Navigating the binary: gender presentation of non-binary individuals

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Navigating the Binary:

Gender Presentation of Non-Binary Individuals

by

Sharone A. Horowit-Hendler

A Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

Much of linguistic study of gender has focused on the binary: “men’s language” and “women’s language”. Similarly, most of society recognizes only two genders with the assumption that gender is connected to body and that everyone will map onto this binary. How then do non-binary individuals present themselves when they desire to be perceived outside of this dichotomy? This study re-examines the question of which masculine, feminine, and non-binary markers exist, and explores the ways that participants are aware of and utilize these signifiers in performing their gender identities.

This study uses self-reported semi-formal interviews with 26 non-cisgender individuals in the general Boston area to create a schema of gendered signifiers and examine awareness of gender presentation. Discourse analysis of these interviews along with that of participant observation is then used to analyze gender presentation in practice, using the emergent schema.

The findings suggest that currently no gender-neutral markers exist, and non-binary individuals intentionally mix masculine and feminine features in order to present as something other than the binary. In addition, participants who were assigned male at birth (AMAB) are primarily only aware of manipulating their physical appearance, while participants who were assigned female at birth (AFAB) display far more awareness of linguistic and somatic aspects of gender presentation, able to deftly discuss and manipulate them. Furthermore, it emerges that intentional gender presentation is performed primarily for the cis-gender gaze in society.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Society is slowly moving to recognize that biology does not dictate gender, and that there are options other than that assigned to a person at birth. Besides the binary genders—male and female—there is a growing recognition that non-binary genders exist as well. There exist transgender people who do identify as binary, but also those who identify as something between male and female, as a gender that is a separate axis from male or female, or who do not identify as having a gender at all. There is also a growing awareness that stems from queer communities that one cannot identify someone else’s gender by sight, and that assumptions based on perceived presentation lead to misgendering. At the same time, however, there is a strong understanding within the trans population that most of society still assigns pronouns and gender roles based on appearance and the aforementioned perceived presentation, and that in order to be gendered correctly, there are markers of gender that are in play. As everyone who identifies as not cis—that is, a gender other than that they were assigned at birth—has had to examine their gender identity and consider their presentation in a way that cisgender people rarely do, there is a stronger awareness of ones own performance of gender in the trans population. This means that non-binary and binary trans people are potentially in a unique position of awareness and ability to intentionally manipulate their own presentation in a way that much of cisgender society does not have the tools to do.

As much of linguistics—especially linguistics focused on Western culture—is still focused on binaries, there has been little room for examining gender presentation in a way that allows for non-binary registers to exist. Gender linguistics for many years focused on the dichotomies
presented by Deborah Tannen of men’s language versus women’s language (1990). While Judith Butler published her theory of gender performativity in the same year, the field of linguistics assumed the binary nature of gender—and therefore gendered speech—until far more recently. While the beginning of the field of trans linguistics has allowed for more focus on gender and sexuality as well as a greater divorce from assumptions of heteronormativity, until more recently there remained a focus on binary trans individuals, often with an associated belief that being trans necessitates surgery and a focus on transnormativity—that is, an assumption that those who are transgender are still binary and would be transitioning to being heterosexual and fit into stereotypical gender roles. Queer research primarily encompassed gay speech or non-western gender identities (for example, Besnier, 2003; Hart and Hart, 1990; Kulick, 1998; Lang, 1997).

Although over the past 15 years there have been more recent calls to study gendered linguistics without focusing on the binary, or at least to move away from the idea of gender normativity (Cameron, 2007; Cameron and Kulick, 2003; Davis et al, 2014; Zimman et al, 2014; Zimman, 2018), such studies are just now emerging. In addition, the bulk of studies on non-binary genders are still focus primarily on languages such as Hebrew or French in which gender constitutes a large part of their grammar (Bershtling, 2014; Hord, 2017), or on use of non-binary labels or pronouns, especially studying use of and reactions to singular “they” (Cordoba, 2018; Hernandez, et al, 2018; Showers-Curtis, 2017).

As Bucholtz states in the preface to Queer Excursions, “it is time for scholars of language, gender, and sexuality to return to the binary, not as a taken-for-granted starting point for
research, but as the very problem to be investigated” (2014: ix). However, despite such calls to reexamine the binary, there have been next to no studies reexamining what markers and registers of masculinity, femininity, or gender neutrality exist in English. Instead, “researchers interested in the linguistic construction of gender and sexuality continue to frame their research in terms of the well-established binaries of women and men, femininity and masculinity, homosexuality and heterosexuality. Consequently, there is a serious need for the field to retheorize such aprioristic dichotomies” (Davis et al, 2104: 1). This means that studying non-binary registers should allow for both a reexamination of gendered language—especially in aid of moving away from the idea of a men’s and women’s language—as well as acknowledging a whole group of people who have been largely ignored, if not outright erased. In addition, even as performativity theory finds ground in linguistic research, there is an expectation of a primarily unconscious use of identity registers, which does not account for the potential unique position of trans individuals consciously choosing their own performances. This leaves a question as to how performativity theory fits with trans gender performance—a question made more pressing by the issue that the majority of the trans community recognize that gender identity does not equal gender presentation.

At Lavender Languages in 2017, Lal Zimman began to lay out the beginning of a trans linguistics, one that requires the exploration of the way that a binary structure impacts trans people, as well as how trans people use these forms. As the trans umbrella includes all those who identify as not-cisgender, this trans linguistics must not only focus on binary trans individuals, but also on non-binary trans people. This paper seeks to lay out the beginnings of an answer to this question, as well as the beginnings of a methodology to continue the examination
of this issue. More specifically, this paper seeks to answer the question of how non-binary individuals navigate a very binary society. First, what are these binary structures of presentation as they currently exist in practice (a question that needs to be asked again and not simply taken as an assumption)? Secondly, how do those who are non-binary use these forms, and with what level of intentionality?

As this research will show, even those who are non-binary currently make use of primarily binary masculine and feminine markers of appearance, body language, and speech. This is partially due to the fact that at this time no neutral markers appear to exist. Therefore, trans people have no choice but to use these binary structures in order to form their own registers. What appears to be unique, however, is the aforementioned intentional manipulation. While there is no one non-binary “language”, individuals create their own mix of masculine and feminine markers. When performing a non-binary presentation, they manipulate these sartorial, linguistic, and embodied practices of gender so as to intentionally portray both the masculine and feminine at the same time. The choices they make depend on the way their body is perceived by society combined with other personal considerations, forming a non-binary performance that is unique to the person. These individual non-binary registers, however, are not always in use. Many participants have times where they find themselves needing to be perceived as binary for a plethora of potential reasons, and they are capable of altering their own presentation in order to be read in such a way. Moreover, due to society’s assumption of the binary, many non-binary participants find themselves struggling to be read as non-binary no matter what they do in order to other themselves from binary structures.
This research also shows that these manipulations of markers for the presentation of gender is done primarily for the sake of the cisgender gaze. When there is a shared understanding that presentation does not equal gender, and that everyone will respect each other’s pronouns and gender identity, then it seems that this calculated manipulation is much less in play. Rather than the intentional alteration of gender presentation, participants were able to relax, in a sense, and let individual personalities come into play. With this awareness of these binary grammatical structures, non-binary people are in a sense forced to do these calculated performances to move about in society. Lack of enforced societal gender norms and structures—such as when it is known that there are no cisgender individuals in the room—changes the stage. This suggests that if society is ever able to move past this assumption of gender binaries, to move to a place where everyone asks gender and no one assumes, where stereotypical gender ideals are not automatically mapped onto a person as soon as a gender is assumed, at the very least those who are not cisgender will be able to allow for individual personality to be the focus of identity performance, rather than gender.

At least, that is the case as it appears in the non-binary geek population in Boston.

1. A Description of Chapters

In chapter two, A History of Gendered Language Studies Leading up to an Emergence of a Trans Linguistics, I lay out a literature review. As previously discussed, much of western linguistics focused for years on a men’s language and women’s language. When trans individuals were studied, trans normativity was the assumption. More recently—within the past ten years—much
of this has come into question and there has been an understanding that we need to examine
gender and transgender in context, but not much of this research has yet taken place. The recent
push towards a trans linguistics seeks to correct this, to contextualize in age, gender, sexuality,
class, race, to understand that language use changes during life, that trans people need to be
agentively involved. In this trans linguistics it is important that researchers explore not only the
established binaries of men and women, but rather open the field to include non-binary trans
identities.

In chapter three, Review of Methodology, I focus on the methods by which the research has been
done so far. I show how I came to decide that I needed to use a mix of linguistic and
ethnographic methods to reexamine gendered language, as well as discussing the way that my
questions changed as I gathered participants and began this research. Rather than simply
reexamining gender registers of speech through a transgender lens, the focus became non-binary
participants and the way these binary gender markers are manipulated.

Chapter four, 100 Meanings of Queer, lays out my participants. The majority of my participants
are white and/or Jewish and self-identify as geeks, and all live in the general Boston area. Here I
also explain the different gender and sexuality terms in use by my participants, as well as
acknowledging that sexuality ended up not being a salient quality to examine. As non-binary
individuals are neither male or female, most by necessity identify as some flavor of queer. There
are also very few participants who fully share gender identities, as acknowledging non-binary
genders means being more aware of the large potential for such identities.
In chapter five, Self-Reported Data, I examine what masculine and feminine markers participants find salient. Here it is revealed that despite all emergent categories being provided by participants rather than drawing from previously established linguistic classification, these markers aligned closely with existent understandings of men’s language and women’s language, and that currently no neutral language exists. Any non-binary markers identified are created by mixing masculine and feminine aspects, such as wearing makeup (feminine) while also having visible facial hair (masculine). Often participants manipulate appearance, body language, and aspects of speech, combining masculine and feminine features of each. In addition, this chapter shows that there is a large difference of awareness between participants assigned male at birth (amab) and those assigned female at birth (afab), with afab participants having a greater awareness of the different aspects of gender presentation, with more ability to discuss it.

Chapter six, Actualized Data, then examines what participants are doing during their interviews and how much it aligns with self-reported data. Even participants who do show as much awareness of aspects of presentation still use a mix of masculine and feminine body language and linguistic markers. Here I also examine my participant observation data, three meetings of a non-cis participants just gathering informally. During these gatherings, rather than registers that showed gender performance, participants fell into patterns based on comfort and knowledge of the topic. Gender markers seemed to be far less in play. This suggests that conclusion that non-binary and non-cis gender presentation is performed for the cisgender gaze, rather than being unconsciously reproduced.
In chapter seven, the conclusion, I lay out potential follow up research that could be done to both further examine the manipulation of gender roles and markers as used by non-binary participants and also continue this question of the effects of the cis-gaze. Also, I discuss the fact that as in non-cis communities there is a far greater understanding that presentation does not equal identity, what does that suggest for non-binary presentation when examined through performativity theory.
Chapter 2: A History of Gendered Language Studies Leading up to an Emergence of a Trans Linguistics

The history of gendered linguistics has been primarily focused around the dichotomy of women and men. Starting in the 1970s, linguistic studies have been centered around an assumption that there is a men’s language that is separate from a women’s language. More recently, calls have been made to expand such studies beyond the binaries, following behind anthropological studies that called the assumption of the binary nature of gender into question, especially Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble in 1990. In 1996 Bing and Bergvall pointed out that there are more than two categories of biological sex, and that men and women are not opposites. Since then further researchers have called into question “The Myth of Mars and Venus,” as framed by Deborah Cameron in 2007. One place in which these studies have been focused has been the slow emergence of a “trans linguistics,” a term I have taken from Lal Zimman’s 2018 keynote (see below), with transgender participants being seen as a way to examine these binaries.

Yet it is only in the past few years that the examination of linguistics and identities outside the binaries have really begun to emerge, many occurring after the beginning of this study. It was only in 2014 that Queer Excursions: Retheorizing Binaries in Language, Gender, and Sexuality was published, a volume of articles focused around this reexamination. As stated in the opening chapter,

Researchers interested in the linguistic construction of gender and sexuality continue to frame their research in terms of the well-established binaries of women and men, femininity and masculinity, homosexuality and heterosexuality. Consequently, there is a serious need for the field to retheorize such aprioristic dichotomies… binary thinking continues to be pervasive in language, gender, and sexuality research, and the differences between women and men or between gay and straight speakers continue to be the primary focus of inquiry in these fields. Rather than simply accepting the binaries as inevitable, or discarding them from
our analyses entirely, we advocate a more complex and contextually grounded engagement with the binary. (Davis, Zimman, and Raclaw 2014: 1-3)
The explosive expansion of the field since this publication is exemplified in the pattern of appearance at the conference Lavender Languages and Linguistics, the primary conference focused on GLBTQ+ language. At the 23rd Lavender Languages, while there were a handful of papers presented on transgender language, there was next to no mention of non-binary identities. At the 24th conference, there were three posters focusing on non-binary use of language in English and other languages, including my own, and one paper on the use of gender neutral pronouns. At the most recent conference at the time of this writing, the 25th conference, there was a full panel on “Confronting Linguistic Normativity,” a handful of other papers, and Lal Zimman gave a keynote presentation on “(Trans)Gender(ed) pasts, presents, and futures: Three decades of research on language and trans experience.”

In order to explain the history leading up to the currently emerging field of trans linguistics, I start with a discussion of the histories of gendered studies, into the emergence of transgender studies, followed by a discussion of self help books for those who wish to be transgender. I follow this thread of pop culture back to a basis of transgender studies in social science. I end with the current state of transgender studies.

1. Quick Summary

Understanding the history of trans linguistics, as it has been studied up until this point, along with the current gaps in the research, requires understanding of both gender studies and gendered linguistics. Gender studies started with a focus on women as opposed to men, looking into
universals of domination and hypothesizing as to the why of this universal. Over time, the focus shifted to looking at the existing relationships between men and women in different cultures. Finally, the overlaying of gender and sex was questioned, and performativity theory—as is defined later in section two—allowed for a diversion from the gender and sexuality binaries. In gendered linguistics, the start was with Robin Lakoff’s explanation of women’s language as opposed to neutral language. This women’s language needed to be feminine, and to fit into the theory of dominance. In response, a dichotomous theory was formed of men’s language versus women’s language. It is only more recently that performativity has come into linguistics, and—as discussed above—even more recently that there has been any focus on identities outside the binaries. These two histories and the differences between them are discussed in depth in sections three and four.

Due to these factors, transgender studies, especially linguistically, are a much more recent field of study. This field as it exists is discussed in section four, after which section five discusses a subtype of this field: the self help book, with instructions for “passing”. The two books discussed here exemplify the field, which is mostly concerned with those who are assigned male at birth “passing” as cisgender women. Section six continues this theme of “passing” by discussing studies of perceived identity when presented with voice alone. As stereotypes sometimes carry more identifiers than natural speech, I also return to gender, looking at African American Drag Queen’s language, and the ways the AADQs manipulate the stereotypes of women’s language to create their own speech style. From here I lead into section seven, with a brief discussion of non-binary genders in other cultures, including the Native American berdache, the Brazilian Travesti, and the Philippine bakla identity. After this I continue in
section eight with a discussion of the state of transgender studies in linguistics at the time this study was first begun. This includes a discussion of the call for a return to qualitative studies, and an understanding of the fallacies of the term “transgender community.” This leads to an explanation of the emergence of the questions that lead to this dissertation. Finally, I end with a discussion of the current state of trans linguistics, as laid out by Lal Zimman and others in the years since I began my research.

2. A History of Gender Studies

There are two separate histories that need to be examined in order to understand the background of studies of transgender language. The first of these is the history of gendered anthropology, the second is the history of gendered linguistics. Both of these histories begin in the 1970s, as a feminist response to a male dominated field. These histories, however, took separate paths, and it is only more recently that queer theory, anthropological gender studies, and gendered linguistics have started to come back together to form the field of trans linguistics.

Gender studies started as the anthropology of women, from a theoretical perspective focused on universals and the asymmetry of the sexes. This left little room for genders or gender roles that did not conform to the binary. The creation of the theory of performativity was crucial to the allowance for the examination of these roles. In the beginning, a major part of feminist anthropology was looking to give a voice to women in anthropological studies. With this concern came a search for universals in the experiences of women, especially universal subjugation. The belief in this universal is strong enough that many early studies take it for granted, as Ortner states in her foundational paper “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?”,
“the onus is no longer upon us to demonstrate that female subordination is a cultural universal, it is up to those who would argue against the point to bring forth counterexamples. I shall take the universal secondary status of women as a given, and proceed from there” (Ortner, 2006:74).

Even in places where women seem to have some powers as rights, “ultimately the line is drawn.” If this subjugation is universal, the key is to search for the cause of this second-class status. For Ortner, this ultimately comes down to nature versus culture. Woman is seen as closer to nature due to her physiology, social role, and psyche. After all, a woman’s body is made for reproduction, and many aspects of her body are irrelevant to personal health or stability, but rather are for childbirth. A woman’s breasts have no personal value, menstruation is often uncomfortable or painful, and in many cultures will actually interrupt a woman’s routine, putting her “in a stigmatized state” (Ortner, 2006:76). Her social role is also focused around children, needing to take care of infants as she is the one who will produce milk to feed them, forming a natural bond. Her place is in the domestic sphere, the more natural sphere of activity, while men deal with religion, ritual, politics, “and other realms of cultural thought and action in which universalistic statements of spiritual and social synthesis are made” (ibid: 79). Ultimately, for women to break free from subjugation, they must become equally involved with the public sphere in matters of creativity, and become aligned with culture. Rosaldo too, in her foundational paper, points to the reproductive cycle and the way women give birth to and nurse children which causes them to become absorbed in domestic activities, thanks to their role as mothers (Rosaldo, 1974). This places them in the domestic sphere in the division of labor. So she places the universal asymmetry in a universal opposition between the domestic and public spheres. By being confined to the domestic sphere and domestic activities, women are cut off from the social world. The domestic sphere is also inherently devalued, helping maintain the
lower hierarchical position of women. They are also truly unable to form distance between themselves and those they interact with, while men are able to form distance from their children and other members of society, letting them “build up rituals of authority that define them as superior, special and apart” (Rosaldo, 1974: 27). When a man enters into the domestic sphere, taking part in child care and cooking, he loses his authority and distance. So for Rosaldo, while there is no absolute orientation of men and women, there is always a relative orientation, where men end up in the position of power. This position of women in the private sphere and men in the public sphere also means that male activities are always seen as more important with more authority and value. This can be seen in the way that men are chefs, but women are supposed to be the ones that cook in the home, men are tailors but women mend clothes and sew for the family, and so on. With this separation of spheres, the division of labor by sex is universal as well, and “if the economic role of women is to be maximized, their responsibilities in child care must be reduced or the economic activity must be such that it can be carried out concurrently with child care” (Brown, 2006: 67). This further constrains a woman’s role and keeps her from breaking into the public sphere.

It is important to note that in all of these above studies, the category of woman was contrasted with the category of man. For example, in the first quote from Ortner we see “female subordination” and “the universal secondary status of women” used as synonyms. This forced a binary dichotomy between man and woman. Furthermore, the terms “woman” and “female” were treated interchangeably, strengthening this dichotomy. Rosaldo, for example, explained that while particular cases may seem to stand out from the global generalization, they “do not undermine our global generalization, which points, not to absolute, but to relative orientations of women and men” (Rosaldo 1974:35). According to Rosaldo’s structural model, in order for
women to gain status and break free from the universal male dominance, women must enter the public world or men must enter the home. This relies on the idea that the woman is connected with the private/domestic sphere while the man is connected to the public sphere. If the global generalization points to relative orientations, there is no real place for intermediary categories, especially categories that would fall outside any direct scale from the masculine/men to feminine/women. Also, with a focus on women needing to find footing in the public/cultural sphere, and on universal asymmetry, it makes no sense for anyone identified male at birth to want to be a woman, and there is no place for anyone who does not fit neatly into these categories. There is no room for someone who takes on feminine gender roles but has no reproductive function and is not required to be part of child care, or for someone who was assigned female at birth but does not identify in a way that would tie them in to nature/the domestic sphere. Therefore, this focus relies on underlying heterosexuality and heteronormativity.

Later studies began to find issues with the concept of universals. As Rosaldo points out in a paper 6 years later, “male dominance, though apparently universal, does not in actual behavioral terms assume a universal content or a universal shape” (Rosaldo, 2006: 110). She points out that assuming the truth of universal asymmetry and then seeking the origins of this sexual asymmetry pulls focus from the significance of gender and forces a focus on dichotomous assumptions linking men and women’s roles to the things they do. So rather than accounting for the origins of sexual asymmetry, what is required are theoretical perspectives analyzing the relationships of “men and women as aspects of a wider social context” (ibid: 120). Anthropologists need to find ways to link the “particulars of women’s lives, activities, and goals to inequalities wherever they
exist” (ibid: 122). This is also due, she claims, to the fact that sexual asymmetries are fully social and they figure in other focuses of social science, such as racism and social class. This change in focus begins to allow more room for a study of gender. It also places gender and sex into a social context rather than a biological or predetermined context. Still, for the most part, there is an assumption of some existing identity “understood through the category of women, who not only initiates feminine interests and goals within discourse, but constitutes the subject for whom political representation is pursued” (Butler, 1990: 2). Even with this change of focus as discussed by Rosaldo, there is still a belief in some common identity of “woman,” which respectively means there must be some common identity of “man.” This common identity, as Butler points out, requires a fit into heteronormativity. Anything else, therefore, must be some version of “other” that will be held in suspect. It also maintains the conflation of gender and sex, and therefore with sexuality.

This issue of common identities, conflating gender, gender roles, and heterosexuality, can be seen in some early studies of “other” gender roles. It is especially prevalent in studies of the berdache, the two-spirit people of Native American tribes. The two-spirit people, as will be discussed later in this paper, are Native Americans who took on gender roles that differed from their birth assigned gender in some way. For some of them this includes taking on the sexuality of the “opposite gender”, meaning two-spirit males will sleep with men, but for most of them sexuality is unrelated. Yet, as Lang points out in “Various Kinds of Two-Spirit People”, the role of the berdache was viewed as institutionalized homosexuality, “a way to integrate homosexual and therefore ‘deviant’ into North American cultures” (Lang, 1997: 100). In other words, in order to deal with “understanding” deviants from North American heteronormativity, these
people would be required to take on the gender role of their sexuality, and therefore basically to align themselves with the other sex. This view has since been reexamined, and found to be untrue—a topic I will return to later in this chapter. This issue is one that also comes into play for people who are transgender, or in studies of those who are transgender. When someone transitions from one gender to the other, it is primarily assumed that they are transitioning into a heterosexual role. In Cameron and Kulick’s discussion of language and heteronormativity, they quote a transgender activist named Kate Bornstein. In 1993, Bornstein spoke of what she found when seeking guidance for changing her speech to fit her gender identity and sexuality. She complained,

I was taught to speak in a very high-pitched, very breathy, sing-song voice and to tag questions onto the end of each sentence. And I was supposed to smile all the time when I was talking. And I said “Oh, I don’t want to talk like that!” The teachers assumed that you were going to be a heterosexual woman. No one was going to teach you to be a lesbian because being a lesbian was as big an outlaw as transsexual. (Cameron and Kulick, 2003: 52)

This statement is iconic of the conflation of gender and sexuality, as well as the idea of the common category of woman. As little room as there was for the concept of being transgender in the first place, if someone was going to transition into a woman, they must be transitioning fully into the category, and therefore must be becoming a heterosexual woman. Similarly, there was—and sometimes still is—a conflation of gay, drag queen, and transgender. A man who did drag would be considered as wanting to be a woman, and someone transgender must be someone who was gay who will now be transitioning to heterosexual. This goes hand in hand with the fallacious societal belief that someone transgender must be at the very least desirous of sex reassignment surgery.

