I need to get more comfortable with it and stuff. But yeah, that is quite funny that I can't actually tell other people.

Jules' discussion around their difficulties with coming out portrays how the act of "coming out" as non-binary is not a singular event. Rather, it is one that will have to be repeated in new circumstances. This could create a burden for non-binary people where they have to frequently re-explain their identities and open themselves to potential judgement.

Living non-binary

When describing their gender presentation Jules described themself as "androgynous", however, they also stated that they are open to presenting in a more feminine manner:

> *"When I go out, I will get real dolled up. […] [M]y mum commented a couple of years ago when I go out because I dress really androgynously most of the time. She was like, "It's like you get dressed in drag when you go out", because I put on crazy eyeshadow and I will be wearing a nice dress and stuff and I never do that normally, and I hate wearing dresses and skirts and stuff. So that's funny. I like doing it. I do perform femininity, I guess, when I go out. It definitely feels like a performance, but it is part of me. It's something that I enjoy doing. It's like fun. It's like, whatever. But it doesn't feel like I am feminine when I do it. It feels like I am performing it. It feels really artificial because it is artificial. I put so much glitter on. I am like a disco ball. I look ridiculous. But it's like fun."*

Jules described how they do present in a feminine manner when they feel that it is more suitable for them. However, they described their feminine presentation as "looking ridiculous", making associations with drag culture. Jules appears to reference Judith Butler (1990) by saying she "perform[s] femininity" but this is not accurate to Butler's theory, as Jules views their femininity as inauthentic to their sense of self. This excerpt portrays femininity as an artificial, as performance rather than performative, whereas androgyny is treated as their norm.

Jules further reflected their belief that gender is performative in their discussion of some jewelry that their boyfriend gave to them:

> *I have a vagina necklace that [my boyfriend] got me for my birthday. I think it's kind of funny because everyone equates vagina to womanhood when obviously they are not. I like having it. I think it's funny a little bit and also because like reclaiming it is not something that is necessarily like feminine and just another body part and its weird how there is so much genital essentialism and like hypersexuality concerning women.*

Jules described their wearing of this jewelry as being “ironic”, stating that vaginas are “obviously” not “necessarily feminine”. This reflects the practice of “deconstructing” popular assumptions around sex and gender that was noted by Munro (2010). Jules appears to be implying that there is nothing essentially “feminine” about a vagina, and that if we accept the identities of transgender men and non-binary people as valid then it is possible for someone who has a vagina to not be female. It also appears that Jules is resisting being defined by their physical body, and the associated assumptions with being AFAB. This reflects discussions by other participants, such as Drew and Frankie, who show a strong resistance to being defined by their assigned at birth gender.

Jules described their sense of identity as being separate from their physical body, dictating how their gender is something they perform as a form of self-expression. This expression of gender as performative seems to be a significant difference between themself and the experiences of their closest friend, Logan. Despite both identifying as non-binary, Logan and Jules’ experiences diverge when it came to the experience of dysphoria, as Logan had strong feelings of dysphoria whereas Jules didn’t:

> *I have never experienced dysphoria apart from general, my body ... oh, actually, maybe that’s not true. I am not really sure. I don’t really know how I would describe dysphoria a lot of the time. I feel really disconnected from my body but again that could be like the whole self [questioning] thing and it’s all very strange. [Logan] had a lot of dysphoria and they had a lot of ... and they openly dated another girl when they were at school as well, which was a really big thing. […] And so, they like understood themself and moved along the whole transition process so much earlier than I did and with so much more confidence and self-knowledge that I did.*

Jules attempted to articulate why Logan wanted to physically transition while they themself do not; Jules described themself as having different experiences of being non-binary.

> *Well, Logan is starting to physically transition, and I have no ... I mean, it’s very different. I have no intention of doing so. I don’t think I will because ... why don’t I want to do that?*

Because for me, my idea of gender is very much ... in my own gender is very much rooted in my own perception of my own self and I don't, like, have issues with my body, just like everyone else will have issues with their body and their dysphoria. And so, my idea of my own gender is very much in my head. I feel like I look kind of androgynous and so for me, that is good enough for now.