There was no place for flexibility in gender categories in anthropological research until the theory of gender performativity. In Judith Butler’s 1990 *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the*
Subversion of Identity, she discusses gender identity. She highlights issues within the category of woman, and shows how gender identity has been conflated with heterosexuality. In order to “feel like a woman” there must be a differentiation from “the opposite gender,” so you are your own gender to the extent that you are not the other gender. This reinforces the binary aspect of gender. Gender, she says, “can denote a unity of sex, gender, and desire, only when sex can be understood in some sense of necessitate gender…the internal coherence or unity of either gender, man or woman, thereby requires both a stable and oppositional heterosexuality” (Butler, 1990: 30-31). This binary is thus continually regulated and reinforced. Butler posits that instead of being an underlying truth brought to light, gender is “performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence,” thus gender is “constituting the identity it is purported to be” (ibid: 34). So gender is not what we are, nor what we have, but what we do. Gender has to be constantly reaffirmed and performed. Someone is a woman because of her constant performance as a woman. It is important to note that this is not completely agentive, a person is not constantly making conscious choices, but rather acting in a system of gender norms that have been being performed and reinforced. These gender norms may also be different from culture to culture, and part of understanding gender performance is understanding the system of indexes being drawn from. Still, as gender is created by repetition of performance, it is open to interpretations, open to mistakes, open to parodies, open to subversions, and open to change, although that change is not easy to enact. This change must take place by continuing to use the existent gender indexes, and working within the system. By this understanding, while gender is regulated and there are rigid social norms—or different cultural normativities—there is room for alternate gender categories, or for intermediary categories in which people perform aspects of what is considered masculine and/or feminine. This allows for variability of gender identities, as
well as for a schema to study these identities and gender roles. Performativity is just as important in gendered linguistics, but came into play far later.

3. Gendered Language

While it has become a highly studied subfield of linguistic anthropology, gendered language came into question about 50 years ago by Robin Lakoff, in a feminist response to our male-dominated society, about the same time that feminist anthropology was starting. In her study she introduced the idea of a “women’s language” which was set as a marked register separate from some neutral language. She gave a list of about 15 different characteristics that were needed for a woman to appear feminine in her speech. As a response to Robin Lakoff’s dominance theory, the cross-cultural theory of difference was born, fronted by Deborah Tannen. This is where the anthropology of gender and gendered linguistics shifted paths. Deborah Tannen’s theory posits that men and women are basically two different cultures. Therefore, when men and women interact, they are prone to cross cultural misunderstandings. Furthermore, men and women are treated as two separate things. Just as someone has to learn how to interact and be a part of another culture, so too must someone learn how to interact and be a part of the “other gender.” While Tannen’s work does align with understandings of gender socialization, there is once again little room for any gender identities outside of these two different gender cultures.

Robin Lakoff’s women’s language is similar in many ways to Deborah Tannen’s. Characteristics of Lakoff’s women’s language include:

1. Women hit phonetic points less precisely than men…
2. Women’s intonational contours display more variety than men’s;
3. Women use diminutives and euphemisms more than men…;
4. Women make more use of expressive forms than men...[far more use of adjectives and other words such as] lovely and divine;
5. Women use forms that convey impreciseness: so, such;
6. Women use hedges...more than men;
7. Women use intonation patterns that resemble questions, indicating uncertainty or need for approval;
8. Women’s voices are breathier than men’s;
9. Women are more indirect and polite than men;
10. Women won’t commit themselves to an opinion;
11. In conversation, women are more likely to be interrupted, less likely to introduce successful topics;
12. Women’s communicative style tends to be collaborative rather than competitive;
13. More of women’s communication is expressed nonverbally...than men’s;
14. Women are more careful to be “correct” when they speak, using better grammar and fewer colloquialisms than men. (Lakoff, 1975)

Another characteristic of women’s language is the use of elaborate color terms. Further studies, however, have shown that Lakoff’s characteristics were based more on her own intuition than on any solid evidence. These studies seem to have disproved many of her claims. While Lakoff’s approach is that of a women’s language that contrasts a neutral language, Deborah Tannen’s approach can be summarized as women’s language as rapport or cooperative language versus men’s language as report or competitive language. Many aspects of her men’s versus women’s language coincide with Lakoff’s characteristics, especially characteristics six (hedges), nine (women as more indirect and polite), ten (women will not commit to an opinion—this takes place especially through use of tag questions), 11 (women as more likely to be interrupted), and 12 (women as tending to be collaborative rather than competitive). According to Tannen’s schema, besides the above, women also talk less than men, and their interruptions, while less frequent, also function differently than men’s. In women’s language, interruptions and overlaps are used to affirm or support, while in men’s language, interruptions are used to take control of the conversation.
It is important to understand Tannen and Lakoff, as both make many appearances in the world of gender passing and linguistic heteronormativity. While there were follow-up studies on Lakoff’s dominance approach, Tannen’s cross-cultural, report vs. rapport schema became the dominant theory, and is one that many still take as an assumption today. It has become a major support for the theory of Mars and Venus. In the early 2000s, linguists such as Deborah Cameron and Don Kulik have brought the idea of this firm dichotomy back into question. As they point out, all too often the same utterance can be made to fit the schema when attributed to a man or a woman, which is a problem. Also when doing analysis, there is a tendency to notice what fits the pattern and ignore what does not. In fact, there are plenty of examples of men using cooperative language or women using competitive language, and labeling them as exceptions does not explain it at all. As one example, aspects of language traditionally considered to be feminine speech patterns can be used in a way that build masculinity, as in Deborah Cameron’s paper about young men using gossip to reaffirm their heterosexuality (1997). Furthermore, the cross-cultural approach ignores the fact that men and women grow up together, and therefore should at least be capable of understanding the other culture. As Cameron puts it, Tannen’s desire to avoid the pitfalls of the dominance approach “threw the baby out with the bathwater” (2007, 77-78).

There are certainly some elements of dominance in male-female interactions and language, and there are some elements of difference. These linguists often ascribe to a third theory, that of performativity, the same theory discussed above in section two. This is where gendered anthropology and gendered linguistics start to come together again. Still, Tannen’s theory enforcing the binary dichotomy was taken as an assumption for so long that there seems to have been little room in the field to see how non normative gender identities and expressions fit into the linguistic schema, as discussed below.
4. Transgender and Gender, a Literature Review of Passing

Despite Robin Lakoff’s theories being supposedly disproved, and the increasing acceptance of the importance of performativity theory, most of the literature about how to present as the “opposite gender” seems to mirror Lakoff or Deborah Tannen’s characteristics. As Don Kulick put it,

Regardless of who was writing—it didn’t matter if the authors were phonologists, linguists, logopedic therapists, or transsexuals—everyone…was possessed by the succubus of the linguist Robin Lakoff, in an earlier incarnation, specifically her early-1970s one, when she wrote her flawed classic *Language and the Women’s Place*. And those who had managed to exorcise Robin had simply gone from the frying pan into the fire to transmogrify into Deborah Tannen, in her spooky *You Just Don’t Understand* avatar. (Kulick, 1999:606)

Don Kulick did a fairly thorough review of the literature of Transgender and Language, and everything I found up through his article heavily mirrors the literature I found. Don Kulick points out how important language is to MTF transsexuals—that is an individual male assigned at birth who transitions to being female. (As a quick note here, I am continuing to use the phrasing of “MTF,” “FTM” (female to male), and “transsexual” here as this was the language used in this literature, but this phrasing will not be used outside of the history chapters unless it is used by an individual to refer to themselves). It is important to note here, as this section continues, that this literature assumes that transgender individuals have the ultimate goal of “passing,” that is to say being read by others as a heteronormative cisgender person. This is not in fact the case, and while I will continue to use the term throughout this chapter due to the prevalence of this concept within prior literature, it is a term that has contentious use and is frowned upon in much of the transgender community as it implies deception and that for
someone to pass as an identity implies that they do not belong to that identity. So for a trans woman to “pass,” this suggests she is not actually a woman.

The idea that all trans people want to pass, however, is still a common assumption even today, and in both the academic and much of the non-academic literature of the time—up through the early 2000s—was taken for granted. Every main-stream self-help book is sure to include a discussion of how to pass through language, including the two books I discuss later in detail. This is also true in academic discussions of MTF passing. As Kulick puts it, “no academic discussion of MTFs and their needs is complete without a word about language” (Kulick: 607). For example, Deborah Feinbloom highlights the importance of the voice in Transvestites and Transexuals (1976), Mildred Brown and Chloe Ann Rounsley in their book True Voices discuss the amount of time and effort that goes into learning to train their voices (1996), Anne Bolin stresses the importance of these speech modifications in her ethnographic study of American transsexuals, In Search of Eve (1988). Similarly, autobiographies of transsexual women stress the importance of proper speech, and their concerns about using it properly. Many mention how they worked for years to alter their voices and/or speech habits in order to emulate women, such as Claudine Griggs and Renee Richards.

For FTM transgender individuals, however—female to male—language is often left out entirely. The most extensive section Don Kulick ever found on the voice in an FTM self help book was five short paragraphs in Information for the Female to Male Cross Dresser and Transsexual by Lou Sullivan (1990), and this section was addressing those who were pre-hormonal, or those who were “merely transvestites/crossdressers,” and not actually transgender. This is primarily
due to the fact that hormones normally lower the voice, and the low voice and an outwardly
masculine presentation are enough to pass easily—at least according to common perspective.

This is a very interesting phenomena, as in a lot of ways it points directly back to Robin Lakoff,
for whom women’s language stood in opposition to neutral language. To properly portray a
woman, someone who is transgender has to go through serious work, learning a whole new way
of speaking. To pass for a man, the person merely needs to have a lower voice, and as hormones
accomplish this for the person, there is no need to actually work at it. On the other hand, as
hormones do not have any effect on the pitch of an amab transgender woman, it is hard to say
with one hundred percent certainty whether these people would have to work so hard at feminine
speech if there was. They have to do more subtle things, as the more obvious—tone—is not
done for them. Considering, however, the advice is not just “speak at a higher pitch,” but rather
involves a mastery of pitch, intonation, lexicon, syntax, paralinguistic behavior, and non verbal
behavior, it seems clear that there is something ideological going on here, not just something
physiological. After all, as will be affirmed further in this paper, being a woman is marked.

Linguistically, markedness is a measure of an asymmetric relationship, where the unmarked form
is the one that requires minimal effort. So “lion” is unmarked, “lioness,” which requires a suffix,
is marked. Similarly, the extra effort required for feminine speech—while someone who is FTM
requires little more effort than the taking of hormones to lower pitch—shows that this register is
marked. By this thought process, presenting as a man is easier—at least linguistically—than
presenting as a woman. So by this literature, should it hold true, being a woman is marked.

Kulick does go out of his way, however, to point out the fact that adhering to these norms does
not mean that they are “reinforcing the fabric by which sexist society is put together,” as Janice
Raymond claimed. Trans women who work so hard to use stereotypically women’s language are merely trying to pass as their chosen gender. Furthermore, “mimesis and repetition” of this kind is not just a simple reproduction of already existing language. Rather, each “citation” occurs in different contexts, locations, temporal structures, etc., and therefore is an alteration. So “the adoption of stereotypical speech norms by transgendered individuals…also opens a conceptual space for an appreciation that those speech norms are stereotypes” (Kulick, 1999: 610). So this use of stylized repetitions proves that there is something not quite solid about them. That transgender women use and have “appropriated” “women’s language” helps prove that there is something very inadequate about this label.

Kulick also points out here—as he does as well in his book Language and Sexuality written with Deborah Cameron—that there are transgender individuals who do not want to fit into the heteronormative mold, as discussed above in section two. Everything teaches to being a “normal” heterosexual cisgendered man or woman. Even now, over ten years after Kulick wrote his literature review and pointed out this deficiency, there have been very few studies that deal with the role that language plays in studies of sexuality, and even less that deal with trans people who are not straight. In fact, this lack was highly discussed at the 20th Lavender Languages and Linguistics conference, which had been the most recent conference when this paper was proposed.

Kulick also goes into a discussion of the importance of terms and linguistic constraints imposed on transgender individuals. Kulick did a study of transgender prostitutes in Northern Brazil. They are typically referred to as travesti, which is a grammatically masculine word in
Portuguese. So when *travestis* talk about themselves as a group, they have to use the masculine words which agree grammatically. Most of them, however, do not use the term *travesti*, but rather use feminine words to talk about themselves and their colleagues. Japanese transgender prostitutes do similar things (Abe, 2010). This is similar to the way that in English, transgender individuals primarily want the appropriate pronouns used for their preferred gender. For those who know the person is transgender, however, many will get confused and use the pronoun appropriate pronoun to the gender they were assigned at birth, or some form of “he/she”.

5. Instructions for Passing

The adherence to Lakoff and Tannen’s men and women’s languages is exemplified in the two following books, both of which are typical examples of the types of self help books previously mentioned. The first of these is *From Masculine to Feminine and All Points in Between: A Practical Guide for Transvestites, Cross-Dressers, Transgenderists, or Those Who Choose to Develop a More Feminine Image…and for All Others Who Are Interested, Concerned, or Curious*. This book is by Jennifer Ann Stevens, who gives the impression in her writing that she is herself transgender. The second is *Miss Vera’s Finishing School for Boys who Want to Be Girls: Tips, Tales, and Teachings from the Dean of the World’s First Cross-Dressing Academy*. This one is by Veronica Vera, a cisgender woman who actually has a whole school set up for this. Both of these manuals, it can be seen, are folk meta-pragmatic primers, drawing on deeply stereotyped language, which in turn helps perpetuate those stereotypes.
From Masculine to Feminine is truly a how-to book for passing as whatever level of feminine the reader wishes. It discusses all aspects of life, including going to the public restroom. There are two aspects that really deal with language. The first deals with developing a biography. According to Stevens, “gender is historical,” (Stevens, 1990: 30). Stevens suggests creating a new past, and talking in a way that reveals history as a woman, not as a man. Part of this is picking a gender appropriate name. In this section, it is mentioned that for most transgender individuals, “learning to pass is like learning language as a child, and they need to give themselves the time and patience needed to accomplish this task” (Stevens: 31). The book also states here that “gender attribution is essentially genital attribution. If you “know” the genital then you know the gender” (Ibid: 31). The rest of this chapter suggests that the opposite is true as well. When you can give off the proper cues, your appearance, demeanor, verbal expression, and biography, you are essentially that gender, and that overrides the genitals.

In addition, this chapter discusses a difference between the basic way men and women are born and raised, and how this is important to passing. While studying and imitating women is important, the key is to be able to reach the place of “true femininity.” Women are born to carry children, and therefore a woman will have a sense of herself as a potential holder and carrier of new life. This affects the woman’s psyche, making her a “relater,” to both her own inner body and to those around her. “Metaphorically, there are perpetual babies grown inside her which she feeds through the revelation (or disclosure) of this inner self to the outside world. Between women this kind of sharing goes on naturally” (Stevens, 1990: 32). Men, on the other hand, must separate from the mother. Someone transgender must learn how to operate in a way that returns to this type of sharing. Rather than going to the extreme—“passivity, lack of expression,
suppression of personality”—that person must learn how to emulate a woman: finding other people equally interesting, collaborating in decision-making processes, supporting other people and their ideas, and learning to act as to how they are feeling rather than merely following “some stereotype about how women move” (Ibid: 33). All of the above all mirror Deborah Tannen’s classification of women’s language as cooperative and rapport language.

As for the specifics of speaking as a woman, Stevens devotes a full chapter out of the total nine—not counting the introduction and conclusion—so more than ten percent of the book is devoted to the issue of language. Stevens quotes Anne Bolin’s *In Search of Eve* to point out that it takes time and practice in order to reach perfection in speech. Besides pitch and tone needing to be raised, those who are transgender “are aware of para-linguistic and sociolinguistic gender disparities in speech.” Females raise pitch at the end of a sentence and use tag questions, weaker expletives, are generally more polite, and use expressive forms such as “lovely, cute, darling.” Transsexuals practice voice and speech patterns until they are no longer a conscious effort (Stevens, 1990: 71). All of this from Bolin sounds a lot like Lakoff’s characteristics.

After discussing Bolin, Stevens goes into specifics of stylistic differences. She points out that vocal pitch is created as much by cultural pressures and stereotypes as it is by physical differences. While a falsetto voice is too high and will sound silly, there is something that can be done to change your natural voice. Stevens suggests learning to breathe from the diaphragm, which leads to better breath control, which allows for voice control. She also gives many more suggestions as to how to get to the right tone of pitch. Aside from pitch, intonation is important. Using a greater range of inflections leads to a more feminine voice. Women also speak softer
and with less intonation than men. Too soft is a problem, but not as much of one as too loud. Stevens then goes into a discussion of women’s speech. Women use more tag questions, mostly as a convention of polite speech. Women’s language contains an “abundance of qualifiers.” Women often end a sentence with a question or by inflecting the final word. This softens the sentence, putting the woman in a place that expresses a little bit of insecurity, which is very feminine. Women articulate more carefully. Women use empty adjectives such as “gorgeous, lovely, and precious”. Women use a slightly different lexicon, such as using “housecoat” rather than “robe”. Women put more emphasis on adjectives and adverbs than men. There is also a feminine way to pronounce words. For example, “saying your ‘s’s’ almost as if you were hissing like a snake,” using “t”s in a softer manner than men, etc. (Stevens, 1990: 75). This list lines up neatly with Lakoff’s characteristics of “women’s language”.

After this list of specific aspects of women’s language, Stevens does something that may at first seem to be unexpected, discussing something first mentioned in Sex Differences in Human Communication by Eakins and Eakins. Stevens points out that it should not be concluded that there are fixed rules of men’s and women’s speech, and instead gives two general observations to follow: first of all, women’s speech is more person centered, deals more with feelings, is more polite, more indirect, and uses language that seeks to avoid imposing belief, agreement, or obedience on others. Hence tag questions, qualifiers, and other such things. On the other hand, men’s speech is more centered around external things and is more likely to deal with straight factual communication. It is more literal, direct, and to the point, employing stronger statements, and pressing compliance agreement and belief on the listener (ibid). Despite claiming a lack of
fixed rules, this description is almost textbook Tannen. This could be easily summed up as rapport/cooperative versus report/competitive language.

It should be mentioned here that these dichotomies are not true cross culturally. For the Malagasy, it is the direct style of their speech that identifies women as being of secondary status. They are the ones who are expected to berate others in public, argue, express anger, and speak bluntly. Men, on the other hand, speak indirectly. For the Javanese, the men are supposed to be more circumspect and controlled in their speech, using the polite speech style with greater art and better effect. These two examples, as discussed in William Foley’s *Anthropological Linguistics*, are just two of many different gender dichotomies in different languages and culture. Tannen and Lakoff’s dichotomies, it is important to remember, are culturally set in English in America.

Along with Steven’s two discussions of women’s speech—ones that appear as if they could have been pulled almost directly from first Lakoff and then Tannen—Stevens adds a discussion of body language. Women, supposedly, smile more than men. They move their mouths more than men. Women hold eye contact more than men. Women reveal emotions more than men. They also use their hands more in expressing themselves. She also specifically discusses the importance of learning how to cough and blow one’s nose in a feminine way, as these can give “true gender” away. She points out that hormones have no affect, and that one really should not attempt to use surgery. She highly suggests hiring a voice teacher, and taping your practices so you can hear the difference. Most importantly, “practice, practice, and the practice some more” (79: ibid).
From Masculine to Feminine is an especially good example of this kind of literature, partly because the author is sharing some of her own experiences transitioning. It also makes use of multiple other similar sources to back up its points. Furthermore, it is often quoted as a source in other books discussing these issues. Miss Vera’s Finishing School is also often quoted, and comes as a source from a finishing school (Vera 1997).

Interestingly, much of Miss Vera’s Finishing School seems to be less aimed at those who are trans, and more aimed at cross-dressers, those who want to occasionally dress up, or tap into their feminine side. Veronica Vera’s book reads more like a “how to be a proper young lady” manual, or an etiquette manual. It is filled with anecdotes and stories, rather than lists of instructions. In a way, it is a long advertisement for the finishing school, while also sharing advice. This gives it a very different tone. The book has both a greater sense of authority, as it comes from an established school, but also a lesser sense, due to its anecdotal nature. With these differences in tone and purpose, similarities between it and From Masculine to Feminine help show the staples of the self-help book for those transitioning. One of these similarities is that Vera also has a chapter on speech, which she calls “girl talk.”

In this chapter, Veronica Vera starts by discussing the simple change from “yup” or “yeah” to the more feminine “yes.” She discusses what happens in Voice class at her academy. Students learn to let their voices rise and fall while they speak. “A man might say, in a near monotone, ‘That’s a nice dress,’ but a woman, allowing her vocal pitch to soar, would say, ‘You look gorgeous!’” (Vera, 1997: 131). She too suggests breath control though this is partly to avoid
“eat[ing one’s] own rules,” but rather letting the woman “feast on each vowel,” stretching them out (ibid: 131). Vera also suggests using a tape recorder. On top of this, she suggests that students read from monologues of female characters from plays. This includes such monologues as Lady Macbeth’s mad scene, and Juliet’s “wherefore art thou Romeo” monologue (which I find interesting as those scenes are not only archaic, but were written by a male). The rest of Vera’s chapter is based on anecdotes. There is nowhere near as much about language in her book, but again, it is less of a how-to manual. It is very clear, however, that the Voice classes she mentions are a very important part of the finishing school. Furthermore, every aspect that she does discuss matches Lakoff and Tannen’s schemas, in the same way that Steven’s discussions do.

It is important to notice that while Vera has many anecdotes, all these anecdotes are about the way her finishing school works. None of them give any proof that women work this way. Stevens, in contrast, does not have anecdotes, except for a few stories of her own experiences transitioning. As Kulick points out, “the overwhelming bulk of [the literature studying transgender and language] does not examine language in informal contexts…the data analyzed by researchers have been literary, film, or song texts; constructed dialogues; onstage speech; or language produced in more or less formal interviews with scholars” (615: Kulick, 1999). Very few of the self-help books make use of actual linguistic studies, but rather seem to quote each other. Very few of the studies of transgender language make use of actual speech. It is only far more recently that such things have been studied, as I will discuss further in this review.
When it comes to gender, it seems pretty clear there is some set of perceived ideals that are the golden standard for what it means to pass, though exactly what those ideals are or how true to life those standards are are unclear. This golden standard is part of Western heteronormativity. Again, it is expected that those who are trans are transitioning in order to fit this heteronormativity—or at least some sort of transnormativity—and part of the way this is performed is through men and women’s language.