Jules implied that for Logan, their gender is associated with their body and how they navigate the world, while for Jules, their gender is very much more a psychological or emotional component. This seems to indicate that there is a distinction not between those who identify as non-binary and those who identify with a binary gender, but rather a distinction between those who feel a need to physically transition and those who do not.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The concept of non-binary gender identity is often associated with a rejection of gender norms (Davy, 2019). The participants of this study frequently shared how they felt that they did not fit conventional gender norms before they had access to the language or terminology associated with non-binary gender identities. This was seen amongst the participants when they discussed their childhoods, as they frequently portrayed themselves as being in contrast to the normative gender expression that is typically associated with their sex. Two particular narratives tended to reoccur throughout. However, the narratives shared in this research suggested that the participants had many diverse ways of "being" non-binary. The most prominent example of this is shown in the discussions around physical transition. Amongst the participants in this research thesis, there were myriad responses to the concept of physical transitioning. This finding stands in stark contrast to more dominant narratives around being transgender, which frequently frame physical transition as a key component (Ekins & King, 2010). While there were some participants, like Blair and Cody, who viewed it as a necessity, there were also participants, like Frankie or Jules, who did not want any physical interventions, and also participants, like Gael and Ellis, who viewed it as a possible future option. This indicates that the participants' relationships with their bodies was not seen as the defining feature of what it means to be non-binary. What all participants shared was the concept that the Western gender binary was restrictive and incapable of fully accommodating the range of human experiences of gender.

Historically, the reason for seeking medical services such as HRT or surgery to transition was to alleviate feelings of gender dysphoria (American Psychological Association, 2013). Within the participants, a distinction was made between "social dysphoria" and "physical dysphoria", with participants such as Blair and Cody reporting high levels of discomfort with their physical bodies while participants such as Jules and Frankie reporting no experience of physical dysphoria. There were also participants with atypical experiences of gender dysphoria, such as Ellis, who described having stronger feelings of dysphoria in adolescence but then found that these feelings decreased as they got older. These descriptions of different experiences of what it means to be non-binary reflect

earlier research that indicates that the term non-binary reflects a number of varied experiences of gender that require individualized approaches when providing treatment (Richards et al., 2016). Those who reported physical dysphoria were frequently the ones who opted to seek medical transition, however, they also found that identifying as non-binary led to them experiencing difficulty with seeking healthcare, as their providers seemed more hesitant in prescribing HRT. This also reflects previous research that has shown that non-binary people face more barriers than binary transgender people to physically transitioning within the healthcare system (Vincent, 2016).

Another difference seen in participant groups was the "pre-coming out" narratives used by participants. The "unable to fit" narrative consisted of the participants discussing their being unable to fit a stereotyped ideal of what was considered appropriate gender expression for their assigned sex. This was seen in the interviews of Adan, Harper and Drew, who described experiences of feeling pressured to conform to cisgender normative behavior before coming out. These participants expressed a reoccurring theme of feeling as if they were unable to fit what they saw as being the social norms of those around them, alongside a feeling that the majority of the population was finding it easy to fit these norms. For these participants, coming out as non-binary allowed them to make sense of these previous experiences, as it was contextualized as a lack of understanding of their gendered self.

The second narrative seen amongst participants was the understanding that they had always presented as a gender-nonconformist. This was portrayed by Blair, Cody, Frankie and Jules who described how they were "tomboys" at a young age. Some participants also portrayed this early gender nonconformity as being part of a larger pattern within the family to be sexually or gender diverse, with Blair, Cody and Frankie listing off other family members who are similar nonconformists. Amongst these participants, a non-binary gender identity was a natural progression from their early gender nonconformity.

While participants tended to portray their pre-coming out identities as either fulfilling "accepted nonconformist" or "unable to fit" narratives, these groups are not mutually exclusive.

Some participants, such as Frankie, had elements of both narratives when they discussed coming out. Frankie described how she was an "accepted nonconformist" in her youth but also felt pressured to conform to stereotypical assumptions of what is considered "lesbian" behavior. This indicates that even those who present as gender nonconforming before coming out may find themselves pressured to conform to a certain type of gender nonconforming behaviour.

All the participants described previous experiences of being an "outsider". Typically, this involved being an outsider with regards to gender norms, with a stated belief that they did not fit the normative understandings of what it means to be their gender assigned at birth. In this pre-coming out phase, the participants would describe normative gender expressions as being oppressive and given that the sample was predominantly AFAB, this oppression was framed as an expectation of conforming to feminine gender standards, which were often portrayed as being predominantly appearance focused. Some participants, including Frankie and Cody, were able to avoid conforming to these standards at a young age by taking on the "accepted nonconformist" role of a "tomboy" at a young age. However, as these "accepted nonconformists" grew older, they found they were under more pressure to conform to social norms of what it means to be their assigned gender.