6. Passing through voice alone

Academia also shows the importance of language and voice when it comes to passing or to being identified by voice alone. There have been a number of studies on what information is assumed when voice is divorced from all other contexts. One such study, though not relating to gender, is found in Bonnie Urcioli’s *Exposing Prejudice: Puerto Rican Experiences of Language, Race, and Class*. In *Exposing Prejudice*, Urcioli examines the way linguistic issues are tied in to prejudices that Puerto Ricans face in the United States. As part of her study, she had participants listen to snippets of speech, and then asked them to assess the speaker’s race/ethnic background, where the speaker grew up, where they might live, and what language would they speak with the speaker. For most of the voice clips, the participants agreed on who the speakers were. For each speaker, there were linguistic cues that pinpointed who the person was. While accent was part of it, tone was another key identifier discussed by participants. One person referred to samples having “‘a tone (of voice) like a social worker’” and another as having a “boring tone of voice.” Similarly, a few different people referred to certain samples having a “Spanish tone of voice” (ibid: 113).
Similarly, there have been a large number of relevant studies at the 2009 and 2010 Linguistic Society of America conferences. These studies have been based primarily around stereotypes. Two especially revealing studies were presented as posters. One study done by Margaret Camp was based around women in Japanese. When asked to replicate women’s speech, participants would all speak in a higher pitch, even if they could not put into words their perception of women’s speech.

The more illuminating of these two studies had to do with identifying nationalities and cultures by listening to clips of speech. Elizabeth Brunner (2010) had two sets of data. In one set, everyone was a native speaker of a specific language. For example, German, Irish, Russian, Chinese, and more. In the second set of data, no one was a native speaker of the language. Instead, speakers were asked to mimic how they believed the various nationalities sound. There was a specific narrative they had to read, all in English. Participants in the study then had to listen to the clips and say which nationality they thought the speakers were from. What Brunner discovered was that in almost every case, participants were able to recognize the non native speakers better than the native speakers—that is, they were able to recognize the stereotyped accents better than the actual accents. In this case the model is not the actual, but the results are fairly interesting. It supports the idea of some stereotyped paradigm. The main difference is that in this case, it is highly unlikely that the non native speakers would pass among the natives, where for trans they need to pass amongst their chosen genders as well, not just the opposite culture.
Returning to gender and sexuality, Lal Zimman also has done such studies of perceived identity. In his presentation “Trans masculinities, phonetic bricolage, and the voice” (2012) and his paper “More than one way to sound gay: Trans men and perceived sexual orientation” (2010), Zimman does a very careful analysis of transgender male voices. He had a group of trans men that he worked with over a large period of time, during which they were all on hormones. He had these men read the same passage at the beginning and end of this period. This let him analyze both the affects of hormones on voices, but also let him look at other aspects of the male transgender voice.

In his presentation, he examines the way that the pitch of the voice and the spectral properties of the [s] map out, comparing the differences before and after a year of hormones. What he found was that for some people the change was far more profound than for others. All together, though, with pitch and tonality of the [s], the end result typically matched the gender identity and sexual identity of his participants. For example, those who identified as genderqueer—that is, neither male nor female—had a higher pitch. Those who identified as male—and not trans male either—typically had the lowest pitch. The spectral properties of the [s] matched as well. This lead Zimman to conclude that vocal pitch is not something fully biological, but rather that there is something psychological and social about it as well. This suggests that FTM trans men do have to put some effort into reaching the correct pitch for them, but it also suggest that the majority of this effort is still unconscious, while those who are MTF have to consciously work to reach the appropriate pitch.
In another of Zimman’s articles, “More than one Way to Sound Gay,” Zimman looked at a group comprised of trans men and gay cis-gendered men. He looked at a mixture of phonetic characteristics that can be perceived as gay sounding, and did a study on gay-sounding styles. He focused on seven specific linguistic features. He had his participants read a specific passage, and had others listen and rate what their sexuality. He then looked at how those factors related to the above characteristics. He found that there is more than one bundle of phonetic characteristics that came off as sounding gay. It was how these factors came together that created the affect of sounding gay or not. This suggests that perhaps our conception of what it is to be gay is something that is less specific than our concepts of races, classes, or gender. Individually, people who scored similar ratings of gayness often had very different specific features. It is important to note is that the factors that come off as gay sounding are not the same features that are feminine. Furthermore, while the trans men and gay men came across as equally gay sounding, there were significant differences separating the trans men from the gay men.

These studies are all important as they show that speech divorced from any visual cues carries a large amount of identifying information. In addition, Brunner and Camp’s research shows that stereotyped versions of speech can sometimes be identified more easily than actual natural speech, something that may be important to keep in mind when it comes to the linguistic registers used by someone who is trying to present a gender other than the one they were assigned and socialized as from birth. It is also important to keep in mind, however, in all of these cases this was manufactured (reading from a prewritten passage) and not actually natural speech. Furthermore, while this shows how important voice can be by itself, it does not convey how much sway voice cues have over physical appearance and body language, or what happens
when appearance and voice do not match, something that as far as I am aware has not yet been studied in an academic context.

To continue on the topic of making use of stereotypical language, while, as previously stated, doing drag is a separate identity, drag queens—especially through the TV show RuPaul’s Drag Race—have become a popular subject of study of gendered language. After all, drag queens make use of stereotypical women’s language and have created their own patterns within the genre. As Judith Butler argued, appropriating symbols of dominant society can serve as a form of resistance: “This is not an appropriation of dominant society in order to remain subordinated by its terms but an appropriation that seeks to make over the terms of domination, a making over which is a kind of agency, a power in and as discourse, in and as performance, which repeats in order to remake—and sometimes succeeds” (Butler, 1993: 137). In this vein, in “Supermodels of the World, Unite!: Political Economy and the Language of Performance among African American Drag Queens,” Rusty Barrett focuses on the way African American drag queens use a stereotyped form of white women’s language (2006). Note that this brings the idea of race into gender as well, once again bringing focus to the fact that gender does not exist in a vacuum.

According to Barrett, African American drag queens—or AADQ—use a register very similar to Lakoff’s women’s language. This register does, in fact, specifically flaunt some of the characteristics. These three characteristics are that: 1) Women use superpolite forms, do not use off-color or indelicate expressions, and are the experts of euphemisms; 2) women do not tell jokes; 3) women speak in italics. AADQs call attention to their flaunting of these three characteristics, especially the use of obscenities. These characteristics—minus the use of
obscenities—are similar to characteristics recommended in the self help books previously discussed. The AADQs are not trying to pass as white women. Instead, they are manipulating the stereotype and the paradigm in order to create a resistance to the very symbols of dominance that they are using. This is a very difference use of the paradigm, but it is interesting that the paradigm is still almost synonymous with Robin Lakoff, and in some ways this seems to relate back to the idea that “the adoption of stereotypical speech norms by transgendered individuals…also opens a conceptual space for an appreciation that those speech norms are stereotypes,” as quoted previously in the Don Kulick article (Kulick, 1999: 610). This again calls into question the schema laid out by Lakoff, Tannen, and the self-help books, and how much they are descriptions of natural speech versus descriptions of stereotyped speech.

To examine this question, however, a study cannot begin with the assumption of the existence of these characteristics of speech, nor can it focus on looking for those characteristics in order to specifically prove or disprove them. As discussed above in section three, Cameron and Kulick called Tannen’s schema into question partly due to the way that different interpretations of the same speech can be made to support the dichotomy no matter which gender actual spoke those words, and in looking for a pre-existing set of markers they reaffirm themselves. This suggests that research should be done that builds from the ground up. This idea will be important further on.

7. Gender Studies of non-Western Cultures
Until recently, the majority of studies into transgender or non-binary registers of speech had been done in non-Western cultures. Examples of this include Kulick’s study of the *travesti* as discussed above; Niko Besnier’s study of *fakaleiti* in Tonga (2003); multiple studies of the Native American two-spirit people, or *berdache*, including the Navajo *nadleehe* and the Shoshoni *tainna wa’ippe* as discussed by Sabine Lang in 1997 in an anthology of papers about two-spirit people; Martin Manalansan’s study of the Filipino gay man, or *bakla* (2007); and Abe’s work with Japanese transgender prostitutes (2010); among others. While I will not go into detail here, these studies all have patterns that repeat. First of all, in much of this research there is a distinct difference between gender identity and sexuality. Secondly, to understand each of these cases one must first have a handle on what masculinity and femininity looks like in that culture. It is important to understand how these genders use and index their culture’s registers of heteronormativity, making use of them while still separating from them. It is also very important not to attempt to map these genders and identities directly onto Western identities, as they do not have a one to one correspondence. Each of these must be examined in their own context.

One benefit most of these studies have, however, is that many of these cultures have languages where gender is grammatically part of the language. In other cases, foreign languages—including English—are used as parts of a code to index inclusivity to their gender or sexuality, such as the *fakaleiti* peppering their speech with English, or the *bakla*’s use of Swardspeak.

This trend is continued in *Queer Excursions*, where a full half of the chapters are studies in non-western cultures. Orit Bershtling and Erez Levon work in Israel, Jenny L. Davis continues studies into two-spirit people, Evelyn Blackwood works with tombois in Indonesia, and Rudolf
P. Gaudio discusses Nigerian Hausa narratives. These studies, however, are primarily working with the understanding that while gender and sexuality binaries are often an undeniable part of the communities we study, these need to be more nuanced, understanding that these structures are produced through interactions and contexts rather than being taken as an assumption.

In addition, there have been studies into how non-binary individuals present themselves through their speech when their languages have binaries built into the grammar. Bershtling, for example, works with gender queer Israelis (2014). Hebrew is a language where every very attaches the gender of the subject, so it is nearly impossible to avoid gendering oneself when speaking. So these non-binary Israelis end up either using the gender forms that do not match their physical presentation, or they switch back and forth as they speak. Levi C. R. Hord’s study reveals that while Swedish speakers find gender neutral language adequate to express their identities, French and German speakers feel that their languages do not have adequate gender neutral options, and that English, in comparison, is adequate (2017).

8. Recent studies at the time of conceptualizing this research

Up through the early 2010s, there began to be more serious studies done into transgender identity and language. Many of these were studies by Lal Zimman, including his studies of trans voices discussed above. As Zimman points out in “More than one Way to Sound Gay”, part of why studies like this one are important is that “identities based on sexual orientation are gendered identities, and different realizations of masculinity and femininity imply different sexual
subjectivities” (Zimman, 2010: 38). Trans voices look at the intersections between gender and sexuality. Therefore, this is an important field to study.

Along with phonological quantitative analysis of trans speech, Zimman discusses the way that trans individuals discuss the parts of their bodies that in society are commonly referred to as “male” or “female” genitals. While there is the discussion of trans people being “born in the wrong body,” for many trans individuals this is not the case. Instead, while some who are trans do undergo surgery in order to combat dysphoria and to have their bodies changed to fit their image of what their bodies should look like, many others do not. In “The Discursive Construction of sex: Remaking and Reclaiming the Gendered Body in Talk about Genitals Among Trans Men,” Zimman brings up Butler’s argument that sex is discursively constructed, and that within discourse that we can see how the body is inscribed with social meaning. He focuses this paper on “the power of language to redefine the body in the face of compulsory gender and sexual normativity” (Zimman, 2011: 2). This was also the topic of Avery Dame’s presentation at the 19th American University Conference on Lavender Languages and Linguistics, “Jacking my Dick: Understanding the Emotional Labor of FTM Masturbation Videos in XTube’s Economy of Affect.” Both of these studies examine the ways that trans men refer to their genitalia as a way to reclaim their bodies.

In Dame’s presentation, he looked at videos of trans men on XTube, especially focusing on the way people referred to genitalia. There are many trans men who will take hormones, leading to an enlarged clitoris. After all, it takes a large amount of surgery to end up with anything resembling a “biological penis,” a thing that many people either do not want or cannot afford to
do. In these videos, the men who post the videos and the people responding refer to the aforementioned enlarged clitoris as the trans man’s penis, or more often and more crudely “dick.” Zimman’s analysis of this same phenomenon is far more in depth, and looks at a larger variety of terms. He focuses on discussions that remake the meanings attached to the gendered body, collecting a number of conversations dealing with these words. What he found is that the word “dick” is used the most to refer to trans men’s genitalia. “Cock” is used the second most. “Penis” is barely used at all, and when it is, it is only referring to the results of phalloplasty. Similarly, “clit(oris)” is only used to refer to “female genitals”. New terms, such as “dic-clit” and “mangina,” as well as euphemisms are used as well. So the vernacular “male” register is used, rather than the typical medical language. In both of these studies, trans men are constructing themselves as male-bodied, “de-coupling the gendered element of the semantics of these words from their physiological description.” So “dick” becomes a word that refers to a man’s genitals, regardless of how they work or look, rather than specifically “a male organ of urination and copulation” (Zimman, 2011: 22). In this way the trans men and are reclaiming their bodies to match with the identity that they have chosen. Or in other words, these men use the words that belong to their own gender. This also challenges the idea that genitalia biologically dictates gender. Zimman adds to this in Gender Excursions, also discussing use of “female” body language. Much of the time the gendered meanings of these words would be decoupled from the physiological, coupling the “female” word with language that makes it clear that it belongs to a man (“my boy cunt,” “his vagina”). This feminine terminology has three main contexts: medical or technical talk about the body, expressions of dysphoria or other discomfort, or in order to reclaim these parts. Again, this usage expands the types of bodies that can be categorized as male, constructing trans men as being male-bodied. As part of his
conclusion, Zimman highlights the fact that “a conceptual difference between gender and sex is crucial for the way many trans people articulate a self-identified, internally felt gender separate from their assigned sex” (Zimman, 2014: 30). While language can be oppressive, especially when disguised as nature, these systems can be remade.

Lal Zimman also writes “The other kind of coming out: Transgender language and the coming out narrative genre.” This article goes into an in depth discussion of the “coming out” narrative for those who are transgender, comparing it to coming out as gay. The most striking difference between the gay and transgender coming out narrative is the ideologies that speakers draw on. For those who are gay, there is the “coming out imperative,” which frames coming out as a valuable task that will benefit the individual and their peers. For those who are transgender, many do not want to be openly transgender, or they see their transgender status as irrelevant to their identity. It is also more dangerous to come out as transgender than as gay. What is especially important here is understanding that “LGBT” is not one cohesive and homogenous community. Gays and lesbians do not stand for the entirety of the queer community. In fact, there is something known as the “silent T phenomenon,” where “LGBT” is used despite a focus on only the issues of sexual orientation. Studies that deal with this community need to take into account the “T” as well. I bring this article up mostly to highlight some former points: that gender identity must be dealt with as well as sexual identity, and that one cannot really study one while ignoring the other.

Again, however, most of the studies done until recently have focused only on sexuality or on non-Western genders. One of the few ethnographies of transgender in America is David
Valentine’s *Imagining Transgender*. In it, Valentine looks at the way people are identifying themselves in the gay, drag, and transgender communities. The transgender community, he posits, is a community of practice, one which is conceptualized in terms of shared practices. Valentine is especially focused on those who are at the margins of the “collective ‘transgender.’” He calls into question the instabilities of the gender category when actually applied to individual lives, and how, based on the current ideas of transgender, these selves would be unintelligible. Many of these people claim multiple different identities, such as Anita, who claims the categories of gay, drag, man, “living as a woman” and she does “everything like a woman,” yet she does not claim the category of woman (115). For some of these people, but not all, transgender is also a category with which they identify, though for some of them the lack of identification with the term is due to a non-familiarity with the term. For others, though they recognize that they fit the description of transgender, yet still reject the label in terms of themselves. In this book Valentine is especially highlighting the way the “transgender community” is not a cohesive community.

An important thing to note here is that the in the approximately 20 year since Valentine did his research, as it took years for him to write before he published in 2007, the concept of what it means to be transgender has expanded and, if anything, become less cohesive. Besides far wider acknowledgement of non-binary identities, there are questions of who can claim the term transgender. There is also greater acknowledgement that being transgender does not necessarily mean being transnormative, even if in much of American society there is still the belief—as discussed above by Kate Bornstein—that if you are transgender you are transitioning to heterosexuality.
This was part of the focus at the 20th Lavender Language and Linguistics conference in February 2013, at a session called Language, Boundaries, and Transgender Rights. In the session, Lal Zimman, Angus B. Grieve-Smith, and Bethany Townsend brought into light the need to examine these issue of the “transgender community”. Zimman’s opening remarks focused on the history of the field, mostly discussing many of the studies discussed above. He brings up a number of emerging trends in transgender studies, including: questions on how we define the “transgender community”, such as the ways transgender relates to the other groups marginalized for sexuality and gender or other things, both distinguishing and connecting trans with GLBT; trans and the voice; negotiation of gender, and genderqueerness. Grieve-Smith’s presentation, “Ambiguity and boundary policing in transgender America” brought up the issues of the boundaries of the “transgender community.” He pointed out the varying definitions that exist for transgender, especially the inclusion or exclusion of “gender expression” in the following common definition: “someone who’s gender identity or expression varies from the gender assigned at birth.” This leaves a question of what does it mean to be transgender? What radial categories are there? Does it include crossdressers? Drag queens and kings? Genderqueer? Genderfluid? Or does it require a wish to transition? For most people the line is drawn at those who wish to transition, or for whom their gender identity is different from the gender assigned at birth. Gender expression is often ignored, and those who fall into certain radial categories—such as “crossdresser”—become thought of as perverts. Grieve-Smith introduces four pieces to transgender: transgender thoughts, transgender beliefs, transgender feelings, and transgender actions. Transgender thoughts are things that everyone has: “what if I was [opposite gender]?” “I’d make more money if I were a man,” and so on. Transgender beliefs are believing the transgender thoughts, such as
“I really am a man,” or “I make a pretty cute woman”. Transgender feelings are feelings associated with transgender thoughts: “I wish I were a man,” or “I want a man’s job,” and so on. Transgender actions are then acting out the transgender beliefs and thoughts. These are fairly loose boundaries, but those who consider themselves trans do not always fit conceptions.

Bethany Townsend’s presentation, “‘Are you a man or a woman, are you attracted to men or women?’: Exploring the Limitation of Discourses on Sexuality in a Trans Community,” continues on this theme, and especially reraises the questions originally raised by Valentine. Members of the community she was working with brought up a lot of the issues of sexuality inherent in transgender studies. It is ridiculous, they said, to say that they were homosexual before and heterosexual now, or visa versa. Everyone has different self identifications of their sexuality, and for many people these identifications do not fit hetero or homonormativity. Still, society tries to force heteronormative binaries onto those who are trans, causing a lack of understanding an a myriad of problems. Townsend calls for a ethnographic approach to transgender studies, one which involves participant observation, in order to help foster real understanding and a lack of “othering” in transgender research.

There are also calls outside of the conference around this time. Edelman points out in “Neither In nor Out” that, “While in recent decades lesbian and gay experiences have become an acceptable, and fertile ground for sociolinguistic inquiry…gender non confirming, transgendered, transsexual, and other persons not identifying with the gender assigned to them at birth…within a North American context have been relatively absent” (Edelman, 2014:150). In
studies of LGBT, trans identity gets lumped in with queer studies and majorly ignored—again, the silent “T.”

9. The recent push to a theory of trans linguistics

Again, up to this point through 2013, there was still a lack of ethnographic research into Western non-cis genders, and only the beginning of a body of research deviating away from the gender binary. In this was also a call for the reexamining of the dichotomies of gendered language, and the recognition that trans was a good lens for the study of gender markers. This was the state of the field when I began my research.

As previously stated, however, in the past 5 years there has been the beginning of a field of trans linguistics with an increased focus on non-binary genders. After the 24th Lavender Languages and Linguistics conference, in April of 2017, there has even been a facebook group created for those who research non-binary linguistics. As of early 2019, it has over 200 members. While much of this research has still been focused on pronoun use or gender neutral options for inherently gendered languages, the need to expand the field has been recognized. At the 24th LLaL, as previously mentioned, there were three posters and one paper focusing on non-binary linguistics (Hord, 2017; Cordoba, 2017; Showers-Curtis 2017). At the 25th, Kirby Conrad, Jordan Tudisco, Sebastian Cordoba, and myself all presented in the section Confronting Linguistic Normativity. There were also multiple other papers in other sections. This includes Lal Zimman’s keynote paper, “(Trans)Gender(ed) pasts, presents, and futures: Sketching a trans linguistics through three decades of research on language and trans experience.”
Zimman lays out the beginnings of a trans linguistics. In queer linguistics, sexuality and gender normativity have been central, and gender variance was an important part of establishing the field, but more recently there has been developments towards this new field. Much of his discussion of the past of the field mirrors my own above. The research that form this trans linguistics, however, are those that include focus on experience, question and explore the way that a binary grammatical structure impacts trans people, as well as how trans people use these forms. Studies of trans voices need to get away from the language ideologies that voices have a “natural” sex, and that all trans people desire gender-normative voices. Future areas of study that he lays out include: pronouns in use; different populations of study including trans people of color, trans feminine people, non-binary people; phonetic variations across trans populations on the basis of age, class, disability and race; applying these questions to children’s language education and medical institutions; and many more. Ultimately Zimman lays out six fields needed for a trans linguistics:

A dynamic field: acknowledging that change is an essential part of life which includes changes in linguistic usage through a persons lifespan.

A denaturalizing field: this means that simplistic accounts of gender and language should not be used. There are no “linguistically ‘naïve’ participants” and any studies that stem from that assumption must be reconsidered.

A recentering field: trans people are people, and should be included in studies that are not focused only on transness. Trans people should not be used primarily to compare to cis people.

A politicizing field: not all prescriptions are oppressive, and the sociopolitical has an important effect on language change.
An imaginative field: research needs to not focus only on norms or things that can be easily generalized, but on exceptions as well.

An empowering field: trans people need to be agentively involved in trans linguistics, not just be subjects.

These are all fields that require studying language use in conjunction with the people using it, centering people in studies. Not all will be in use in every study, but they cannot be ignored. It is important to highlight here that while the body of existent trans linguistics has still been primarily binary, a fully explored field necessitates inclusion of all trans identities, including non-binary, agender, third gender, and non-western trans identities.

It was in this context that I began my research as a way to reexamine gendered speech, and through a mix of further research, discussions, and my participants being mainly non-binary refocused on non-binary speech markers. In fitting with trans linguistics, I seek to center trans voices, attempting to focus on the actualities of the trans population rather than generalizing. This research especially seems to fit with Zimman’s question of how trans—in this case especially non-binary trans—people make use of the binary structure. In this way, it seeks to be part of exploring a part of trans linguistics that is still currently primarily absent. With this research, I also attempt to expand the understanding of what it can mean to be trans, as much of society—including in academia—interpret “trans” to mean a person who transitions from the gender they were identified as at birth to being the “other” gender. As chapter four of this paper will show, this does not reflect the current identities within the trans community. Along with this, as a non-binary researcher seeking to elevate trans voices rather than speak for them, this research especially attempts to acknowledge the empowering field.
Chapter 3: Review of Methodology

As this study began in order to reexamine the question of gendered language without making use of previous dichotomies and taking in account an option of a non-binary or gender neutral register of speech, I needed to work out a methodology. To do this I looked at the methodology of transgender and queer linguistics so far, both quantitative and qualitative methodology, in order to create my own methods. It is important to note that this covers a review of methodology through the early 2010s, in order to explain where mine originated.