While participants who were AFAB frequently described the feminine gender role as being perceived as repressive, the gender role of male was not seen as being particularly liberating either. Participants who found themselves being socially accepted as male or masculine found themselves being pressured to conform to a new set of gender standards. These participants expressed a sense of frustration that they were now expected to separate themselves from behaviours and qualities that were considered "feminine". For the one AMAB participant, Gael, there was a sense that masculinity was similarly oppressive as they repressed their feminine qualities into a secret "feminine self", which they mostly explored in private. For all the participants, there was this sense that the gender binary represented two distinct structures that they were expected to choose from despite both structures being ill-fitting. For all of the participants, the concept of non-binary gender identity

presented a new alternative where they were not confined to the gender binary and allowed for a more individualized expression of the self.

It should be noted that while all of the participants discussed a lifelong experience of feeling unable to fit into the gender binary, they all came out as non-binary within the decade preceding the interview. It was during that time discussions of transgender identities became more prominent in the public discourse, and so before this period access to the language around non-binary identity would have been much more limited (Steinmetz, 2014). As non-binary concepts and discourse became more accessible, the participants have used it to better articulate their own experiences of their identity and to help foster a community with other people with experiences of non-binary gender identity.

The emergence of the non-binary gender identity appears to show an evolution in Western understandings of gender identity. Early Western culture saw gender identity as a strict male–female binary in which any deviation was pathological. However, over time this was challenged by individuals who saw gender diversity as being a natural part of the human experience (Ekins & King, 2010; Oosterhuis, 1997). This interpretation of gender diversity within history and other cultures, as was popularized by Leslie Feinberg (1996). Amongst the participants, their coming out as non-binary appears to be precipitated by an increased awareness and discussion of gender diversity that made them aware that such discourse may be applicable to their own lived experiences.

For the participants, it seems that their changing relationship with the concept of gender is to be related to the changing cultural ideas around what it means to be a man or a woman. Historically within Western culture, one's gender was seen to be strictly related to one's physical sex, with any deviation from this seen as being a pathology (Oosterhuis, 1997). As transgender people have become more accepted, the concept of "gender identity", the idea that people have an innate psychological or emotional component that makes them male or female, has become popularized, if not universally accepted (Stone, 1994). While this concept is used to communicate the experience of being transgender, it also implies that all people tend to have an innate understanding that they are

male or female. For many of the participants, this does not seem to be true, with participants such as Frankie struggling with being placed in a masculine or feminine role or Drew stating that they are "…not even sure of what a woman is". This suggests that it is possible to feel like neither a man nor a woman. The concept of non-binary gender identity allowed the participants to verbalize this experience.

Previous research has shown that there are several "strategies" that are used to create new narratives around gender, including making categories more flexible, introducing a gender continuum or presenting with an ambiguous gender identity (Richards et al., 2016). Within this study, the majority of the participants appeared to view constructing an ambiguous gender presentation as their preferred goal. There were some, such as Gael and Jules, who described a form of "gender fluidity", which involved switching from one gender presentation to another. One interesting variation in the narratives was Ellis, who viewed their presentation as a "costume" and unrelated to their own inner experience of their gender identity. While the participants reported a range of preferred gender expressions, these expressions were restricted by their cultural settings. The feeling of being restricted by culture was best portrayed by Blair, who described how they preferred to have a feminine gender presentation alongside a masculine physique but also felt that such a presentation would possibly expose them to harassment. This led to Blair taking the "path of least resistance". This reflects a strategy discussed in previous literature, of opting into a more conventional binary gender presentation to avoid harassment (Evans, 2010).

Being able to "come out" and publicly identify as non-binary was seen as a valuable experience by the participants as they used these concepts to help define an identity that they felt was more "authentic" to themselves. This was seen by the participants to be a more affirming cultural narrative than what was previously available, as they previously felt they were they were labelled as "outsiders" due to their gender nonconforming status. However, this narrative is not universally accepted or tolerated within the wider community, and this led to some experiences of discrimination. An early study of the US-based National Transgender Discrimination Survey

identified that non-binary transgender people faced more harassment than binary transgender people, and the participants in the study identified feelings of being vulnerable to discrimination (Harrison, Grant, & Herman, 2012). Several participants of this study frequently discussed how coming out as non-binary caused conflict within their family or social environments. They also identified harassment by the general public as a possibility that they need to navigate, as the participants frequently discussed both experiences and reports of conflict being caused by a nonconforming gender presentation.

Alongside coming out, participants also had to navigate what it meant to "live" as a non-binary person within a culture that often only acknowledges two genders. While some participants access health services to physically transition, not all participants viewed this as a viable option for themselves. Frequently, the participants would discuss how they would adopt an "androgynous" appearance through the use of fashion and personal grooming. For many of the participants, this was seen as liberating as it allowed them to adopt an appearance that they felt suited to themselves rather than attempting to conform to societal gender norms. However, some participants, like Ellis and Jules, also rejected the assumption that they had to adopt a specific appearance to be "authentically" non-binary, instead viewing their gender identity as separate from gender expression. There were similar disagreements around pronouns, as some participants viewed pronouns as being an important way to have their identity acknowledged while others seeing them as less important. An interesting perspective came from Blair, who expressed discomfort with using non-binary pronouns due to wanting to avoid being defined entirely by their gender identity. Overall, it appeared that if one wanted to interact in the world as a non-binary person, it required an active maintenance of how they presented themselves.

The participants in this study often reported feeling like they had to "justify" their gender identity, whether it be to family members, medical professionals, or members of the general public. While binary transgender people may often feel like they have to justify why they are "really a man" or "really a woman", non-binary transgender people often find themselves having to educate others

on an alternate understanding of gender that may be entirely novel to the people they are speaking to (Monro, 2019). This was particularly frustrating to those in this study who were seeking medical assistance in transitioning, and at times they would instead recite more normative narratives of gender identity to access this treatment. This supports what has been found in previous research that showed that non-binary people were in frequent negotiations with their environment about when it was safe or comfortable to be openly non-binary (Bradford et al., 2019; Davy, 2019). Even in spaces where the participants could be open about being non-binary, they found themselves struggling with being "authentic" in their non-binary presentation. This can be seen in Frankie's discussion of how she felt pressured to take on a more masculine role by some of her partners or by Blair's description of how he struggled with not being able to take on a more feminine presentation. In these negotiations of femininity and masculinity, the participants appear to be experiencing a replication of their struggles with binary gender. As, while they do not identify with being male or female, they now find themselves having to navigate a gender expression that is "authentically non-binary".

It could also be argued that the practice of doing this study also replicated this experience of the participants having to "prove" that they are non-binary, as the participants were asked to talk about their narratives of how they came to the realization that they are non-binary and how they live as non-binary people. This may have led the participants to either intentionally or unintentionally place more emphasis on details that supported this narrative and to neglect details that may have contradicted such narratives. Involvement in the study may also have also affected how they interact with the world as non-binary people. An explicit example of this can be seen in how Drew's involvement with the study became a talking point when discussing their identity with others. The shaping effect that this research may have is not brought up to question the validity of the participants' narratives, but rather to highlight how non-binary people are often asked to justify their own identity in ways that cisgender people are not.

In this study, the majority of participants were AFAB with only one participant being AMAB. This reflects statistics from the recent "Counting Ourselves" survey, which found that more

than three quarters of their respondents who identified as non-binary were AFAB (Veale et al., 2019). However, it should also be noted that the recruitment for this study relied on people who had access to the discourse around non-binary gender identity and who had some contact with the transgender and non-binary communities, as it was advertised through transgender and non-binary social media sites. It is possible that there are people in the general population who have similar experiences to the participants but are not engaged with the larger non-binary and transgender communities. While reaching contact with these participants would be difficult, it would be interesting to see how gender nonconformity is experienced by those without access to this discourse. Given how Aotearoa New Zealand has a large Pasifika population and that these communities have their own understandings of gender diversity, it would be valuable to do a similar study on people from these groups (Schmidt, 2016).

Within my discussions with the participants in this research, they made frequent reference to feeling misunderstood by the people around them. This misunderstanding was not only experienced in their interactions with the general population and family but also in their interactions with medical and mental health professionals. This is problematic as non-binary people often experience a disproportionate amount of mental health concerns when compared to cisgender and binary transgender people (Thorne et al., 2018). The study also identified that non-binary participants frequently struggled with interpersonal conflicts within their families and fears of harassment from the wider community. Given that non-binary people often experience feeling misunderstood and judged, it is important for clinicians to be educated and respectful of non-binary gender identities. This would help to increase rapport with non-binary people who are seeking mental health services and their confidence in the services provided.