The quantitative methods are primarily socio-phonetic experiments. These, as discussed in section one, focus on certain variables, including vowel quality, frequency, pitch, vowel formants, and properties of /s/, especially fronting. These studies tend to focus on either attempting to find the specific variables/groups of variables that gay or transgender speakers use in order to index their identity; or the variables/groups of variables that the listeners pick up on that cause someone to sound gay or masculine. These quantitative studies also primarily seem to focus on these variables as if they are direct indexes—variables that specifically denote gender or sexuality—rather than indirect indexes, where these social aspects are more complicated and not a direct inference. Most studies also focus on either gender or sexuality, but there are a few that have started focusing or call for a focus on both.

There is also a history of studies in quantitative research that focus on matched guise studies, as in William Labov’s foundational work on r-pronunciation in New York City. In these studies, listeners are asked to make value judgments based solely on listening to pieces of speech, with
no other background knowledge of the speaker. In many cases, these are used to try to pinpoint the variables indexing these judgments, either directly or indirectly. These matched guise studies have also been used to form more qualitative methods for similar purposes. In addition, it is very useful to think about many of these phenomena in terms of registers of speech, or registers in the making, as discussed by Asif Agha. All of this will be relevant to the review of both types of methods to come, and will therefore be discussed more fully later in this chapter.

As for the qualitative methods, as discussed in section two, they primarily involve long field study, living or spending much time with the subjects, along with discourse analysis and interviews. Most of the qualitative studies I have focused on that have happened since 1990—at least those specifically focused on gender or sexuality—use Judith Butler’s performativity theory in some way. Many of these studies, however, are uneven in regards to language, and therefore some discussion of more linguistic ethnographies that do not relate to as much to gender or sexuality—such as Rampton (1995) and Urciouli (1996)—become necessary to examine. This is also where Agha and his discussion of register studies become important. Through this discussion I will show the reasons that for my own studies I created a qualitative approach, as discussed in sections two and three.

From here, in section four, I lay out my methodology as planned when I proposed my research, in 2013. Here I show where I came to my original questions, and my original methodology. As my understandings changed, my participant pool surprised me, and I worked with my participants, my methodology and questions changed. In section five I explain these changes, and lay out the specifics of my methods.
1: Quantitative methods

According to Zimman, on the topic of sexuality and socio phonetics, over the years “focus of this work has shifted away from how gay-identified men speak and toward the question of what leads a listener to identify a voice as gay- or straight-sounding” (Zimman, 2010: 4). Sexuality studies at this time focus primarily on the same speech traits associated with gender differences, these being fundamental frequency, properties of [s], and vowel formants. There is also a focus on traits that have to do with language ideologies of gay men’s voices, such as pitch dynamism or the idea of the “Gay lisp.” The special issue of American Speech on sociophonetics and sexuality examines phonetic features that include vowel quality and dispersion, fricative place of articulation, pitch levels, and pitch variability. These features are also not used independently of each other but rather must be analyzed in the context of which features occur together. In other words, these must be analyzed in terms of their registers—that is, sets of features and behaviors that through historical processes come to be “regularly treated as indexical of a social type by a given social domain of persons” (Agha, 2005: 45).

Many studies of sociophonetics and sexuality have been based in laboratory experiments, and have focused on binaries. Older studies sought for some sort of gay variable that would be a direct index of sexuality. As Eckert and Podesva put it, in their opening to the special edition of American Speech, this is “clearly a thing of the past” (2011: 9). Instead of this, there is a search for the phonetic features indirectly indexing a number of stances and acts and activities that are associated with certain sexual identities. It is pointed out that most variables have indeterminate
meanings. These quantitative studies also focus on performance, rather than performativity. They are looking at these fixed and objective indexes of sexuality and gender. For the most part, in these studies the context does not matter, in fact most of them use read speech, studying how specific passages are read and therefore eliminating contextual differences all-together.

Many of these studies also follow the traditions of matched guise experiments. Matched guise experiments have a long history in sociophonetic research. In matched guise experiments, as used by Lambert and Labov, informants are exposed to utterances with contrasting values of a single variable, and then asked to make value judgments about the speakers’ personalities (Labov, 1972). In the original tests by Lambert, they were asked to rate which of a certain set of jobs they would be more likely to hire the person for. These matched guise experiments by Lambert allowed for unconscious social attitudes towards language to show in judgments of speakers’ honesty, reliability, intelligence, and so on. Similar tests have followed since, by many different linguists, using these types of experiments to account for judgments on race, class, or, in experiments relevant to this paper, judgments on gender and sexuality. Most matched guise experiments can only focus on one variable, such as tone or the properties of [s], however, and this does not account for analyzing uses of features together.

In Lee Zimman’s study of sounding gay, he uses a form of the matched guise experiments that takes more than one variable at a time into account (2010). As discussed in the previous chapter, Zimman looked at gay men and trans men to examine how one “sounds gay.” The collective results in the previous work he drew from provided evidence that listeners tap into different sets of cues when identifying someone as sounding gay or straight. He points to the notion that there
is more than one type of gay-sounding voice, and that this aligns with the idea of hegemonic masculinity. People who are accused of being “gay” may in fact be attracted to men, or he may be singled out as insufficiently masculine, for a number of reasons. Similarly, any phonetic styling that does not meet the expectations of heteronormative masculinity is likely to be lumped together as sounding gay. Zimman’s methods involve three groups of men, those who are gay, those who are straight, and those who are transgender. In each group were five men, all suburban middle class. Of the trans men, four identify as queer, while the fifth identifies as straight. For some of them queer means attracted to women, for some it means attracted to men, and straight means attracted to women. Zimman had each of them read a specific passage called the “Rainbow Passage,” one that has been used in several studies of sounding gay. After this, he interviewed each of them on a number of topics. After this he picked a 30 second segment of text and in them took measurements of seven acoustic characteristics: “mean fundamental frequency, mean F1, mean F2, vowel dispersion, creaky voice quality, and the frequency profile of [s] as measured by center of gravity and spectral skew” (Zimman, 2010: 15). He then used an online survey where he posted these same clips and had volunteers provide judgments about each speaker’s age, height, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. There turned out to be no relation between perceived and actual ethnicity, which was examined due to the myriad of ethnicities and of the speakers and the possible interaction between ethnicity and gayness. He then worked to use a linear mixed-effects model to study the acoustics to examine what features are perceived as gay and what are perceived as straight, as well as to how this actually corresponds to being gay, straight, or trans. The results showed that the trans men and gay men were perceived as more gay sounding than the straight non-trans men, but there was no statistical difference between trans and gay men. Also, for the most part the trans men were statistically indistinguishable from
the non trans men in their acoustic features. Another thing this study suggests is that it is a set of variables that create the stereotype of gayness, not a single variable. It is a nice reworking, however, of matched guise that allows for the analyzing groups of features. This also allows for more specifics than many of the studies discussed in the previous chapter, in the research using samples of speech.

In another study, Zimman studies the effects of hormones on trans male voices (2012). He uses the same rainbow passage. He uses a number of men who were taking hormones at two sets of time, early in their hormones and then a year later. He examines the difference between the voices of these men before and after this time, especially with fundamental frequency, frequency of [s], and pitch. He compares the change with the gender identity of the speakers—man, trans man, or gender queer. He finds that the frequencies matched their gender and sexuality identities, where the least change and highest pitch is from someone who identifies as gender queer, while those who identify as men—not trans men—typically have the lowest pitch (2012). This suggests there is more to the change in voice than merely hormone treatment.

As previously stated, much of this type of study uses read speech in order to be able to control for certain sounds and ability for comparison. This eliminates contextual differences, and allows for more objective studies controlled for certain variables. Robert Podesva takes a different approach in his paper on the California Vowel Shift and Gay Identity (2011). In order to look into sounding gay, he had a single speaker, who he calls Reagan, in order to study intraspeaker patterns. He examines how Reagan’s vowel production differs in different contexts, seeking to use naturally occurring conversational data. In order to do this, he had Reagan record himself in
a variety of situations where he felt comfortable. Podesva then digitized the recordings, and took measurements using a program of maximum, minimum, and mean f0 as well as the duration of the vowel. He found that Reagan used the California vowel shift during a boy’s night out and similar contexts, but not all the time. This shift, he claims, indexes the “fun” and “laid-back” parts of the stereotypical Californian, which fits with the Reagan’s particular gay style of the “gay partier” (2011). While this study allows for the introduction of context as effecting markers of sexuality, with only one participant it becomes difficult to be certain that these shifts would be unique to this “gay style” of speech, rather than belonging to others from the area. In addition, due to the fact that Podesva was studying only certain words and vowels, some of these words had a very low occurrence. All of this means that this study is very narrow, and it is difficult to draw any larger conclusions about speech patterns beyond a single individual. This focus on specific acoustics, and therefore often specific words and vowels, seems part of why many quantitative studies use read speech instead of free speech. The studies of read speech allow for uniform comparison, whereas free speech is much harder to compare, especially when trying to control for certain contexts. This does, however, highlight part of the issues of using quantitative research when desiring to form a large understanding of the many different aspects going into gendered speech and presentation.

Another type of quantitative study focuses on perception, such as Lal’s study of sounding gay discussed above. Kathryn Campbell-Kimbler examined perception in her study, Intersecting Variables and Perceived Sexual Orientation in Men (2011). She took clips of four male speakers, taken from informal interviews, then also recordings where they produced alternate guises of –in and –ing, which were spliced into the original excerpts. From this she created pairs
that differed only in –in and –ing. She also worked with s/z, dealing with fronted, mid, and backed s production, annotating these in the clips. Finally, she created pitch manipulation, multiplying the pitch values by 1.25. This leads to three points of variation that she discusses. She created ninety six samples using these variations, then had listeners describe them with descriptive words or phrases that they felt relevant for the voices. She had 110 participants from all over the country. She then coded these responses. She coded on a mostly binary scale of mention/no mention, with an occasional -1/0/1 scale, with -1 being a negative mention, 0 being no mention, and 1 being a positive mention. Things that she ended up coding for include competence assessments, gay, south, country, city, etc. She then did another set where a total of 175 listeners were played a single clip from each of the four speakers, where she asked them to rate nine different terms that she drew from those produced in the first phase on a six-point scale: “smart,” “knowledgeable,” “masculine,” “gay,” “friendly,” “laid-back,” “country,” “educated,” and “confident.” Campbell-Kimbler finds that fronted /s/ is the most salient cue in the study, overwhelmingly heard as more gay. It was also rated as significantly less masculine. She also finds that –ing guises decreased negative assessments of intelligence, but leaving positive assessments unaffected (2011). This is interesting because it pinpoints individual variables as carrying a lot of meaning of their own, while Zimman’s earlier discussed article pointed to groups of sounds indexing sexuality. However, of the studies discussed so far, this seems to be the most thorough, using technology to create multiple variations from just a few original recordings, and using the internet and other methods to get over two hundred listeners cross country. This matched guise study also seems to be strongly pointing at a stereotype. These are “sociolinguistic markers [that] rise to overt social consciousness” (Labov 1972: 248). The fronted /s/, or lisp, is one of the features that people will point to as a feature of gay speech. So
this paper supports the existence of the stereotype. It is important to notice, however, that as the guises were all created from a small number of speakers, there is no correlation between this feature and the sexuality of speakers who have it. This is solely a study of perception, and, of course, “there may or may not be a fixed relation between such stereotype and actual usage” (Labov, 1972: 248).

Lal Zimman presented a similar study, titled Trans Voices and Perceived Gender (2013). He took recordings from 19 speakers reading a sentence from—once again—the rainbow passage reading as close to 150-165 hertz as possible. This pitch is the possible place of crossover from male to female voice according to previous studies. He created eight guises for each speaker by manipulating the pitch with mean F0s spaced 10 Hz apart from 120 to 190 Hz. Using Amazon’s mechanical turk, he collected listeners, and had 10 listeners listen to each guise, then select it as either male or female. He found that pitch is important, but there were very different crossover points. Therefore, perceived gender also depends on stylistic context. He found that f2 and the center of gravity are also significant factors, but that /s/ fronting did not seem to be much of a factor, which does not match the above study (2013). So pitch itself is not a sole index of gender, but requires a set of markers that work together. This study, as Zimman points out, is lacking in the number of listeners, and there was no way to be certain that listeners were native English speakers. It is interesting in the difference in results between these two fairly traditional matched guise studies.

Most of these studies focus on gender or sexuality. Erez Levon’s Teasing Apart to Bring Together: Gender and Sexuality in Variationist Research (2011). He argues for the need for
intersectionality, studying gender and sexuality together. Unlike most of the other studies discussed in this section, he focuses on women rather than men. He examines how two different groups of Israeli lesbian activists use the same phonetic feature—variation in mean pitch—to different social ends. There is an ideological tension between identifying as lesbian and identifying as Israeli, and Levon has focused on seeing how gays and lesbians linguistically negotiate this tension. Levon spent twelve months observing and recording members of numerous gay and lesbian activist associations. For this paper he restricts himself to women in what he calls the “mainstream” and “radical” groups. Here he focused on pitch, mainly the ways these women very their mean pitch levels in their Hebrew across topics when recounting narratives. These two groups conceive of the intersections between sex and gender very differently. This leads to them placing different meanings on the same variable. He took these narratives, and in some way—I am unclear as to how—measured the pitch levels. The radical women used significantly higher pitch when talking about gay topics rather than nongay topics. The mainstream women’s mean pitch was much closer to nongay pitch, but they also used higher pitch for gay topics. Radical women, unlike mainstream women, reject the dominant Israeli discourses of gender and the mainstream’s overly accommodationist stance. The way the higher pitch levels is used suggest that these higher mean pitch levels are being used to indirectly index lesbian subjectivity. So talking about gayness is distinctive for the radical women, and pitch is used to indirectly index that this is happening. In turn, this indexicality likely means it can be inferred that the topic is in some way gay if the pitch rises. For the mainstream group, Levon proposes the higher pitch simply means “gender”, where they perceive lesbianism as a special kind of feminine gendered status. There is not, however, much proof for how the same use of the same variation means two different things and points to different intersections of sex and
gender. It is not until much later in this paper that he brings up non narratives, where it does look different. For non narratives, the mean pitch is lower for mainstream women when discussing gay topics than nongay topics, where radical women do not have significant difference. So it is somewhat unclear as to where his conclusions come from. It is, however, interesting that the same markers index different meanings in two different lesbian groups.

Over all, these studies seem to rely primarily on laboratory studies, with recording devices and ways to measure the complexities of the recordings. They are also very statistical, relying on very careful analysis of the numbers and significance of the differences. These studies work best with read speech, allowing for direct comparison of certain variables. Most of them look at the same variables as well, although those they find to be related to gender and sexuality do vary. Most of them also show that no single variable alone accounts for these registers of speech. In fact, it is interesting to see that in some of the above studies, the fronting of the /s/ sibilant does not seem to have much relation to the interpretation of a voice as “gay,” nor does it necessarily appear in “gay speech”. This is despite the fact that a common stereotype of “gay speech” is the fronted /s/ or the lisp, as discussed with Campbell-Kimbler above. However, attempts to bring multiple contexts into these studies seems to weaken the studies, in one case there being a single subject making the conclusions impossible to verify (Podesva), and in the other case the proof behind the meaning of the variations is very weak. These studies seem to work best with matched guise studies, examining these fixed variables in read speech. It is also important to note that reading is a context, something which is fairly ignored in these studies. Besides being an elicitation task, reading is often more formal. This means readers are likely to more carefully
say the words as written, rather than using informal terms, which could potentially change some results.

For my own purposes, however, context is far more important, as is interaction. Much of the previous studies into gendered language—as discussed in the previous chapter—and much of the research into trans linguistics is related to interactions, that is, how the individual comes across to others—especially in the case of passing. These lab studies are focused on a very narrow set of indexes, and take into account only these acoustic features. They cannot allow for including other important aspects of presentation, as discussed in many of the sources listed in the precious chapter, such as appearance, body language, and word choice. They all also seem to rely on strict categorization and having a set of preexisting acoustics that the research plans to examine. Therefore, quantitative methods, while still extremely important, seem less applicable to reexamining gender markers.

2. Qualitative methods

There have been a number of qualitative studies on gendered language, trans language, and sexuality. This includes many of the sources discussed in the literature review, which will make up a large portion of the methodology I expound upon in this section. These sources rely primarily on interviews and life experiences, and are nearly all done in fieldwork.

As for this research I was likely to be using a mix of ethnographic and linguistic methods, it was important that I look into the methodology of some studies focused on language use and social
relationships. One of these is Rampton’s *Crossing: Language and Ethnicity Among Adolescents* (1995). In Rampton’s studies of crossing, Rampton begins with an analysis of the friendship networks between the adolescents. He looks at the ethnicity of those that hang out together, which reveals that ethnic descent is an important organizing factor in these networks, and that shared ethnicity is extremely important for the forming of friendships, though there are other things that would also affect friendships. This analysis also lets him focus on some of these clusters.

Rampton does two sets of fieldwork, both in the same neighborhood. These are three years apart, and the neighborhood is one where he had already been working as a teacher and youth worker for three years. His subject pool comes from the students with whom he worked, making contact with a few youngsters he already knew, and then he uses what seems to be something like snowball sampling, recruiting through friendship networks. In this way he is able to work with a few extended peer groups, allowing for easier cross-referencing. In both studies he uses radio-microphone recording, interviewing, and participant observation. The radio-microphone recordings are of recreational activity at the youth club and during free time at school, and these are one of the main sources of interactional data in the study. He does interviews relating to these recordings. In both studies, he does interviews focused on language as well as interviews based on social topics. These interviews, it seems, are unstructured, where he had a very specific set of topics he sought to initiate. He indexes and annotates these interviews, and compared his answers between the two years of study. He also does participant observation focusing especially on language use, group relations, and forms of youth culture at the local youth club, which he recorded in a field diary. In his second year of fieldwork, he also did retrospective
discussion with participants. As part of his analysis, he also does multiple codes. He codes major similarities and differences between the types of crossing into the three different languages. He also codes Panjabi crossing in two different recreational activities. He also does a large amount of discourse analysis and uses other linguistic methods to examine this phenomenon of crossing. On top of this, besides comparing the answers of the two different sets of interviews, he also compares earlier recordings with later reports, and later incidents with informant reports.

Rampton’s analysis incorporates all of these methods together to work with crossing and the way this linguistic event ties in with the social lives of the adolescents. He pulls in many linguistic methods from studies of code-switching, and carefully cross checks his data. In the ethnography itself, he peppers his book with transcriptions to highlight his findings, and to show how the linguistic and cultural overlapped and intersected. He also makes sure he has multiple examples of everything, to prove that nothing he discusses is an outlier, nor an exception. Each of his different methods all serve to cover different aspects of this ethnography. His interviews let him examine the social feelings of the groups, their norms, at least what they are willing to speak of, as well as the way language is used in conjunction with different groups and different feelings. Participant observation covers the ways that the different groups interact, and can get at less manufactured attitudes—by which I mean their overt ideologies, the way that these groups discuss other groups when not prompted by specific questions. In doing retrospective discussions and interviews, he is able to check his original beliefs but also see what has changed over the years. Furthermore, all these together let him examine many different contexts and see
what holds true in what contexts. This study shows the effectiveness of these many different qualitative methods, especially used together, in studies of language use and performance.

Another study in this vein is Urciouli’s *Exposing Prejudice: Puerto Rican Experiences of Language, Race, and Class*, but here the focus is on day-to-day language use and how this relates to social relationships as well as social identities, rather than on use of mimicry (1996). In this study she uses qualitative linguistic and anthropologic methods in order to examine issue of language and prejudice among Puerto Ricans in America. Part of this dealt with attempts—and especially failures—in social shifting. In order to study this issue, Urciouli worked in the community she was studying for a long period of time. She worked to slowly build connections, using Spanish to help connect with the community, and to help her slowly develop a persona that was more than just white. This means that her studies all come from this community, so she used nonprobability sampling. She follows the lives of the people in this study for about thirteen years, living with them and learning from them. She gained her information from a mixture of types of interviews, as well as from use of tape recorders to record speech in daily life. Her studies began in 1978, and she held series of interviews in 1988 and 1991.

Urciouli’s interviews seem to have been a mix of informal and unstructured. She reports on a number of conversations she had, complaints she heard, language and conversations she heard in daily life. She also includes transcriptions and reports from more structured interviews. As far as I can tell, she used unstructured interviews in her 1988 and 1991 interviews. She reports on common themes and threads in them. In her 1991 interviews, she especially focused on her subjects’ experience and analysis of class. While she followed a specific set of themes, she does
not seem to have followed a specific set of questions. It seems that her interviews were very in depth, asking many follow up questions for every answer, but unlike the rest of the ethnography, her analysis of these interviews seems to be fairly sparse and lacking. She addresses one type of question at a time, giving a few similar answers for each of these questions, but mostly just provides the straight transcripts, rather than any actual analysis of them.

Much of her data came from living in the community for years, and informal interviews. The longer she lived there, the more the community trusted her with their problems, and the more she was called in to help with issues. This means she was able to report thoroughly on many accounts of problems that the community faced due to their “broken” language. She also used tape recorders in homes, meaning that many natural conversations were recorded. These natural conversations really highlighted the code switching, and the ways that her subjects used Spanish and fluent switching in order to stay within and create the inner private sphere of the community, indexing their common cultural identity. Without this participant observation and these recordings, Urcioli would not have been able to catch the ways that her subjects use language patterns to create their private social sphere.

Her formal interviews, focused on recordings of speakers, showed a different aspect of the semiotics of speech. These, rather than focus on her community, focused on the attitudes and stereotypes of her community. They showed the ways that voice alone—tonation, word choice, accent, etc.—can be associated with race, class, education, location, and so on. “Voice alone,” however, is a misnomer, as voice is not a direct index. All the above listed aspects of speech work together to point to social categories. Again, this is similar to Zimman’s quantitative
matched guise study where he manipulated tone. Urciuoli’s interviews, however, are able to examine all these different pieces of voice, and she can learn from her interviewees the different things that jump out at them as key identifiers. This is also very similar to another kind of experiment that Labov talks about in *Sociolinguistic Patterns* (1972, 212-213). He calls this a “family background test,” asking subjects to identify the ethnic background, race, and social class of speakers based on a taped section. He claims that these tests tell us whether or not listeners can make these identifications from speech alone, but not where the information is located from grammar, phonology, intonation, or voice qualifiers. In order to help correct some of these gaps, the listeners’ in Urciuoli’s studies discuss the passages at length, including explaining why they make the judgments they do. Still, many times these focus more on word choice, or overall feelings or more judgments, rather than being able to get at specifics.