This study also reflected findings from the "Counting Ourselves" survey, which indicated that non-binary people were more likely to report barriers when accessing gender-affirming healthcare (Veale et al., 2019). This was the case for some participants, such as Cody and Blair, who reported that they felt being open about being non-binary prevented them from receiving healthcare

and that they felt pressured to have a more conventionally masculine presentation. Given that non-binary people often have very individual goals with how they want to present, it is important to take a collaborative and open approach that looks at what is possible and what is medically advisable, rather than focusing on expecting individuals to conform to a binary gender category (Richards et al., 2016).

Within this more collaborative approach, the role of psychologists would move away from a diagnostic approach and focus more on assisting transgender and non-binary people in developing their own understanding of themselves. While transgender and non-binary people are frequently uncomfortable with feeling that their healthcare is being gatekept, research also shows that many people find therapy helpful in developing their understanding of themselves (Fraser, 2009). The participants in this thesis described how they developed their understanding of themselves not through a diagnosis but through experimentation and interactions with the world around them. Psychologists could help provide transgender and non-binary people a safe space to experiment and reflect on their experiences as they do. A potential model for this is Ehrensaft's (2013) "True Gender Self Therapy", which while it was designed for work with children could be adapted for use in adults. This would also require clinicians to be educated on transgender issues so that they can have more informed collaborations with their clients (Chang, Singh & Dickey, 2018). By taking this approach and moving away from diagnostic criteria non-binary people are likely to feel less judged by clinicians and be able to be more open about their concerns and challenges while transitioning.

Appendix A:

Advertisement

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Exploring Gender

A qualitative photo-elicitation analysis of the experiences of people with a non-binary gender identity

I am currently researching the experiences of people who either currently or previously have not felt comfortable identifying as either male or female and how this experience has impacted their life. I intend to do this through a method called photo-elicitation, where participants take photos of scenes and objects that reflect their experiences which will then be used to initiate a discussion on what the participants feel is relevant. So if you are over sixteen, are a fluent speaker of English and either currently or have previously felt uncomfortable identifying as either male or female I would be interested in talking to you about being involved with the study. All participants will be given a koha of $20 for their time.

If you are interested in being involved my contact details are:

Caitlyn Drinkwater
Email: c.drinkwater@auckland.ac.nz
School of Psychology
University of Auckland

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. phone 09 373-7599 ext 83711, email ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 23rd November 2016 for 3 years, Reference Number 018352

Appendix B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: Exploring Gender: A qualitative photo-elicitation analysis of the experiences of people with a non-binary gender identity.

Principal Investigator: Professor Nicola Gavey
Co-investigator: Professor Claire Cartwright
Researcher: Caitlyn Drinkwater

Researcher Introduction

I am Caitlyn Drinkwater and I am a student who is currently undertaking a Doctorate of Clinical Psychology in the University of Auckland, School of Psychology. My supervisors are Professor Nicola Gavey and Professor Claire Cartwright.

Current Project

I am doing this research because there has been a lack of research into people with non-binary gender identities. I decided to use a photo elicitation method because not only does it allow for the participants to be more active in how the research is developed it also useful for discovering details in the lives of participants that may have previously gone unacknowledged.

Our aims are to develop understanding of people come to understand their gender identity and also document the challenges and benefits that this understanding and expression of their identity creates.
Participants will be expected to be involved with the project for a two week period during which they take photographs and also engage in one initial meeting and one interview session. If participants wish to edit their transcripts they will be given a two week period to do so once the transcription has been completed.
We hope that you will find the experience to be quite rewarding as a learning experience as the project will allow you to reflect on and express your experiences. The research will also be used to inform better services on standards of care for individuals with a non-binary gender representation.

During the interview there is a possibility that some difficult experiences could be discussed which may be emotionally distressing. Because of this you will be allowed to withdraw from the study if you feel uncomfortable. If you feel that you need to discuss any issues that arise during the research further the research team can facilitate contact with counsellors at OUTline who specialize in issues related to gender identity. It should also be understood that if your photos are used in publications resulting from this research there is a possibility that anyone within the photos could be identified. Because of this any people within the photos will have their faces anonymized to lessen the chances of identification, but even with this cautionary measure there is still a risk of identification.

Aside from myself there will also be a transcriber who will have access to audio recordings. The supervisors of this project (Professor Nicola Gavey and Professor Claire Cartwright) will also have access to this data. Everyone who has access to this data has signed a confidentiality form.

Invitation to Participate

You are invited to participate in this research because you have indicated that you have or currently or in the past identified with a non-binary gender identity or have felt uncomfortable identifying with male or female. We also require that you are over sixteen years old and are a fluent speaker of English.
To find potential participants, like you, I have distributed an advertisement with information on this project through resources and organizations that are relevant to Aotearoa/New Zealand’s gender

diverse community, this includes online resources such as Facebook groups and organizations such as Rainbow Youth, Outline and Tiwhanawhana Trust.
Your participation is voluntary and you may decline this invitation without penalty. You may also choose to withdraw from the study at any point during taking the photographs. There is also a one month period following your final interview where you may choose to withdraw your data from the study. A Koha of $20 will be offered to the participants to help cover the costs of attending interviews.

Project Procedures

If you choose to participate, I will arrange a meeting with you where you will be given a disposable camera and asked to take photographs over a two week period that are relevant to the themes of the study. At the end of this two week period I will collect the camera and develop photos. Following this you will be invited to a final interview during which we will go through the photos and discuss what motivated you to take the photos and what they represent. It is expected that the interviews will around 90 minutes while the time attributed to the photography sections will be variable depending on how much time you wish to invest. As the researcher I will conducting the interviews and analyzing the data but the interview recordings may be transcribed by a different individual. If you wish to review the transcript of your interview and correct any changes then you will be given a two week period following the completion of the transcript to do so.

Data Storage, Retention, Destruction and Future Use

I will collect the data by making audio recordings of the interviews. The photos you take are also considered data. Physical copies of the data will be stored in a secure location by the researcher. Digital copies of the data will be backed up and stored on a University of Auckland server. The data will be stored for a minimum of six years, however it may be kept for longer if it is possible to ensure secure storage and the research team still maintains an active interest in this area of research. After the minimum storage time has elapsed the data will be destroyed by deleting the digital copies and shredding the physical transcripts and photos.

Right to Withdraw from Participation

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. You will also be given a one month period after the final interview to withdraw your data from the study.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The preservation of confidentiality is paramount. The information that you share through your photograph and will remain confidential to the research team, who will have signed a confidentiality clause. If the information you provided is published it will be done in a way that does not identify you as its source. If during the process of data collection we uncover evidence of violent or abusive behavior then we will have to breach confidentiality and contact the appropriate authorities.

If you wish a copy of the research findings will be made available to you.

CONTACT DETAILS AND APPROVAL

Researcher	Principal Investigator	Head of School
Caitlyn Drinkwater c.drinkwater@auckland.ac.nz	Nicola Gavey School of Psychology n.gavey@auckland.ac.nz 09 373-7599 ext 86877	Professor Will Hayward School of Psychology w.hayward@auckland.ac.nz 09 923-8516

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. phone 09 373-7599 ext 83711, email ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 23rd November 2016 for 3 years, Reference Number 018352

Appendix C: Consent Form

(THIS FORM WILL BE KEPT FOR A PERIOD OF SIX YEARS)

Project Title: Exploring Gender: A qualitative photo-elicitation analysis of the experiences of people with a non-binary gender identity.
Principal Investigator: Professor Nicola Gavey
Co-investigator: Professor Claire Cartwright
Researcher: Caitlyn Drinkwater

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and have understood the nature of the research and why I have been invited to participate. I have had the opportunity ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to take part in this research, involving one initial meeting where I will receive the new camera, a 2 week period in which to take photos and a 90 minute review interview afterwards.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw participation at any time, without giving a reason and that I can ask to withdraw any specific things that I said during the interviews.
- I agree for the interviews to be audio recorded.
- I agree to share the photos that are produced during the study.
- I agree to allow photographs to appear in any publications resulting from this research.
- I understand that if my photographs are used in any publications resulting from the research there is a chance that either myself or anyone who appears in the photographs could be identified. I understand that any people who appear in the photographs will have their faces anonymized to reduce the chances of identification.
- I understand that parts of what I say may be quoted (without my name) and may be presented in publications and talks.
- I agree that the research team can contact me at some time after the interview if they would like to clarify details of what I have said.
- I agree to allow the research team to contact me following the interview if they feel that the interviews reveal a possible risk to myself or someone else.
- I understand that people involved will keep what they hear or read confidential.
- I understand that recordings and transcripts will be kept for a minimum of 6 years or until such time as the research team is no longer working in this area of research, after they will be destroyed by deleting digital files and shredding hard copies.
- I would / would not *[please delete one]* like to be provided with an electronic copy of the thesis when it is available.

Name: ________________________________
Signature: ______________________________
Date: _________________________________
Contact details:___________________________

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 26th November 2016 for 3 years, Reference Number 018352

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