This last method, the “family background test”, is also used in Elizabeth Brunner’s studies of nationalities (2010), as briefly discussed in the previous chapter. Brunner asks her subjects to identify the nationalities of the speakers in recordings. She has two sets of recordings she has them listen to, one with native speakers and one with non-native speakers doing what they think the accents sound like. In this way she was studying how real accents sound to us, finding that it is the stereotypes of accents that we recognize better than the accents herself. This is similar to the way that often times in Urciuoli’s study, people would often make incorrect assumptions about people’s identities. In Urciuoli’s case, however, the recordings that were analyzed were of people simply talking. In Brunner’s recordings were produced by having the speakers attempt to talk in accents. This meant they were drawing from known stereotypes, markers that are overtly part of a conscious ideology, but as discussed earlier, do not necessarily relate to actual usage.
This is not a new idea, as stereotypes and ideas about usage are notoriously inconsistent with actual usage. For example, Peter Trudgill shows that females heavily over reported using the prestige standard pronunciation, while males heavily underreported their use of these forms (1972). Brunner’s study is especially important because it highlights the way that stereotypes can become more “real” than actual patterns of speech. Also, in many of the matched guise experiments discussed in the quantitative sections, the studies focus on finding perceptions without seeing whether there is any relation to actual usage. This study is able to compare to native speakers, so it really highlights the disparity between the stereotypes and the reality.

Both Urciouli and Rampton use a variety of methods, including participant observation, structured interviews, and unstructured interviews, which allow them to examine their topics from multiple angles. These feature heavily in my own methodology. From these, I knew I likely needed to work in a location where I already had some ties as I would not have the same kind of structured society where I could establish rapport over time. I also came to plan to use semi-structured interviews to ask about specific aspects of identity, language use, and conceptions of use; as well as more informal interviews and recording of natural conversation to be able to analyze language use that is not being influenced by the interview questions themselves.

As I am focusing on gender and sexuality, it is also important to discuss ethnological studies that focus on “alternate genders.” My ethnological sources all use the same theory as a baseline, and they used fairly similar methods. This is the theory of performativity, as first described by Judith Butler in 1990. As previously discussed, Butler posits that instead of being an underlying truth
brought to light, gender is “performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence,” thus gender is “constituting the identity it is purported to be” (1990: 34). So gender is not what we are, nor what we have, but what we do. Gender has to be constantly reaffirmed and performed. Something very important here is the difference between performance and performativity. As previously stated, most quantitative methods seem to call upon performance. For one thing, this assumes a set identity with specific associated features. This assumption allows for studies that seek these specific aspects of, for example, “gay” speech. While Podesva does seek to look at some shift in identity based on context, this is still done as a study of performance, as defined by Cameron and Kulick, “in the sense of ‘what real people in real social contexts really do with language’” (2003: 150). Performativity theory, however, “focuses attention on the codes of signification that underlie particular performances, and so challenges the common-sense perception that our verbal and other behavior is merely a ‘natural’ expression of our essential selves. For Judith Butler, identity is not the origin but the effects of practices of signification” (ibid). In other words, performance assumes an identity that language reveals and with which it is associated with, identity is the origin of practices. Performativity, on the other hand, assumes that the practices form the identity. In both cases, this is not completely agentive, a person is not constantly making conscious choices, but rather either performing the features of the language of their identity (performance), or acting in a system of norms that have been being performed and reinforced (performativity). Butler’s theory is focused on gender, but it should be noted that it can be applied to Urciouli’s studies of social shifting. The Puerto Rican’s use of English and Spanish helps form their identity in society. They can also use it, if their skill is high enough, to maneuver between different social situations and the public and
private spheres. This can only be done, however, within this system where English and Spanish carry different associations and there are norms for the different social classes.

In the context of gender, the original purpose of the theory, performativity theory truly allows for the study of alternate gender roles for the first time, as well as the possibility of changing gender roles. Before that, there was a strong equation of male with man and female with woman, all in a set of oppositions. At this time, non-binary gender roles were treated as failures of trying to be a man or trying to be a woman. This explains why in studies of berdache—the Native American two spirit people—the berdache were originally treated by anthropologists as institutionalized homosexuality, “a way to integrate homosexual and therefore ‘deviant’ into North American cultures” (Lang, 1997: 100). This means anthropologists were treating the two spirit people as homosexual men who took up the role of women in order to be accepted by society. This completely misses the point of the two-spirit people: they were an accepted third gender.

However, due to the introduction of Western culture and ideas of gender and sexuality, by the time the question was reexamined, the main source was the historical records and previous studies, rather than new field studies.

This new theory allows a proper examination into such other genders, and Don Kulick’s study of the Travesti of Brazil exemplifies the use of said theory (1998). The travesti are Brazilian transgender prostitutes, but while they go through hormone treatments and change their bodies through irreversible silicone implants, they do not get sex change surgery nor do they consider themselves to be women. Kulick lived with the travesti for eight months out of twelve moth of fieldwork, sharing a boarding house with some of them, spending much time with them, and
talking with them. His primary method is participant observation and recording. During the course of his stay, he recorded and transcribed over fifty hours of speech, which included twenty hours of spontaneous speech and sixteen interviews. Most of the time he used his tape recorder openly, but at night he would hide his tape recorder as otherwise he would be interrupting conversations to tell them he was recording, therefore altering the existing dynamics of the interaction. Kulick explains that this method is ethical—or rather, at least not unethical—as his identity as researcher was well known, he changed names or got permission to use names, and that this method is no worse than attempting to reconstruct conversations from memory. Kulick focuses his study on the mundane aspects of the day-to-day lives of the travesti as well as the more sensationalist aspects, in order to anchor the spectacular in the mundane and therefore contextualize these activities. By living with the travesti, he was able to see the truths of their lives for himself rather than relying on occasional trips to visit, the media, and police reports. Furthermore, living with the travesti, as well as his own homosexuality, allowed him to create a rapport in which the travesti included him more in these daily lives and were willing to talk freely around him. In analyzing his data, Kulick focuses on gender as “understandings, processes, subjectivities, and practices,” allowing him to ask the question: “what do travesti practices tell us about the ways in which gender is imagined and configured in Brazilian society” (Kulick, 1998: 11). In treating the travesti’s lifestyles as inherently logical, he is able to uncover truths about the meaning of femininity in Brazil, where travesti exist in a system where femininity “properly belongs not just to anatomical women, but to all individuals who enjoy penetration” (ibid: 233). Kulick’s approach is enlightening, both in his methods of data gathering and in his methods of analysis. He is showing all aspects of the lives of the travesti, truly turning something foreign into something that makes perfect sense. Without his participant
observation, fully living with the travesti, he likely would have been unable to gather the information and frank responses that he did. It also let him avoid a sensationalist view. Furthermore, by integrating himself with this group he gained a sample that is very representative of the group, as his sampling was the entire community of travesti living in Salvador, one of Brazil’s largest cities.

Martin Manalansan also focuses on the performance of his subjects, the Filipino Bakla (2007). These are Filipino gay men who live in New York City. Between 1990 and 1995, Manalansan did participant study in both private and public sites, including homes, bars, hospitals, restaurants, and public social gatherings. He also conducted informal interviews with more than a hundred Filipino gay men in New York, Atlanta, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and San Francisco, as well as collecting life narratives of fifty bakla in semi-structured interviews. These life narrative interviews focused not only on life experiences such as immigration and childhood, but also on views of racial, ethnic, and class issues, categories of identity, and AIDs, as he explains in his preface (Manalansan, 2007: viii). The interviews also were conducted primarily in Taglish—a mixture of Tagalog and English. When presented in the book, they were written in the original language with an English translation following. Manalansan gained his subjects primarily through word of mouth and social networks, and while this does cause self selection amongst his subjects, the large number of interviews and people should create a good sampling of these men in this time. Manalansan’s focus is on the way that these men have to negotiate between Filipino and American traditions, especially the gay and bakla identities, bakla being “the Tagalog term that encompasses homosexuality, hermaphroditism, cross-dressing, and effeminacy” (ibid: ix). He especially focuses on the ideas of the idioms of biyuti and drama,
along with the swardspeak discourse that is the “vernacular language or code used by Filipino gay men in the Philippines and in the diaspora” (Manalansan, 2007: 46). Manalansan is also placing the actions and speech of his informants into day-to-day life, seeking to see the ways these men maneuver to identify themselves and survive. In these studies language proved to be very important, as “Tagalog, English, Taglish…, Pampango…, and swardspeak were used depending on the informant’s choice…it is precisely this choice and the circumstances around it that provide glimpses of how language mediates identities and selves” (48).

Swardspeak is especially interesting, as according to his informants, swardspeak immediately marks a speaker as bakla, and all that is needed is a word or two. It seems to be a choice in some cases, and something automatic in others, as some bakla would try to give their interviews in English yet end up punctuating sentences with phrases key to swardspeak. One said “no matter what you do and how hard you try, the bakla in you will come out of you” (49). A few others, especially those who did not grow up in the Philippines, discuss attempting to use it whenever possible. Swardspeak is also interesting as it is a language that “changes from ‘under your feet,’” mirroring changes in popular culture, and these changes are also needed in order to keep up the exclusivity of the code for bakla (50). This is a language that is constantly change with the times, much as the bakla identity is a shifting identity. In other words, swardspeak is a register. A few things are unclear here, however. First of all, it is not clear whether those who did grow up in the Philippines choose to use swardspeak or if it is something that always “come[s] out.” It is, however, certainly a direct index of gayness. It is also unclear whether this is treated as performance or performativity, especially as Manalansan only uses the word “performance,” even when briefly discussing Butler. It seems, however, that it is the changing
culture and the way the bakla speak and act within this change that forms the bakla identity, and therefore bakla performance is always making use of the competing and changing cultural customs, memories, conditions, and especially norms to crystalize the bakla identity.

Manalansan’s study is very comprehensive of all aspects and intersection of the life of the gay Filipino, and contrasts it well the Western idea of being “gay”, highlighting the different meanings and cultures of homosexuality that exist. He melds the way his informants speak with the way they live their lives, and the way that the bakla identity is a shifting identity where performance pulls from a set of possible scripts, mirroring the way the bakla must maneuver and struggle between competing cultural customs, memories, and conditions. His overarching approach, looking at the Filipino gay views of multiple issues, not merely gender and sexuality issues, allows him to contextualize his study.

Once again, these studies show the importance of interviews and participant observation. As previously mentioned however, these ethnological studies are uneven in regards to language, and focus far more on non linguistic practices. Swardspeak, however, is a fairly well studied register of speech. Swardspeak, as previously mentioned, is constantly changing, reflecting changes in culture. In this way it also maintains exclusivity, maintaining its use as a register that immediately identifies the speaker as part of the gay Filipino community, as well as allowing the user to cement their ties to the group. While there is no standard set of rules, there are some standard conventions, including: replacing the first letter of a word with ‘j’, ‘ky’, and ‘ny’; replacing the final syllable of words with a diminutive suffix; inserting an /r/ after a vowel, especially when the vowel is preceded by /l/; inverting the letter order of a word; word play,
puns, and codeswitching; references to popular culture; or borrowed words from other languages (such as *drama* and *biyuti*). This register is discussed in depth in many locations, including blogs, articles published for the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (Alba, 2006), and a few articles (Hart and Hart, 1990). In these there is very little discussion on ways this register specifically was studied.

Another ethnological study that is important to examine is David Valentine’s *Imagining Transgender*, where he seeks to study a far less defined community (2007). In fact, Valentine’s studies in some ways directly lead to my own questions, being one of the few examples of research done on transgender individuals within our own Western culture. Valentine has two main aspects to his study: the history, and the current reality—or rather current in the time in which he did his field studies. The historical aspect of his book tracks the history of studies of gender and sexuality, and the ways that these two studies have been primarily separate, despite the way that they actually interact. The other aspect of the book focuses on gender identities, the ways people relate—or do not relate—to the transgender identity, and the interactions of the gay and transgender communities. Here Valentine does, once again, participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Over a period of 18 months, he went to a number of drag shows and other major GLBT events, as well as working with many support groups in the New York City area, and other field sites that seemed to be part of the transgender community. He also did a number of interviews focused on gender self-identification, how they lived their life, and their sexuality self-identification. Valentine’s goal in this book is to show what the transgender community is, where it fails, and the issues of the separation of the ideas of “transgender” and “homosexuality.” His interviews—at least the one he publishes—focus on outliers and
conflicting identities. Unlike the previous two books, instead of seeking to show the way these alternate identities are performed, Valentine seeks to show the issues in our current gender identity categories. Valentine highlights interviews where the identities do not fit neatly into the concept of transgender, and especially those who consider themselves homosexual, however consider themselves to be women who like men.

On the time between his research, his publishing, and today, it feels as if the definition of “transgender” has solidified, and transgender is considered very much an issue of gender. On the other hand, it seems to me that many of his issues still stand. He also seems to ignore whole categories of people at the same time that he is showing how transgender is made up of multiple categories. The way he writes makes it seem—at least to me—that someone transgender who identifies as female will only be attracted to men, and not women, which falls into the false concept of transnormativity.

These qualitative studies have many different focuses, yet they all have a mixture of participant observation and interviews. It also seems to me that the large amount of participant observation and the focus on the context of the lives these subjects lead are what make these studies as enlightening as they are. First of all, interviews alone can cause the illusion of the importance of those things questioned, while participant observation and conversation allows for those things that are more important revealing themselves in the actions of the participants. Interviews can also lead the interviewees to overthink or change their answers based on the questions, and can especially change speech patterns when people are questioned about their speech, while participant observation and well placed recording devices can reveal natural speech such as
Urciouli uncovered when she recorded normal conversation and was able to see how patterns of code-switching index community. In fact, at the time of conceiving this study, the discourse about this field had been pushing for a return to qualitative methods, as the recent focus had been mostly concentrated quantitatively, as discussed at the 20th Lavender Language and Linguistics conference in February 2013 session Language, Boundaries, and Transgender Rights (Townsend, 2013; Grieve-Smith, 2013; and Zimman, 2013), as discussed in the prior chapter. Interviews then allow for specific inquiries about the lives, language, and actions of the participants, how they see themselves, how they identify themselves, and when used together with participant observation, the issues that arise from using interviews alone are negated. Similarly, without interviews it can be very difficult to understand how people see themselves, what they’ve been told, what they believe, and other such things that do not always appear naturally in day-to-day speech.

3. Performativity and registers

These qualitative studies also primarily make use of performativity—even in the case of Urciouli who is not focused on gender or sexuality, and is unlikely to have been aware of this theory; she certainly never mentioned it. These also all focus on registers of speech, as discussed by Agha. The use of these forms “formulates a sketch of the social occasion of language use, indexing stereotypic features such as interlocutors’ roles, relationships, and the type of social practice in which they are engaged” (Agha, 2007: 148). These sets of features and behaviors specifically reference these roles and relationships. When gender or sexuality is performative, we are “materializing gender / sexual identity/ desire by repeating, consciously or not, the acts that
conventionally signify ‘femininity,’ or ‘butchness’ or ‘flirting’…[it] focuses attention on the
codes of signification that underlie particular performances…identity is not the origin but the
effects of practices of signification” (Cameron and Kulick, 2003: 150). Therefore the question is
not who is saying it, but “what does saying it do” (123). Registers become enregistered through
historical formations, and end up drawing on codes that conventionally signify the roles and
relationships of the speaker. In Crossing (Rampton, 1995), the different codes signify
relationships between the groups, and index the different ethnicities and friendship groups. With
Urciuoli, the different registers signify the workings of the public and private spheres. In all the
cases above, the language use is in some ways using codes that signify certain aspects. The
ethnographic studies specifically focus on the way practices create gender and sexuality.

A study that properly focuses on performativity is Don Kulick’s “No” (2003). In it, Kulick
examines the way the act of saying “no” in relation to sex creates different effects. In our
society, the act of saying “no” produces a female sexual subject, where a woman is expected to
say “no” and a man is expected to say “yes” to a sexual invitation. Therefore, a man placed the
act of saying “no”—for example in the case of being approached by another man—is
materialized in the female heterosexual position, which undermines a man’s performance of
masculinity. For a woman, saying “no” produces a female sexual subject, meaning that saying
“no” traps a woman in a place where refusing still materializes into sexuality, and therefore still
transforms her into a sexual being. This leaves her no way to fully refuse. Here, what the
subject is performing—a refusal—is separate from what is being performatively materialized—a
positively sexual subject. As seen here, performativity theory does assume that what is
materialized is largely out of the control of the performer, and that much of it is unconscious. As
will be discussed later, there is apparent tension between this assumption and the conscious manipulation of gender presentation by the trans community, of which I was unaware in the conception of this study but became apparent during my research.

All of this highly suggested to me that my own methodology would have to follow more from ethnography and performativity theory, making use of interviews and participant observation.

4. My Original Questions and Methodology

My methodology and understanding changed over the course of my research, so in this section I will start by laying out my original plans and questions, and then explain how they changed and why.

At the time of beginning, my main question was how do members of the transgender community form these gender and sexuality identities through their performativity with both language and practices? What indexes of gender and sexuality norms do they utilize and manipulate? Or, more specifically: 1. how do members of the transgender community describe their gender and sexualities; 2. what intersections of these genders and sexualities exist; and 3. how do members create these identities through their practices, especially their linguistic practices.

The first two questions especially came out of Valentine (2007) and Townsend (2013), the Lavender Languages and Linguistics conference, and extensive discussions through 2013 with Lal Zimman before and others studying transgender. There has been a tendency to try to place
transgender identities of gender and sexuality into neat boxes, where more often this neat
definition does not work, as both Valentine and Townsend point out. Therefore, before any
studies could be done, I first would need to know whom I am working with and what genders
and sexualities actually exist, and how they intersect. Understanding how those of the
transgender communities I am working with self identify is key to being able to properly
understand and analyze their practices. My third question followed from these, Butler, the
conferences, and the general body of studies discussed above and in the social shifting paper.
The question of the registers of speech that make up transgender speech has been examined, but
not very widely and primarily quantitatively. I wished to follow up in the traditions of Butler,
examining these practices from a performativity background. This is especially of interest given
that this is a community that is intentionally working to create their identities through their
practices, working to present as their chosen gender and sexuality. Again, before I can examine
this third and most important question, I first would need to answer the other two questions.

In order to answer these questions, I planned a qualitative study in the traditions of ethnographic
studies and discourse analysis, taking a more encompassing approach that focuses on a mix of
performativity theory, linguistics, and ethnography. I planned to spend time living in a primarily
GLBT(QIA…)—Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender (Queer Intersex Asexual etc) community,
where I could anchor my understanding of speech together with my understanding of
“transgender culture,” inasmuch or as little as it exists, similar to the methods of Valentine. I
would study the performativity of transgender in order to understand the ways in which gender
performance melds lifestyle with linguistic style. While my focus would lie primarily with the
linguistic aspects, I believe this to be best done in this more rounded approach, combining
speech with actions and the practices of day-to-day life. Doing the sociophonetics studies uproots speech from context into a lab, and I believe it is the contextualization that allows studies such as Urciouli, Kulick, and Manalansan’s to understand the interplay of performance and identity. Furthermore, it seems that sociophonetic study is most conclusive when it is possible to examine the ways different people pronounce the same passages, rather than trying to compare passages of different discourses. These quantitative methods also seem founded upon the theory of performance. I do believe that sociophonetics studies are important, but it only gets at a piece of what is being studied.

Those who are transgender must constantly navigate cultural norms, and they must create their identities through their performances. Part of transitioning or “passing” is learning to make use of societal gender norms and learning to perform ones chosen gender and identity rather than that of the one they were identified with at birth. This shifting performance strongly suggests the need for performativity, which in turn suggests a need for qualitative methods. Participant observation and qualitative methods allows for better understanding of the community—as much as one exists—without making the community “strange” or the causing the creation of an “other.” Finally, lab work and studies of isolated speech loses another level of language: that of expression. Body language, facial expression, these add to meaning, and are also parts of language and register. In conclusion, for all of the above reasons, I proposed a qualitative approach.

My study methods were to be—and primarily remained—primarily participant observation and interviews. I planned to base the majority of my research in Boston, a community with a large
GLBTQ population, and where I already had connections. The beginning of my study was to in some ways mirror Valentine’s interviews and observations, conducting semi-formal interviews where my initial focus will be on seeking the different sexual and gender identities in the transgender community, and the ways these sexualities and gender identities interact. These would specifically allow me to answer the first two questions. Through interviews I could also discover the conscious choices that those in the “community” make—what they were told to do when transitioning, what they believe are traits of male and female performance and language, what they believe they do in practice. This will also help give me categories and registers to watch out for and examine in the interviews, participant observation, and recorded conversations, and allow me to seek actual patterns rather than resorting to Tannen or Lakoff.

Through participant observation I would contextualize those answers in society and culture, as well as seeing how much their actual practices follow what they believe they do. I could also see the ways they perform gender and sexuality that they are unaware of, and what indexes of gender and sexuality norms they pull from or subvert through their performances. My hope was to be able to contextualize the linguistic performances with the ways these people perform their gender and sexuality in their day-to-day lives. In this way, along with the information from the interviews and recording conversations, I would be able to answer my third, and most important question.

In a sense, what I wished to propose is an answer to the problem that Valentine presents, where gender and sexuality have become two separate things, and where many gender and sexuality identities do not fit into the category of transgender. I wished to see what intersections of gender
and sexuality exist within those who are transgender today, and then examine the way these
genders are performed, with a focus on linguistics performance.

As will be discussed later, the awareness of these performances and gender categories changed
the question from how do participants create their identities to how do they manipulate their
performances.

5. Methodology in Practice

In order to begin my research, I came up with my semiformal interview questions and began to
put the word out through posters and word of mouth, especially through friends and at local
conventions. It took longer than I expected to gather participants, and when I finally had a
number of interested individuals, the winter of 2015 proved to make travel nearly impossible.
By this time I had already come to some realizations: first of all, I knew that I would be using
grounded theory—that is, using my interviews to build the schema I would be examining when it
came to examining the use of gendered registers. Rather than seeking specifically transgender
registers, something I had come to realize through many off record discussions, I was interested
in how those who were transgender make use of gendered registers of speech. So I would be
attempting to form a picture of male, female, non-binary, and any other gender’s markers and
indexes.

I also put out a call for non-cisgender participants rather than only seeking binary trans
participants as, again, those who are not cisgender are more conscious about the presentation
needed to create their perceived gender. Binary trans individuals seeking to pass especially have to re-socialize themselves and learn to present as the other binary gender. Non-binary individuals, if seeking to present as non-binary—and it was during this time I had already begun to understand that gender identity and gender presentation do not always match—also need to have greater understanding of gender presentation and how to maneuver in order to be read as their own gender. While I expected to mainly have binary trans participants, I knew that I would have less control of who was willing to participate in my research. Therefore the participant focus would depend on who volunteered. I quickly learned that the bulk of my participants would fall under the non-binary umbrella, which shifted the focus of this research from especially being about binary genders to being about the way that non-binary individuals present themselves.

This change in focus became especially important as two things happened: I reconceptualized my own gender, coming to the realization that I myself am non-binary; and this proved to be a gap in the field. There were more researchers studying trans linguistics, but almost no one studying non-binary linguistics (a field which has grown over the past few years, as explained in the previous chapter). This lead to one new main question: what registers, markers, and indexes of gender exist, including (and especially) non-binary genders? Chapter five explains the follow up questions that analysis revealed.

I started with semiformal interviews. In order to gather participants I first placed recruitment posters around the Boston area that asked for individuals who identified as non-cisgender. I also sought participants by word of mouth at Arisia, a convention that takes place in Boston in January, and asked acquaintances in the area to share that I was seeking non-cisgender
participants for a study on gender presentation. Many participants also shared with friends of theirs after their own interviews. In all cases I shared my contact information so that participants could self select.

These interviews took place in a location of the participants choosing in order to maximize comfort. In all cases they took place in privacy with the individual, myself, a video recorder, and occasionally a pet. In these interviews I started with a basic set of questions and then asked follow up questions based on the answers given. Interviews were approximately anywhere between fifteen minutes and an hour, depending on how long each participant’s answers were to the questions. The basic questions, altered as necessary based on the participant, were as follows:

- What is your gender?
- What are your pronouns?
- What is your sexuality?
- What is your race/ethnicity?
- How do you present as [your gender]?
- Describe your hobbies
- Describe your social groups, both interest and gender wise
- If needed as follow up: How do you believe different genders present?
- If the interview so far was very short (under fifteen minutes): tell me a story

After these interviews, I watched each one back multiple times. During the first watch I did open coding, writing down for each participant: their pseudonym, gender, sexuality, pronouns,
assigned gender at birth, race/ethnicity, social groups, and what they listed as masculine, feminine, or non-gendered markers. I also wrote down what participants discussed in terms of their own presentation: what they said (if anything) about how they wished to be perceived and when, and elaborations into gender and sexuality, both for themselves and in society. I then compiled every gendered marker listed by participants and compiled them into a chart. At this point I identified 8 overall gender categories among my participants: intersex, amab agender/third gender, afab agender/third gender, amab non-binary, afab non-binary, afab genderfluid, trans woman, and trans man. As discussed in chapter 5, afab non-binary, afab agender, and afab genderfluid were condensed into one category by the end; amab non-binary and amab agender likewise acted similarly enough to become one category. For each marker, I then counted how many participants of each gender category discussed it explicitly, and how many implied it. I also coded for each marker how many participants of each category listed it as a thing they do themselves, used to do, or did the opposite. Once I did this, due to the low number of participants overall, I counted every feature discussed by at least two participants as significant. These I discuss in detail in chapter 5. Once I had a schema as derived from this open coding, I then rewatched each interview and coded what participants actually did for each significant marker that could be examined in a one-on-one semiformal interview. This is discussed in chapter 6.

For my participant observation, I was unable to make use of public speech as I could not record unaware individuals. In order to gather natural speech, I arranged three meetings of participants, where food and games (as the majority of the participants were part of the local geek
community) were available. Each of these meetings took about two hours. The specific methodology used for this observation, along with the results can be found in chapter six.
Chapter 4: 100 Meanings of Queer

All of the research for this study took place in the general Boston area, extending up to an hour travel at maximum. This includes Cambridge, Somerville, and many other surrounding cities that share a culture with Boston. All participants either have lived in the Boston area their whole lives or chose to move there.

Massachusetts, and the Boston area in particular, is one of the most LGBTQ+ friendly states in the country. It was the first state to legalize same-sex marriage in 2003, and in 1989 was the second state to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. By 2016, discrimination based on gender identity was prohibited in public accommodations as well as private practices, a process that was started in 2011 when an executive order was issued banning discrimination against transgender employees of the state. While in 2018 there was a vote as to whether the discrimination ban should stand, the vote to maintain the protections passed by a large majority.

In addition, Boston itself is the birthplace of GLAD: GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders. The culture of the area reflects this, with a very active queer and transgender population, including many meetup and support groups for LGBTQ+ individuals. In addition, in general, there is often less gatekeeping on strict gender roles and stereotypes. As Jesse discusses, in Cambridge no one is surprised by long hair on men, or wearing kilts, things that marked him as different in Iowa. This means that many find Boston to be a very welcoming area. Even so, many people do not feel comfortable being open in work or other situations outside their circle of friends. Many participants are not out at work, and while there is a growing population of non-binary folks, and there is greater awareness, it is still not as prevalent in the overall society.
The area also has a highly active geek community, with many big conventions such as PAX East (Penny Arcade Expo) and Arisia taking place there. The vast majority of the participants in this study participate in such hobbies as board gaming, live action role playing, video gaming, tabletop pen and paper role playing games, and so on. This is partly because my recruiting started in the geek community and word spread through it, but also as the Boston geek community is extremely progressive and has a lot of queer gamers (a thing that is certainly not typical nationwide). In addition, I believe that the majority of my participants have at least a college education or are currently earning their bachelors, and/or are in a generally educated field such as technology or law, although this was something I did not ask about.

The final relevant overarcing category is that of race and ethnicity. All of my participants identify as white or white-passing. A few identify as Jewish as their main identity, but most conflated that with whiteness, or at least passing for whiteness. As Jaymes commented, being Jewish means you count as white until you do not. Cee also discusses being Jewish when discussing their relationship with being female:

One of the ways I've described it is that I see myself as having a connection to, um, uh, female history and, um, minority status, kind of in a similar way to how, uh, totally non-practicing Jews might be, in that—I am in fact a practicing Jew—but, um, but, uh, even if someone is a totally non-practicing Jew, they still have a historical connection to and group of people, and when the Nazis come you are still going to be set on fire.

In this chapter, sections one and two summarize important terms and categories of gender and sexuality. These sections especially draw from existent reference guides, such as GLAAD’s media reference guide, along with long years of discussion within the transgender community. Here I especially make use of my own place as a non-binary queer individual to draw from
online conversations, social media groups and discussions, as well as currently unpublished
dialogue with fellow trans and queer researchers.

Section three lays out my participants. Here each individual is listed with their self-descriptions
of their gender and sexuality, along with their pronouns. In many cases, these could not be
distilled into single words, and all explanations come directly from the participants themselves.
Many of these combinations of gender, sexuality, and pronoun do not fit into any previously
researched categories. In section four, I expand on these identities. Here I explore what these
labels means to my participants, based again on their own self explanations. This section
highlights the limits of terminology and categorization, as well as the complicated nature of
gender identity.

1. Gender: A Summary

When it comes to gender and sexuality, participants fall into five overall categories of gender:
non-binary individuals who were assigned male at birth, non-binary individuals who were
assigned female at birth, binary trans men, binary trans women, and one intersex individual.

To define these terms, it is important to understand that these are primarily what are known as
“umbrella terms,” or in other words, terms that encompass whole categories of gender.
Transgender is typically defined as having a gender other than the one you were assigned at
birth. Cisgender is defined as identifying as the gender you were assigned at birth. Having a
non-binary gender means that the person identifies as something other than male or female.
While some people—including myself—label themselves as non-binary, many use other terms that fall under the non-binary umbrella. Intersex individuals may have some combination of male and female sex characteristics, or lack any thereof. By this definition, non-binary people fall under the trans umbrella along with binary trans men and women. This is not true of everyone who identifies as non-binary, however, for a variety of reasons.

In this research, the gender that participants were assigned at birth revealed itself to be a salient point of distinction, with those assigned female at birth (afab) showing different knowledge and presentation from those who were assigned male at birth (amab), as will be discussed later in this paper. It is important to note here, however, that one should never ask a trans person about the gender they were assigned at birth or ask about their genitalia. Outside of the context of research such as this, there should be no difference in the way that non-binary individuals are perceived based on the gender assigned at birth. Similarly, trans women are women, and trans men are men. Some include “trans” as part of their gender label, but others do not.

When it comes to individual distinctions within the umbrella of non-binary, there are many terms. While definitions of those terms vary from person to person, there are a number of more common terms with overall understood meaning:

- Gender-fluid means that the person’s gender fluctuates, though what genders that person will shift between and how often they fluctuate will vary between individuals.

- Agender is often used to mean a lack of gender. Sometime the person has no internal sense of gender, sometimes they have a strong sense of being genderless.
Gender-queer is often used synonymously with non-binary, but often with an emphasis on “queer.”

Androgyne is an identity that is associated with androgyny, often meaning the person identifies in some way as both male and female.

Third gender is a gender identity that is not part of the male-female framework, a gender category of its own.

These terms and definitions and labels are commonly used, however personal interpretations and usage of these terms are various, as will be discussed further below.

2. Sexuality: A Summary

While this research concentrates on gender identity, gender presentation is often highly linked to sexuality. Much of queer linguistics has been focused on gay and lesbian speech patterns, as discussed in the history section above. Terms such as homosexual and heterosexual or gay and straight are complicated, however, when dealing with non-binary genders. In addition, as with the gender identity terminology, many of the labels for sexuality have personal variance as well.

Heterosexual and homosexual are well defined as sexual attraction to the “opposite” binary gender or to ones own gender, respectfully. Gay is typically used to refer to men attracted to men, although it is sometimes used as a synonym for homosexuality. Lesbian is defined as women attracted to other women. Bisexual and pansexual are more contested. A common misconception is that bisexuality only applies to attraction to men and women, and therefore
there are some who claim the term is transphobic or excludes non-binary individuals. For many, however, bisexual is used to describe sexuality to their own gender and not their own gender, an attraction to more than one gender, or attraction to multiple genders but not all genders (non-binary individuals and women, for example). Pansexual is defined as sexual attraction to all genders equally, although many who identify with the term do have genders to which they may be more or less attracted. There are those who use the two terms interchangeably, and there are those who strongly identify with only one term.

In addition, there is the asexual spectrum. Asexuality, commonly shortened to “ace,” is defined as a lack of sexual attraction. Grey-aseuality is the spectrum between asexuality and sexuality. This includes demisexual, where an individual will only be sexually attracted to someone with whom they have first formed a strong emotional connection. In discussing asexuality, a distinction must be made between sexual attraction and romantic attraction. Sexual orientation denotes to which genders an individual will be sexually attracted. Romantic orientation denotes the genders to which an individual will be most likely to have a romantic relationship or fall in love. While for many these two orientations are the same, there are also many for whom their romantic and sexual orientations are different. Many who are asexual are not aromantic, and there are also those who are aromantic but still experience sexual attraction. There are also those who are both asexual and aromantic.

A final important term is the label “queer.” Queer is often used as an umbrella term for all sexualities that are not heterosexual. It is often used to include anyone who is not cis-gender as
well. Sometimes it is used for political connotations. It is also often used due to its lack of specificity.

3. Participants in summary

Before it is possible to go into a far more in-depth discussion of genders and sexualities as they pertain to the participants, they must first be identified. This is a short description of the participants, grouped by overall gender identities. For each, the participant’s pseudonym is followed by as short a description of their gender, sexuality and pronouns as possible, based on their own descriptions. As can be seen, in most cases one word will not suffice.

**Intersex Non-binary:**
Quinn: Cisgender genderfluid. Pronouns: herm/herm/herms (him and her mixed together).
Sexuality: Sapiosexual. Is straight and gay with any cis person at the same time.

**Trans Man:**
Jaymes: Transmasculine demi-boy (part male, part not-male. The not male part is also not female). Pronouns: He/him/his. Sexuality: Queer

**Trans Women:**

Jennie: on the feminine side. Pronouns: she/her/hers. Sexuality: pure sexual attraction is more towards the classical feminine ideals, romantically attracted to intelligence and compassion and a person's chemistry with gender not mattering.


**Assigned Male at Birth Non-Binary:**

Ben: Gender non-conforming, feels language is not really there yet for them. Pronouns: Still figuring it out. Sexuality: Prefers people who seem more feminine, though not exclusively.

Zane: Genderqueer. Pronouns: he/him/his, or if wearing a skirt, she/her/hers. Sexuality: only interested in women.


**Assigned Female at Birth Non-Binary:**


Kay: third gender/non-binary. Pronouns: he/him/his. Sexuality: homosexual is the most accurate, he is attracted to other afab third gender people.

Kelly: Her gender depends on the time asked. It usually cycles, sometimes to the extreme in either direction, sometimes it is in the middle, sometimes none of it applies. At time of interview it is somewhere in the middle, drawn towards female presenting because it makes life easier. Pronouns: she/her/hers, they/them/theirs. Sexuality: free for all.
Tal: Complicated. Rapidly genderfluid, androgyne. Pronouns: usually uses she/her/hers, but is equally comfortable with he/him/his. Sexuality: When identifying strongly as female, is a straight female. When identifying strongly as male, is a bisexual male.


Sal: Genderqueer. Somedays they feel more feminine, some days more masculine, more days fall in between. Pronouns: they/them/theirs, she/her/hers. Sexuality: still figuring it out, queer, somewhere on the ace spectrum.


Cee: Non-binary agender. Pronouns: they/them/theirs. Sexuality: queerish. Mostly dates cis men, but is not comfortable being “the girl” in a relationship with a cis straight male.

4. Gender and Sexuality: The Complicated Version

While many participants do have a word or phrase that describes their gender or sexuality, the truth of these gender identities is far more complicated. First of all, most of these labels mean different things to different people. As Sky explained when discussing what terms they use, “I
tend to use a lot at once because there are so many overlapping terms and they don't necessarily all mean the same thing depending on who's using it." Secondly, for many, gender is a constant discovery. Some may find their gender identity has shifted over time. For others, while their identity has stayed the same, they have had a path of discovery to finding a term that might fit them. As Sam described when discussing his own gender:

I have been like in serious process of like reinvention on that, but, uuuuh, I guess, one of the descriptors I've been favoring at the moment is genderfluid, um, still, uh, preferring, uh, pronouns 'he/him/his,' uh, but feeling, like, for me there's a strong, like, disconnect between, um, linguistically how I like formally mark gender versus how I present, um, so yeah genderfluid's like the really succinct form of it, but I also, like, it's that's not just a descriptor for, like, me in the moment, it's also kind of that I feel like even though, even though I know plenty of other trans people who have, um, a, like, who's who's gender they feel like has been always pretty fixed, they it just took them like a while to, like, figure it out sort of, um, in my case I feel more like, um, it took me a little while to figure out that I wasn't, uh, like, binary, cis, female, but like it is nonetheless um been like a process of going through different things, like and I I don't feel like beholden to any one in particular.

Sam is not the only participant who went through this sort of journey. Some described still looking for a term, or are continuing to figure themselves out, such as Ben, who claimed, “the language still isn't really there, like I don't have a good word or a good short way to put it.” And, as Ink stated, “There’s still places where we don’t have good words.” There are also participants who identify differently now from how they identified during the interviews. Adrian, for example, said about their gender, "I don't know how my gender will evolve, but currently [I identify as] genderfluid."

Therefore, while the section above is a short form for quick reference, very few participants can actually be summed up so easily. To understand the identities involved in this research, as well as to gain a richer understanding of these gender and sexuality identities, far more specificity and knowledge is required. This process will also reveal the many complexities involved in the
usage and choosing of these terms. For ease of navigation, the rest of this section will go in the same order as the section above.

Starting with Quinn, Quinn is the only intersex participant of this study. Quinn identifies as cisgender and genderfluid, as herm was born both male and female. Herm came up with herm pronouns with herm wife. Herm describes herself as being both straight and gay with any cisgender person at the same time, as herm has both a penis and vagina.

Jaymes, likewise, is in a category of his own. He is the only trans man participating in the research. Jaymes is demi-male, meaning he is partially male and partially something that is not male. In his case that part is also not female. At the time of the interview Jaymes was early in his transition, and felt like he could not yet explore the not male part of himself. He said he would still wear skirts if it was not so important to him at this point to be read as male, and that further along in his transition, when he does not have to spend so much of his focus on being seen as male, he will be able to get a better grasp on what that other part of his gender is. When it comes to his sexuality, Jaymes uses the term queer. He says he is most attracted to androgyny and masculinity, but any time he tries to narrow it down he finds exceptions to that.

The six trans women, for the most part, had the simplest descriptions of their gender and sexualities. Lily is a transgender woman, and she says that both the trans and the woman parts of that are very important to her. She had a wife and is primarily attracted to women. Overall, she is attracted to femininity through androgyny, and is not attracted to butch or macho presentations in women or men. Lea is female, and she is gray asexual, though she does not define what that
means for her. Bonnie is a transgender female whose sexuality is pansexual, though she leans heavily towards lesbian. Jennie describes herself as “on the feminine side, but lacking the something classical training and graces a cis woman would acquire growing up.” She is sexually attracted towards “feminine ideals,” but romantically it is intelligence, compassion, and chemistry that matters, rather than gender. Grace is a middle-aged straight woman. While that identity seems simple on the surface, she was given genital surgery at age 3, and then had it again at age 29. She says that when she was young she identified as a straight boy, then later as a bisexual boy, and then later as “I don’t know what I am,” before now identifying as a straight woman. Carrah is female and bisexual, and started transitioning about two years before her interview.

When it comes to the six amab non-binary participants, identities begin to require far more discussion and description. Ben is still figuring a lot out. When asked his gender, he responded:

that's a tough one because of, uh, I don't like, the words for it, so the word that I use now is gender non-conforming, um, that's sort of the best that I can come up with, I often just say transgender because that's easier, um, but I haven't found anything that fits or anything that I'm sure of.

He says when he was younger he probably had a clearer idea that he wanted to be female, but now thinks there are benefits to all genders, and that when he talks with people about it he talks about the uncertainty. He says, “I certainly feel like I'm retaining some masculine characteristics and taking some feminine ones,” and that the language is not there yet. When it comes to pronouns he is still figuring out if he has a preference. He has asked people to use different pronouns to refer to him, but as he does not push, most people default to male pronouns so he has not been able to get a good feeling for how he would respond to other pronouns. Sexuality
wise, he prefers people who seem more female, although not exclusively. “I certainly feel attraction to a wide variety of people.”

Zane wants to perform his identity without having to pick a conventional gender, which is why he uses the term genderqueer for himself, saying, "It's a label I sort of like because no one has any idea what it means, so they're less likely to make assumptions...they're more likely to ask you what that means to you which is what I like about it." When it comes to his sexuality, he is only interested in woman, but because he is not male, “a term for it is a little complicated.” This brings up the issue of terminology for anyone who is non-binary since terms such as straight or heterosexual or homosexual do not really work.

Terry identifies as genderqueer and non-binary, not having a way they identify all the time, thus they use genderqueer as a catch-all term. There are times that they will feel in a more masculine or feminine mood. Terry is bisexual with some qualifications, being more attracted to a broader range of feminine characteristics than masculine characteristics.

For awhile John identified as male with feminine qualities or as a cross dresser. They have been using genderqueer for about a year now. By genderqueer, John means that they do not fit within the binary, having a little of each. They are not agender or genderfluid, always having some male and some female. Sexuality wise, they say that it is difficult to apply the terms straight or gay because, not seeing many other genderqueer people, so they identify as gynosexual, being attracted solely to femininity.
Jesse has been using the term genderqueer for a long time, about ten years, and does not really find meaningful differences between the many terms for non-binary. For Jesse, "there's a lot that is baked into socially normative conceptions and expectations of gender, um, that does not adequately describe me or that I don't identify with." He says there is a “book of assumptions” that are fairly standard to make when someone is perceived as male or female, but “those assumptions are not valid as applied to this animal.” He also identifies as heterosexual.

Riley describes themself as a non-binary demi-girl. For them, this means that they are close to being a girl in some ways, but not in other important ways. They also say they are bisexual, but are not entirely sure of that.

The afab non-binary participants exhibit the largest variety in gender and sexuality identities. This may partly be because there were more afab non-binary individuals than any other category, but it is also clear that choosing and describing non-binary identities, and the sexualities that accompany them, is complicated.

Sam, as previously discussed, has been in a process of discovery, currently using the term genderfluid but he does not feel beholden to any one thing in particular. He uses the term queer to describe his sexuality for many reasons. He does not like using binary labels for his attraction, though, "more like sort of’clinically speaking' it would be, like, pansexual, there's no particular gender that's more, uh, attractive to me.” He also uses queer because of the political descriptor element of it, as well as for the fact that his sexuality is fluid, going through phases where he is
more attracted to one gender or another. At the time of the interview he was mostly interested in men but, as that has not always been the case, he feels queer captures the fluidity of his sexuality.

Sky is agender, saying they do not really have a gender, "I take this off, I put it on." Agender is the term that is most comfortable to them, having tried genderqueer and non-binary. They also say they do consider themself to be trans, just not “traditionally trans.” They use the terms queer and pansexual to describe their sexuality, saying that if you have no gender you cannot be gay or straight. While they have no preference based on gender, they will not date straight cisgender men as this invalidates their own gender. They admit that this tends to limit who they date, as “I happen to look like a lady but that doesn't mean shit.”

Ink’s description of eir gender is especially complicated as e partially bases eir terminology on the impression it gives to others.

Words are about communicating something to somebody else. And words are shortcuts for concepts. And if they have the concept you can use the word, which is the shortcut, and then they will understand what you are talking about. If they don't have the concept, it doesn't matter what word you put on. They're gonna look at you like you just stepped off a ship from mars. It doesn't matter. So that was where I was, and not just about gender but a lot of other things too. But just that face of how do you even begin to talk about it, because I'm, I'm fundamentally getting at things which conceptually they don't get. And, what I learned is that even if I wrote the most beautiful articulate treatise, on exactly how it worked for me, filled with lovely, lovely words and analogies and I mean it was freakin perfect, if they don't understand it, it's going nowhere. For em this is especially true when it comes to the term genderfluid. When, in the past, e used genderfluid, people expected a fluidity, something e does not feel inside. Even moreso, eir family was not very accepting of eir gender. When they heard fluid, they would imagine the fluidity was some sort of choice. They also would expect consistency. So if Ink said e sometimes had no gender, then how could e ever be a man? And after admitting to sometimes
being a woman, eir family grasped that and then wanted em to be “fluid” as a woman. They only took the female identity seriously because that was the identity they wanted. “Since you say you're genderfluid, can't you just be fluid, and do what I want you to do.” The other problem with genderfluid for em arises from Ink describing emself as always having all the genders but only one being prevalent at a time:

Everyone is familiar with a six-sided die, some of us who are gamers are familiar with dies of other size...and with a die all the states are coexistent at any given point, but only one is pointing upwards at any given time. And that's kinda how I feel about my gender, in that I have multiple discrete gender states, um, and they're all part of me continuously, but only one is pointing up at any given point. Um. I choose this metaphor instead of saying genderfluid because there's no point at which there is a fluidity to the gender, that is what it appears to the outside, from somebody else looking in, um, who sees things changing and therefore perceives it as being fluid. I do not actually perceive myself as being fluid. The other reason e uses the metaphor of the die is that it gets people out of the binary narrative.

Of thinking either that there's male and female, or that there's a line, and it's a continuum, and that there's male on one end and female on the other and then there's gradations in the middle. Or even where we have a circle and there's a map and you can be anywhere on this sort of two-dimensional axis, um, that's not the metaphor that works for me. That's a metaphor that works for other people, and it works really well for other people, but it doesn't describe having multiple discrete gender states, um, in the way that it works for me. Um, and also people are very very concrete. They want to be able to visualize something, a model that they can actually touch and hold and go, 'oh, that makes sense.' So to say 'I'm non-binary,' which is also a label that I use sometimes, tells you what I'm not. And does not tell you what I am. I can also say I'm not a mushroom. That's true, I'm not a mushroom. It doesn't tell you what I am. It doesn't tell you a thing about what I am. And so saying to people who don't already have a very robust grasp of non-binary identities, 'I'm non-binary' is about as useful as saying 'I'm not a mushroom.' *laughs* Um, so if I say, 'my gender is like a die, here you can hold one and you can see, physically, that there is one pointing up but they are all actually coexistent.' They go 'oh, okay, so you can have it be male, you can be female, you can be something other than that, you can have no gender, and these are all discrete states that continue to exist even no matter what the orientation of the object.' That's kinda how I work.”

Eir most frequently dominant gender identity is agender, and Ink’s sexuality fits under the asexual umbrella.
Ink has a second narrative about eir gender which, while continuing to show the complexities of gender, also brings up some of the difficulties inherent in framing concepts of dysphoria and transition for a non-binary rather than a binary trans individual:

The other narrative that I use to talk about gender for me is puberty was a mistake. Um, that it's not so much about maleness or femaleness, but my gender dysphoria comes from, um, having secondary sex characteristics at all. Which is what was so confusing because trans is always presented as binary it's presented as like, oh, you have, you're one gender and you want to be 'the other one,' as if there was this 'this other thing' and if you only had those secondary sex characteristics instead then you'd be happy. And that's not how it was for me, I looked at it and said well wait a minute, if I had a deep voice I would actually feel more dysphoria. Um, so I don't want that. So now what am I. I don't want to go on testosterone because that would cause changes that would even lead to more dysphoria. So what does that leave me as. And that opens up this idea that not only can you have non-binary gender transition and not only can you be someone who is agender, but that you can actually frame dysphoria around something other than maleness or femaleness, which in my case is actually, puberty was a mistake. The changes to my body that happened with puberty were not things that were good for me. Um, and in order for me to be happy with my body whatever gender label I want to use for myself, I have to take steps, and to some degree I have and continue to take steps, to reverse those changes.

Ink here discusses the difficulties with the assumption of transnormativity, i.e. that if someone is trans they must want to transition to the “other gender.” Instead, e points out, non-binary transition is a real thing. E also brings up the important fact that dysphoria is something that can exist for someone who is non-binary with the extra difficulty that, for many, going on hormones or getting surgery would just give a different set of sex characteristics about which to be dysphoric.

Ink’s method of choosing labels is not as unique as it may seem, though eir priorities are weighed differently. Most participants seek to find a term that feels most right to them rather than a term that will best convey their identity to others, but conveyance of information is often part of the choice. Zane is an example of this, choosing genderqueer as a term more likely to get people to ask questions rather than make assumptions. On a similar note, Adrian bases their
presentation on the way they want others to react, as will be discussed later on. And like Ink, Adrian discusses their gender in a manner that is not contained in a lined continuum between male and female.

Adrian defines themselves as genderfluid, describing their gender as shifting within a range. Rather than being a point on the gender spectrum, they exist,

as an area, and sometimes I shift as a point within that area, and sometimes I am all of that area all at once. And that area over the time of my identification has gotten larger, um, not quite to being simultaneous identification with all the genders at all times, which would be how I conceptualize pangender.

Adrian too, like many who have already been discussed, has had their gender identity shift, in their case encompassing a larger area over time. As for their sexuality, Adrian is pansexual.

Kay is a third participant whose gender identity questions the idea of a discrete binary with a connecting continuum. Kay is third gender non-binary, which for him means he is neither male nor female. His gender makes the graph look more like a triangle rather than a spectrum line, being a “discrete separate unit” of gender. Kay used lesbian to describe his sexuality for awhile, but realized that he is not attracted to women as a whole. Rather, homosexual is the most accurate term as he is attracted to other afab third gender people.

Kelly did not have a specific term for her gender, saying that her gender depends on the time that she is asked. It usually cycles, sometimes to the extreme in either direction towards male or female, while sometimes it is in the middle, and at other times no gender applies. At the time of the interview she said her gender was somewhere in the middle, but that she is drawn towards presenting as female because it makes life easier. Her presentation, however, does tend to cycle
along with her gender identity. She did not have a specific term for her sexuality, describing it rather as a “free for all” with no reasonable limitations.

Tal’s immediate reaction to being asked her gender was “complicated.” She said she mostly goes by genderfluid, but because it makes life easier rather than because it is the term that fits the best. Instead, if she had her choice,

If you dropped me into, into my favorite fictional world, or holodeck, or something, and said ‘here's a magic wand, you can make the world whatever you want it to be,' I would be a Betan Hermaphrodite from the Vorkosigan series, uh, which is to say, it's a fictional universe in which there are genetically engineered true hermaphrodites. That's, that's that. It's just, you are both male and female and they tend to be sort of androgynous in appearance, and, uh, dress according to what they feel like that given day. And that's the closest parallel I have found to how I feel internally, hermaphrodite is a very bad word. In large swaths of the transgender community which pisses me off, like I understand the history of it, and why they get upset by it, but it annoys me that I can't identify that way without pissing them off. So the closest parallel I've found in terms of the "modern gender theory thing" is "androgyne," she also describes herself as rapidly genderfluid, some days identifying male, some days identifying female, most days somewhere in between, but certain circumstances can push her one direction or the other. When asked for her sexuality she said, "I stick to queer. Queer makes life easier. Nobody asks you complicated questions." This is in partly because of the complicated nature of her sexuality, as she is always attracted to men, sometimes attracted to genderqueer people, and only romantically or sexually attracted to women when she is identifying as male (though she is always aesthetically attracted to women). So in this way, her sexuality is tied to her gender, which she points out as being unusual, "one of the things you hear about online a lot is people say all the time gender identity and, uh, sexuality have nothing whatsoever to do with each other. Uh, as far as I can tell I'm the counter example that proves the point." This is her reasoning for using queer rather than going into detail or trying to come up with a term for her
shifting sexuality, and "mostly, queer serves as the convenient umbrella term for 'queer and it's complicated and you probably don't care'."

Taylor, like Kay, has a gender outside of the gender spectrum, although they use the term agender. Taylor says that they are either completely outside the gender spectrum or “smack dab in the middle” of male/female. More specifically, while their identity is outside the binary, their presentation is more towards the middle. Their sexuality is bisexual.

Sal also identifies as genderqueer, sometimes feeling more feminine, some days more masculine, with more days falling in between some “both/neither goodness.” They are still figuring out their sexuality, being somewhere on the ace spectrum, and also identifying as queer.

Pat took awhile to come to their label of androgyne, which they describe as being the idea of androgyny as a gender identity. By this they mean having aspects of femininity and masculinity, but also aspects of neither, all at once. They describe their journey:

For me, for a long time I was really just obsessed with labels, just trying to find one that fit me. Um, so like, I started as genderqueer, and then I went to, I was fluxing between agender and genderfluid for awhile because those technically have different connotations, um, and I mean while I do agree that I am agender to an aspect, I still like to, I mean I still, I'm not devoid of gender. I have both male and female aspects. You know I'm not a blank slate. So they are agender while also having male and female aspects, and they do not want to be nothing. Pat is also panromantic demi-sexual, being on the asexual spectrum but seeking out romantic relationships with “men and women and anyone in between.”

Sandy, unlike most other afab non-binary individuals, simply defines themselves as non-binary, by which they mean anything that’s not necessarily woman or man. They are bisexual.
The last interviewee was Cee, who is non-binary agender. Like Ink, they discussed the idea of being trans and what it means to transition. Unlike Ink, who became comfortable with defining eirself as trans, Cee thinks of trans as transitioning in terms of movement. They only see themselves as moving away from something, rather than moving towards something. As discussed in a previous section, they also still feel a connection to female history and minority status. While Cee has mostly dated cisgender men, they describe themselves as “queerish.” This has been a problem in the past as they often found themselves being “the girl” in the relationship, something they are not comfortable with.

All this shows that terminology for non-binary identities is still in flux and is very personal to the individual, but there are some commonalities. All non-binary gender terms carry meaning of being something other than binary male or binary female. Also, terminology is chosen as a mix of what term feels most correct together with the way that it will be received by society. Tal, for example, not using “hermaphrodite” because that is perceived as “a bad word”, or Zane and Jesse using “genderqueer” so that there will be no preexisting assumptions attached to their gender. Some terms are also chosen as a catch-all, such as most choices of the term queer or Terry using genderqueer. As Ink says, “there are labels. But like I said they're social shortcuts. And no matter how granular you make the labels there's always gonna be people who, who don't fit in to them.”

It is also important to note here that the complications of gender terminology, as well as the wide array of gender concepts that appear in this chapter rarely appear in current literature. The vast
majority of current research focuses on generalizations of gender, and most in context of male and female, occasionally with some sort of third gender or non-Western gender. While Valentine did examine existing identities within the transgender community of the time, he either ignored many gender labels or they were not yet in wide practice. Even as Valentine and Townsend raise the difficulties of finding sexuality labels for those who are transgender, there has yet to be research that fully explores the full range of non-binary labels and meanings. Most discussion of this type remains relegated to non-academic conversations on social media, personal interactions in the trans population, or youtube videos about gender.

5. The Author’s Identity

Before continuing, it is important to describe myself in the terms of this study. I identify myself as femme, non-binary, and queer, though I also use pansexual and bisexual. I prefer a very feminine appearance, choosing to wear dresses and skirts and jewelry, but that is separate from my gender. While aware of my sexuality for a number years prior to beginning this research, it was during the period of time spent in the interview process that I went from identifying as cisgender to cisgender but non-gender conforming, to non-binary.
Chapter 5: Self Reported data

As previously discussed, the body of study of gendered language has been primarily centered around binaries, and the bulk of the work has focused on the dichotomies of “men’s language” versus “women’s language,” often taking as an assumption the report/competitive vs. rapport/cooperative schema laid out by Deborah Tannen (1990). Even in the few cases in which researchers attempt to reexamine these schemas, they still continue primarily framing their research in terms of gender binaries. While the beginning of the field of trans linguistics has allowed for more focus on gender and sexuality as well as a greater divorce from assumptions of heteronormativity, until more recently there remained a focus on binary trans individuals, often with an associated belief that being trans necessitates surgery and a focus on transnormativity. Despite the more recent acknowledgement that a trans linguistics necessitates re-examining the concept of the binary, the majority of the emerging field is still focused on non-Western cultures or languages wherein gender is coded into the grammar. Of the non-binary studies that exist, the majority examine pronoun usage. Studies that reexamine the question of gender markers and presentation in English speaking Western culture are near non-existent. Therefore, as discussed previously in the Methods chapter, in order to study non-binary presentation we must first establish a schema. Once again, non-cis participants are an ideal lens through which to study gender presentation since transgender individuals, both binary and non-binary, have to think about presentation very explicitly. In order to break from the way they had been socialized by society from a young age and present as a gender other than the one they were assigned at birth, they have to learn to re-socialize themselves. Or, as Lal Zimman puts it, “language & trans people: a perfect match” (2018). Therefore the interviews were designed partially to elicit
information on indices of gender in order to allow the establishment of a schema that could be used for the rest of the study.

1. Gender Identity versus Gender Presentation

It is very important to note here that gender identity does not always match gender presentation. First of all, “passing” as a binary cisgendered individual is not an ultimate goal for all binary trans people. It is true that for many binary trans individuals passing means not being misgendered and often it is also very important for sake of safety. As Ben stated in his interview, “it is dangerous in some ways to be identified as female and then suddenly to not be.”

As Eric Plemons discusses, “trans- people…are frequent victims of discrimination and violence, the worst of which is often reserved for those people who are visibly gender transgressive: those who look trans” (2017:129). As a very real illustration of this, HRC advocates tracked at least 28 transgender murders in 2017, and “it is clear that fatal violence disproportionately affects transgender women of color, and that the intersections of racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia conspire to deprive them of employment, housing, healthcare and other necessities, barriers that make them vulnerable” (HRC, 2018). The “gay panic” defense also still exists in 48 states, and this includes “trans panic” (discovering someone is trans when you thought they were cisgender). In addition, while not all states have laws against discrimination based on gender, even fewer have laws against discrimination based on being trans. Not only does this mean that some trans individuals find themselves trying to pass as cisgender (even if they would otherwise prefer not to), this also means that there are trans people who are not able to transition in society for those same reasons. Jennie, one of the trans women who participated in this study, is an
example of this, as at the time of the interview she was unable to be out as trans at her work and therefore not only had to present as male at her job, but also could not start vocal training or other elements of transition for fear that she would then accidentally present femininity at work. On the other hand, there are also binary trans individuals who intentionally want to present specifically as trans, or want to make sure they are in some way not read as being a cisgender heteronormative person. For example, the case previously discussed in the history section, where Cameron and Kulick quoted a transgender activist named Kate Borstein (2003). In 1993, Bornstein spoke of what she found when seeking guidance for changing her speech to fit her chosen female gender identity. She complained,

I was taught to speak in a very high-pitched, very breathy, sing-song voice and to tag questions onto the end of each sentence. And I was supposed to smile all the time when I was talking. And I said “Oh, I don’t want to talk like that!” The teachers assumed that you were going to be a heterosexual woman. No one was going to teach you to be a lesbian because being a lesbian was as big an outlaw as transsexual. (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 52)

This resistance to performing transnormativity has not gone away, although none of my participants spoke specifically about sexuality as part of performance. In fact, only two of my 26 participants, one trans woman and one amab non-binary individual, identified as heterosexual/straight.

Similarly, non-binary trans individuals may present on the binary for a number of reasons. Adrian, for example, spoke of being involved in a court case on their college campus and therefore having to present “extremely femininely” in order to match the gender they were assigned at birth. They said that presenting genderfluidity would have created issues at that time. There are also non-binary folk who still strongly align with the presentation that matches the gender they were assigned at birth, or who may prefer a presentation that matches the other binary gender. In addition, as Jesse stated, “trying to publicly present a non-binary gender
identity increases rather than decreases the baseline friction of going through life.” He described how, in Cambridge, MA at the time of his interview, there was nothing about being perceived as a cisgender male that would get under his skin. He contrasted this to growing up in the midwest, where being perceived as male carried a whole set of assumptions that did not match him at all. Therefore, for Jesse and for other non-binary people who do not feel dysphoria in their current communities, they may choose to present on the binary because it is easier or safer.

With this in mind, participants were questioned in their interviews about what they do specifically when presenting as their gender, as well as about gender presentation in general. Gender fluid individuals were asked to discuss their presentation during different periods of fluidity (for example, someone who is fluid between male and female would be asked what they do when presenting as male compared to what they do when presenting as female). Furthermore when examining non-binary presentation, this paper specifically focuses on what participants do when they wish to present and be read as non-binary.

2. Salient Markers and Indexes of Gender

As there were only 26 participants in the interviews, when examining specific gender markers to create a schema for study, I considered any marker discussed by at least two participants to be significant. While, as will be discussed later, the emergent schema maps closely to prior linguistic binary categories, all aspects identified in this chapter come directly from participants. No prior research was shared preceding the interviews, and participants were not provided any list of markers. In addition, while I did initially create subgroupings of non-binary participants
based on more specific gender identities, as can be seen in the Methods chapter, there were no significant differences in presentation or in knowledge between the different types of non-binary identities. Instead, five main groupings emerged, as will be discussed more specifically further later: amab (assigned male at birth) non-binary, afab (assigned female at birth) non-binary, trans women, trans men, and intersex non-binary. As I have only one intersex participant and one trans man, however, I am not able to make any overall conclusions on presentation of either of those two genders. Additionally, while I did ask about sexuality in the interviews, no participants discussed it as relevant to their presentation except in cases of an overall queer identity alongside being non-binary—for example, Sky discussed a hairstyle often read as queer, being short hair with an undercut. I also did not find a salient variance based on sexuality within my participants, which may be due to the fact that only one individual was both straight and binary.

Indexes of gender discussed by participants fall into three main categories: physical appearance, body language/physicality, and linguistic markers. While I separate these categories here for reference, most participants discuss and manipulate all three aspects in tandem.

**Physical Appearance**

Everyone discussed physical appearance: 25 out of 26 participants discussed clothing, 11 discussed makeup, 11 discussed visibility of breasts or binding, 11 discussed hair length, and 5 discussed facial hair. These were rather evenly distributed across all participants, regardless of gender. This was also the only category in which anything was specifically discussed as being androgynous or gender neutral. All of these androgynous or neutral markers, however, were
specifically a mix of masculine and feminine markers. Three afab non-binary and three amab non-binary participants spoke of mixing men’s and women’s clothing in order to create a gender neutral look. Mixing facial hair with makeup was also brought up as being neutral.

Over all, physical appearance markers as identified by participants are as follows:

**Table 1: physical appearance gender markers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No makeup</td>
<td></td>
<td>Makeup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttoned down shirts, “men’s clothes”</td>
<td>A mix of both women’s and men’s clothing</td>
<td>Skirts, dresses, “women’s clothes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No breasts/Binding</td>
<td></td>
<td>Visible breasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facial hair</td>
<td>Facial hair + makeup</td>
<td>No facial hair</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In table 1, most of these physical aspects can be seen to be dichotomies in which something is explicitly gendered and the lack thereof is implied to belong to the other gender. Makeup is feminine, no makeup is masculine. Facial hair is masculine, no facial hair is feminine. Thus, combining the explicitly masculine facial hair with the explicitly feminine makeup creates something in the middle, i.e. gender neutral.

**Body Language/ Physicality**

Fewer participants spoke expressly about body language, but it was still a highly discussed topic, especially among afab non-binary participants. Only two amab non-binary participants were able to discuss this category. However, all afab non-binary participants could discuss body language to a greater or lesser extent. Most trans women were also able to at least touch on this
category, and the intersex participant was very aware of it. On the other hand, the trans man did not discuss it at all.

A major feature of gender registers that emerged was that of taking up space, both physically and linguistically. Eight participants spoke of this: two trans women, four afab non-binary participants, the intersex participant, and one amab non-binary participant. Five participants discussed talking with one’s hands: three trans women, one afab non-binary, and the intersex participant. Eight participants discussed ways of walking: three trans women, three afab non-binary, one amab non-binary, and the intersex participant. The discussion on walking included amount of hips used, as well as placing it within a subcategory of taking up space—whether or not someone will get out of other people’s way or will walk straight and make others get out of their way.

Over all, body language markers as identified by participants are as follows:

Table 2: Body language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking up more space</td>
<td></td>
<td>Taking up less space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manspreading</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sitting with legs crossed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making others get out of one’s way</td>
<td></td>
<td>Getting out of other’s way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking without one’s hands</td>
<td></td>
<td>Talking with one’s hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive Posture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once again, as in table 1, table 2 establishes dichotomies. In this case, however, the neutral column is entirely empty. As everything falls into binaries, there is nothing left to fall into the non-binary category.

**Linguistic Markers**

Similar to the discussion of body language, fewer participants were able to speak at any length about linguistic markers. Once again, the intersex participant spoke about many features of speech, the trans women all spoke a fair amount about language, and only two amab non-binary participants were able to discuss this category at all, although no feature was discussed by both of them. The trans man was able to discuss a few markers of speech, though half of them were in the context of stereotypes of women’s speech that he did not believe were accurate. When it came to afab non-binary participants, nearly all discussed at least one linguistic marker, but a much greater number of those indexes that they brought up had less consistency between them.

The linguistic marker that was discussed the most was that of pitch or tone. Out of 26, 14 participants spoke of men having a lower pitch and/or women having a higher pitch: five trans women, six afab non-binary participants, one amab non-binary, the trans man, and the intersex participant. The next most discussed index of speech was the rising tone at the end of sentences. Although eight participants (split between every gender identity with the exception of the trans man) discussed this feature, most claimed this to be more of a stereotype than something people necessarily do. Six participants spoke of volume: three afab non-binary, one amab non-binary, the trans man, and the intersex participant. Also, as discussed in the previous category, taking up space was typically used to refer to both conversations and physical space. The remaining
markers listed in the chart below were discussed by no more than two to four participants. Any marker that was only listed once was not included in the chart.

Over all, linguistic markers as identified by participants are as follows:
Table 3: Linguistic gender markers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking up more space in a conversation</td>
<td>Taking up less space in a conversation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low pitch</td>
<td>High pitch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flat/atonal speech</td>
<td>Melodic speech/ “pulling the taffy”**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louder</td>
<td>Quieter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rising tone at end of sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Talking quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive speech/personality</td>
<td>Deferential speech</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asserting opinion</td>
<td>Inviting opinion/ compromising/ being willing to change one’s opinion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct speech</td>
<td>Reserved speech/ attempting to “soften the blow” when giving criticism/indirect speech</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving specifics</td>
<td>Avoiding specifics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being apologetic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being emotional/expressive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Politeness**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*“pulling the taffy” was a quote from Sky as a way to describe speaking very tonally, with pitch rising and falling throughout one’s speech

**While being polite was discussed, it was spoken of as a predominantly feminine thing to do, to the extent that one participant spoke about the fact that when they are feeling more masculine they do not know how to do politeness, as none of their male friends ever gave them examples to pattern themselves after.
HRT/hormones were discussed by a few non-binary participants, but primarily as a thing that they had done in the past. I believe that no non-binary participants are on HRT at the time of their interviews.

In table 3, gaps exist wherever the opposite of the marker was not explicitly stated by any participant, however implied binaries still remain. If talking quickly is feminine, talking slowly must be assumed to be masculine. If being emotional or expressive is feminine, then the lack of emotion will be masculine. The fact that all of the explicitly stated markers were feminine already hints at the markedness of being female, with male being the default, as will be discussed further in section 5 of this chapter. Additionally, once again the neutral middle category is left blank. It must also be noted that these markers map closely to Jessica Stevens’ and Veronica Vera’s self help books as discussed in chapter 2, section 5: Instructions For Passing.

In all three categories of gender markers, there were no gender neutral markers. Every feature discussed was labeled by participants as either masculine or feminine, with the only specific markers of androgyny being a mix of appearance markers of femininity and masculinity. This can be easily noted from the empty column under “neutral” in both tables 2 and 3. A participant often noted the different usage of some feature by men and women, though unable to go into specifics, but it was always a difference between male and female, without a gender neutral variant. Moreover, as Sal stated, “with most of society, androgyny tends towards the masculine.” In addition, the indexes identified by participants not only end up forming two dichotomous registers, but they are registers of speech that are very similar to those identified by Deborah Tannen in 1990.
3. Questions

These emergent categories pose two main questions: 1) Why have these binaries reemerged, and 2) So how do non-binary individuals navigate this very binary territory? As to the first question, I would hypothesize that it is due to the way society is geared towards binaries. This ties in to the human tendency to think in dichotomies, which is reinforced from a very young age. After all, “while simplistic binarisms are patently inadequate for describing social facts, binaries are a pervasive and arguably inevitable feature of human discourse,” (Gaudio 2014: 170). Most of Western culture still centers around the idea of only two genders that are connected to body and sex, and therefore presentation is bound up in society’s current systems of binary gender norms that are constantly being performed and reinforced—as per the theory of performativity, as discussed previously in the History chapter. After all, “the sociopolitical processes that neatly categorize human beings into girls and boys, women and men, require the gender binary to operate…at the same time, binary serves as a vital resource for social agency, as language users enlist binary structures precisely in order to undo or redo them” (Bucholtz, 2014: ix). We also frame boys as opposite to girls from a very young age, setting them against each other in childhood games, lining them up separately in school, and so forth, as described by Rebecca Bigler (2016). As Jesse stated in his interview, “when people hear that a person is male or that a person is female, there’s a whole book of assumptions that are fairly standard as acceptable assumptions to make based on that data.” For many non-binary individuals, however, those assumptions are a large part of the problem. They do not wish to be associated with the gender roles and stereotypes associated with the gender they were assigned at birth. Yet as Adrian said,
“it’s very very hard to present off of a linear gender spectrum…because that’s not how society is wired…” This problem is confounded by the fact that, “people are afraid of misgendering people, but they have learned that gender is binary and related to your body, so they’re doing it wrong, but they can be taught. Hopefully.” Society is geared to read everyone as male or female, and make assumptions based on this.

How, then, do non-binary language users “enlist binary structures” in order to present as something off of this gender binary?

4. Self-Reported Presentation

Now that a schema has been established, the next point of inquiry concerns what non-binary participants believe themselves to be doing in terms of their own presentation. As mentioned previously, I observed no salient difference between presentation of genderqueer, agender, and non-binary genders. However, there was a large difference between afab and amab non-binary participants in the awareness of these somatic and linguistic features, and therefore the ability to intentionally manipulate them.

**Amab Non-Binary**

Amab non-binary individuals, as a whole, displayed the least awareness of any gender group as to any aspects of presentation other than physical appearance. All spoke about clothing, some about makeup and facial hair. When asked about non-appearance based aspects of presentation, some began to discuss pronoun use or honorifics. Only Jesse was able to talk about language
use. Jesse spoke of spending most of his time as a child with his mother. He was therefore socialized to speak more like her, as well as learning to prioritize other people’s needs over his own. If he wanted someone to do something, he learned to manipulate them believing that his need was theirs. In this way, he could still fulfill their need. It was not until he started to read Deborah Tannen’s *You Just Don’t Understand* that he finally began to understand that many of his speech patterns might be feminine. He knew only that he did not fit in. However, due to the social friction resulting from any attempt to be visibly non-binary, he has chosen to blend in. Therefore he does not intentionally present as non-binary. The other participants required more specific and potentially leading questions as well as examples of what I meant. Zane was eventually able to discuss tone and volume, but nothing more. However, half of them still were unable to be more specific or give any examples of their own. In fact, Terry actively rebuffed these questions, refusing to commit to answers or be more specific, saying, “If I'm specific about something then I could be wrong! And that would be horrible!”

For amab non-binary participants simply adding on aspects of feminine appearance seems to be sufficient for, at the least, getting others to take a second look and question their gender. But getting most of society to identify anyone as off of the gender binary remains difficult. As Riley said when discussing the fact that they wear only skirts or dresses now instead of pants, “in some ways it’s important to me that I don’t look like a guy and that’s good enough.” They would also rather be misgendered as female than as male. That such a large percentage of these participants do not speak about any elements of non-appearance based presentation suggests that they do not need to know other aspects of presentation. Makeup or feminine clothes on an amab body would seem to be enough to make someone stand out as “not male.”
Afab Non-Binary

For afab non-binary participants, however, manipulating physical appearance is not enough. One of the first things multiple participants explained was that if their breasts are visible they are likely to be misgendered as female no matter what they do. When asked how they present as agender, Cee responded, “physically I mostly fail. Because breasts are a problem. It was very helpful to me to learn that yes, breasts are a problem for lots and lots and lots and lots of non cis people.” Cee was the last person I interviewed, and by then this thought had been presented multiple times:

    Tal: “I am sort of stuck presenting as female whether I want to or not. I hate this. I have a very feminine physical body type, I often dress in men’s clothing, in which case I mostly present as a engineer. Which I am, so there you go.”

    Sky: “I feel kind of trapped by like having a body type that is not seen as very androgynous.”

    Adrian: “Because I have the boobs, unless those are completely bound flat people still pick up on that and read me as feminine, no matter what I do.”

    Pat: "a lot of my focus is on outside appearance because that's what people are judging me on first, and that's why I get misgendered a lot, because I still do carry on a feminine appearance at first because that's kind of all I'm, those are the tool I'm working with."

For this reason, many afab participants said they wear a binder fairly often. Those for whom a binder creates a more androgynous appearance seem to have more choice as to how to physically present. When describing the way that they play with their appearance, Pat said: “I feel like if
my base is at a neutral point, where I don't have sexual characteristics being shown, I can kinda play up or down the femininity easier than if I was just looking like a cis female.” Pat is more likely to wear makeup or jewelry or “feminine accent pieces” when they bind. They also say that their ideal body type is that of a Ken doll. Cee likewise says that their ideal body type would have no breasts, no penis, and no facial hair, and would look like “one of those people where you just cannot tell what gender they are.” Cee gave a long discourse on the difficulties of presenting androgynously in which they wished they could simply remove their breasts:

"I actually had a conversation with someone, someone who asked me if I were interested in going to a, um, uh, trans and genderqueer, uh, group at Fenway Health. Uh, which I was. Uh, but I said, you know, well will, is it okay if I go? I mean, uh, I, I present female. And, she said, um, YES, it's okay that you go, it doesn't matter if people see you as female, *laughs* that's not what cau-, you know, that's not the question, uh, but, I really spent a very long time thinking that, oh well, to be anything you know other than female, I would have to somehow manage to present androgynously. And I would LOVE to present androgynously, my breasts are WEIRD, they've been weird since I was 13 and they first stuck out from my chest enough to touch the rest of my body before the rest of my chest did, um, but major surgery's a problem, and nerve issues are a thing, uh, so, you know, a lot of us joke about, um, "oh it would be so nice if we could just kind of take off the extra bustage that we don't want and give it to someone else or put them in the closet, the way various science fiction comedy stories have, have posited, um, and it would be so nice. But I can’t.”

Clearly breasts, as visible sexual organs, cause great distress—no amab participants discussed their own sexual organs. For some, like Cee, breasts cause dysphoria, while others have no problems personally but find that having visible breasts causes constant misgendering. Tal also talked about her “hair dysphoria,” by which she means that to read as more masculine would require cutting her hair. However, she pictures the male version of herself as a tall, skinny geeky guy with long hair and is unwilling to get a haircut. She added that though she will occasionally wear both suits and dresses, she feels that they read as costumes on her. All of this shows that body remains a very important part of afab non-binary presentation.
Unlike with amab non-binary participants, however, presentation does not stop with appearance. This may be due partly to the need to counter the fact that, as discussed in the many quotes listed above, if the body reads as feminine what is put onto it does not seem to matter. Many of these participants wear suits or avoid dresses, even if they like wearing them. Thus Sam avoids dresses, but will sometimes wear clothes that accentuate “this female body that [he] has”, while Sandy prefers to specifically avoid feminine clothes and would seek to have a more androgynous wardrobe if they could afford it. As Sky remarked upon cutting their hair short, “a signifier of ‘I’m kinda gay over here,’” they were trying to decide whether they would be able to wear dresses. Maybe short hair and a dress and piercings would at least give people pause.

In addition to physical appearance, many afab non-binary participants discussed body language in depth. Examples include assertive posture, spreading legs and taking up space while sitting, or as Adrian put it “sitting like a dude.” Kay says that he is more likely to take a masculine position and take up space when nervous. Taylor specifically discusses working to take up more space and also to walk in a straight line, making other people get out of their way. Pat, Sal and Tal all describe changing the way they walk depending on how they are feeling genderwise. Cee reports that they sit with their legs crossed on their bed during their interview in order to take up a medium amount of space. They believe themselves to be the only one among their acquaintances who sits that way—as will be discussed later, however, many of the non-binary participants maintained that exact posture during the interviews.

In addition to taking up space physically, many afab non-binary participants discussed taking up space linguistically as well. Kay explains that in order to aim for androgyny he uses masculine
markers, and is glad that he has a low voice for an afab person. However, when he is spooked, nervous, or with people who do not know his gender his voice goes higher and he starts raising his tone at the end of sentences. Kelly likewise will get higher pitched when nervous, but when comfortable is authoritative, direct, and snarky. Taylor speaks of trying to lower his voice. Cee says their voice also goes higher when they are nervous, and they talk about how they wish their voice was lower and that although they do not work on doing anything to lower it, they do not like it when it is high. Sam used to be on testosterone, though he is no longer interested in having a very male presentation, but he claims he still pitches his voice low, will not speak deferentially, and will assert his own opinions. Sky talks about learning to be more direct in their speech.

While the above primarily indexes masculinity, however, many afab participants discuss feminine markers other than body as well. Sam discusses using makeup, hand gestures, and that while he will assert his opinion he is also willing to have his opinion changed. As already mentioned, Sky will wear makeup or jewelry to match their short hair. Also, while learning to speak more directly, they will still soften the blow if criticizing someone. Sky also described having a very feminine customer service voice. Adrian is genderfluid and switches presentation to match their gender at the time, using makeup to contour a masculine face or a feminine look depending on the day. They did say that while feeling masculine, however, they are more likely to be quiet as they never learned to speak like a guy, and that they really do not know how to perform politeness as the cisgender men in their life never perform politeness, or as they joked, “politeness? What’s that?” Kay and Kelly both, as previously mentioned, will lapse to feminine speech patterns when nervous or scared. Tal says she is a sponge when it comes to speech
patterns, and will pick up on the patterns or accents around her. As she is “rapidly genderfluid” she will also change the ways she walks and sits throughout the day. She does not know how it comes off, but suspects she reads as a “weirdo engineer.” While Taylor tries to deepen and “calm down” their voice, they are still naturally apologetic. They also said that while they have a friend who came out as non-binary at the same time, that friend pushes for total androgyny while Taylor still has some feminine markers and does not feel weird or dysphoric when misgendered as female. In fact, they feel “more weird” that they do not feel weird about being misgendered female. Sal likes to mix and match clothing, likes dangly earrings, and their way of walking will change throughout the day as they shift between genders. Cee’s voice also goes up high when stressed, though as previously stated they are not happy about this. Cee will also often crunch up to take less space, though they say it is more to keep others out of their space as well as a side-effect of being a small person rather than as any desire to sit in or be read in a feminine way.

So just as with amab non-binary participants, afab non-binary individuals also used a mix of masculine and feminine gender markers. In all cases, how their body would read to others was a large part of deciding how to present. Those who can/do bind have more of a canvas to play with. Still, physical appearance alone is not enough to present as non-binary when afab. These individuals displayed far more understanding of body language and speech, and were all able to discuss their own presentation in far more detail than any of the amab non-binary participants. While a good portion of this is due to body constraints, a large part of this is also likely due to society defaulting to male and the feminine being marked. Not only do my participants note this fact, but “it has often been observed that, both in social perception and in language, the
masculine gender appears as non-marked, in a sense neuter, in opposition to the feminine, which is explicitly characterized” (Bordeaux, 2001: 9). This is a commonality of other languages as well, for example in Hebrew the default for a person of unknown gender is the masculine form. While appearance alone seems to be enough to register as “not male,” it takes a lot more work to achieve “not-female.” Similarly, as female is marked it requires more work and the groundwork for this is laid out from a very young age. So even though these participants are not women and are not female themselves, most would have been socialized as if they were female when young. Therefore they would have already been learning what it means to be feminine, even if unconsciously, in all three categories. So in figuring out their identities, they would already have more experience in navigating the differences between the masculine and feminine in action and speech. This is further substantiated as Jesse, the sole amab non-binary participant able to speak about language use, was primarily raised by his mother and was learning her patterns rather than masculine patterns.

The fact that many non-binary genders are still not well known in society does not help either. As Kay explains, “granted I don’t pass as third gender because no one knows what the hell that is, but you know, I do what I can. You know, if I look like an elf from Lord of the Rings I’m doing it right. If I look like a male elf from Lord of the Rings I’m doing it right.” Adrian also explains the difficulties as being read as a gender that most people still do not recognize: “I imagine how other people will react to me being whatever, and then I change how I do based on what reaction I want them to have. So it’s very very hard to present off of what they perceive, what the traditional gender spectrum looks like because they’re just, like, I don’t even know what that would look like.”
Binary Trans Participants

While binary trans participants were more important to developing the schema for this study, it is also important to contrast amab trans women with amab non-binary participants.

While amab non-binary participants were primarily unable to discuss more than physical appearance, all six trans women showed strong awareness of and use of linguistic markers and body language. Even Jennie, who was still presenting as male at work was able to discuss elements of voice training that she would like to have when she feels that is possible for her to do so. Each trans woman spoke of at least one element of body language (most often that they sit with legs crossed or to take up less space), and linguistic marker (tone of voice and “pulling the taffy” or talking very tonally being two common ones).

Besides this difference in awareness, while amab non-binary participants spoke of intentionally mixing masculine and feminine physical markers, all trans women described their gender presentation as adhering strictly to their own gender identities. Every feature they discussed as being something they do was a feminine marker. Even Jennie really only discussed very feminine presentation, though some of it was in the context of the types of vocal training she would like to go through in the future. The only exception to this was Lea, where she described herself as performing a very feminine register, but listed markers as feminine that other participants marked as masculine. She described being more opinionated, less animated, and having stiller hands as being feminine. Still, despite having differing opinions on whether
certain features were masculine or feminine she still described her presentation as falling solidly under her own definition of feminine.

As for Jaymes, my one transmasculine participant, as discussed in the participant section, he is demi-male, meaning he is part male and part not-male, though that part is not female. He describes the fact that a big part of his own presentation includes having gone on testosterone so his voice dropped, and he discussed binding his chest as an important element of presentation (at this point, in fact, he has had top surgery). He also states that if not trying to make sure he gets read as male, he would still wear skirts. So he is still performing very masculine, though partly in making sure that he does not get misgendered rather than it being his preferred presentation. His knowledge was also on the low side for afab participants. This matches the fact that there are far less resources for presentation for trans men, as well as it being much harder to find vocal training. Testosterone naturally lowers the voice, and a lower voice plus surgery or binding and wearing masculine clothing seems to be the most important steps for trans men.

This shows a distinct difference between binary and non-binary trans participants. These binary trans participants all seek to present strictly on the binary, while non-binary participants all intentionally mix masculine and feminine markers in order to present off of the binary. Amab binary trans women also display far more awareness of gender markers than amab non-binary individuals. On the other hand, it seems that afab binary trans men may have less awareness than many afab non-binary trans people—with only one transmasculine participant I can not say anything for certain, but it does match with discussions in the local trans community.
5. Analysis

From self-reported data alone, it is apparent that there is no single non-binary or gender neutral register of speech. Rather than any overall non-binary presentation, instead non-binary individuals intentionally mix masculine and feminine gender markers, manipulating the linguistic, sartorial, and embodied practices in tandem. A large part of this is contrasting presentation with body. For amab non-binary individuals, wearing “women’s clothing” or makeup is often enough, with the majority of amab non-binary participants not mentioning breasts at all (though Terry discusses occasionally wearing a stuffed bra). There are also amab non-binary individuals in the area who are on HRT, though none of my participants were. For afab non-binary people, however, whether they do or even can bind is a very large part of which features are picked, with nearly all of them discussing the issue of breasts or body type. In general, participants are more likely to wear masculine clothing and use masculine linguistic and somatic features if they are aware that their breasts will be visible and/or their face will be read as feminine. They are more likely to wear makeup or jewelry or feminine clothing, or intentionally use feminine linguistic features if they can bind effectively, and believe they will not be read immediately as female because of their body type.

Based on interviews and levels of awareness of markers of gender, it also seems that amab binary trans women have to put in a lot more effort in order to be read as female, while amab non-binary trans people only need to throw on a dress in order to be more likely to be read as not male. Afab non-binary individuals, however, have to put in a lot of effort to be read as not female. This suggests two main things: 1) it confirms what many afab non-binary participants
said about societies beliefs that body equals gender. Therefore contrasting one’s body is a large part of presenting as non-binary. (An interesting note here, though, is that putting on a padded bra, taking HRT, or some other way of giving the appearance of breasts often is not enough to be read as fully female if assigned male at birth.) 2) Binary trans women having to put in a lot more effort speaks to the fact that masculine is baseline, is the default. As Adrian claims, “In our society [male] is the default gender, and the default sex, and therefore the default pronoun. So that’s like, problematic.” There is also an idea that, as Taylor said, “[androgynous] is the way that you’re ‘supposed’ to present.” But at least for afab non-binary individuals, androgynous means masculine of center, as Sal explained, “With most of society, androgyny tends towards the masculine.” Similar to the way that men are taken more seriously than women, as Sky stated, “I know, and a lot of my trans friends know, that, y’know, I would be I guess like taken a lot more seriously if I tried very hard to look more androgynous.” In much of society, female is marked and less privileged than male, the “default.” Even androgyny, which is supposed to be gender ambiguous, is more masculine. After all, as Bourdieu’s Masculine Domination lays out, “the androcentric vision imposes itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses aimed at legitimating it,” where the masculine being neutral is a major aspect of patriarchy and part of the self-replicating structure of male power dynamics in many societies (2001, 9). Similarly, on a basic linguistic level, compare “lion” versus “lioness,” or “mailman” being used as default where even switching to the gender neutral “mail carrier” stands out as marked and more noticeable. So even a small change away from the neutral masculine is marked as unusual—hence amab non-binary participants needing less knowledge and only changing physical appearance—whereas working within the marked category of not-male is harder.
In addition, when choosing their presentation, non-binary individuals are required to consider the perceptions of society. Again, body becomes a salient consideration, as contrasting the way one’s body will be read becomes an essential concern. In essence, participants are creating their performance based on tacit understanding of the interactions of the “book of assumptions” that society will connect to their presentation. This, in fact, shows intentional manipulation of performance as described by Plemons, in his discussion of facial feminization surgery. He explains:

In a performative model citation and reception of sex/gender norms are predicated on recognition…if recognition is the means through which sex/gender becomes materialized and naturalized, then the conditions of recognition are the conditions of gender: I am a man when I am recognized as a man…in a performative framework sex and gender are intersubjective and irreducibly social things (2017: 10-11)

For Plemons, facial feminization surgery integrates this performative model into a plan for trans medicine, which allows for shaping a person’s gender through literally shaping her face into one that will be recognized as female. Once again, we see this conscious changing of appearance in order to align with societal expectations, as well as the fact that in some cases the body must be changed or contrasted with in order to achieve that recognition. In discussing cases in which FFS fails, it is also clear that for Plemons as well body alone cannot be the only aspects that are considered for gender. This highlights some problems, however: if recognition is required for gender, what does this mean when “no one knows what the hell that is,” to use Kay’s words? What about when the body gives the wrong recognition? Or when a person does not know enough to change the appropriate aspects of their performance? As discussed earlier, there is also a fundamental difference between gender identity and gender performance. The place of performativity theory in non-binary presentation must be considered further, along with the examination of how these individuals actually present.
This raises the question, do participants actually present in the ways they claim they do? Are there any aspects of gender presentation that are more tacit, that participants are unaware they do? Or are there any claims made that are unsubstantiated? In order to confirm this analysis, as well as to examine actual use of these gender markers in non-binary presentation, we must not rely on only self-reported data. We must also analyze presentation in action, as will be done in the next chapter.
Chapter 6: Actualized Data

As previously stated, the self-reported data suggests that non-binary presentation is created through a mixing of masculine and feminine markers. The question remains, however, as to whether there are common patterns of mixing markers, other than those of appearance. In addition, non-binary amab participants rarely spoke of non-appearance based markers. Does this mean that they only make use of these markers, or are there registers they are unaware they are using? This chapter will examine the presentation of non-binary participants through the interviews and participant observation.

1. Important note on methods and transcriptions

It is important to note here that as a single researcher with no transcription programs, a large majority of the interviews and participant observation were not transcribed. While I watched all my videos multiple times, I primarily coded everything rather than being able to transcribe it all. In addition, when it comes to judging matters of tone and speed, these were my own judgments based on comparing the interviews and participants relative to each other.

During the interviews, a large number of salient markers were not apparent as these were one on one formal interviews. Politeness, indirect speech, interruptions, assertiveness, and space taken up (both in speech and body language) were aspects of conversation that I could not code or judge. Based on the markers identified as important in chapter five, in these interviews I coded for:
1) Sitting position
2) Was tone of speech melodic or flat, and did this change
3) Overall speed of speech and when did this change
4) Overall pitch and when this changed
5) Did they speak with their hands
6) Did they curse
7) Any instances of indirect speech, hedging, or hesitance to state opinions
8) Did they tone raise at the end of sentences?

This selective coding comes directly from the results of my open coding, using gender signifiers identified by my participants.

2. Presentation in Interviews

As stated above, I coded each interview of non-binary participants for the markers listed. While I attempted to code for cursing or indirect speech, these did not appear enough to be salient data. For tone, flowing relates to “pulling the taffy” as described in chapter 5, with the speech being more melodic and varying in tone. For each of these I also recorded how the participant labeled their own presentation, if at all. In the following charts, light pink shows a feminine marker, light blue shows a masculine marker, and if the marker is not strictly one or the other the color was left empty. In addition, Appendix 1 has transcription selections from every non-binary participant.
AMAB Non-Binary

Self Reported

Table 4: Amab self reported data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>Speed</th>
<th>pitch</th>
<th>Speaking with hands?</th>
<th>other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Has difficulty directly stating needs or opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>Take up less space</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table is very light, having only Jess and Riley rather than all six amab participants. This is because only Jesse and Riley discussed any of these markers.

In Practice

Table 5: Amab presentation in practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sitting Position</th>
<th>Overall Tone</th>
<th>Overall Speed</th>
<th>Overall pitch</th>
<th>Speaking with hands?</th>
<th>Rising tone at end of sentences?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Upright in chair</td>
<td>flowing</td>
<td>fast</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>occasionally</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse</td>
<td>Cross legged</td>
<td>flat</td>
<td>Slow-medium</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Cross legged</td>
<td>flowing</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>Cross legged</td>
<td>flowing</td>
<td>varies</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry</td>
<td>Hunched, legs together</td>
<td>flat</td>
<td>slow</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>Occasionally to punctuate</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zane</td>
<td>Upright in chair</td>
<td>Very flowing</td>
<td>fast</td>
<td>mid-high</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appearance**

Table 6: amab appearance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hair</th>
<th>Makeup?</th>
<th>Clothing</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Long tied back</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Striped dress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse</td>
<td>Long in ponytail</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Tee-shirt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>short</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Sweater vest over long sleeves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>Long and loose</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Long skirt</td>
<td>geeky shirt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry</td>
<td>short</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Sweater and pants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zane</td>
<td>Long and curly</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Brightly colored hoodie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

As previously discussed in chapter five, amab participants rarely were able to speak about non-appearance based presentation, with Jesse and Riley being the exceptions. (This is the reason for how little information is in table 4.) However, all six participants sit in traditionally feminine positions. In addition, most participants have a majority of feminine markers with two exceptions. The first of these is Jesse, who has stated that he intentionally does not attempt to present as genderqueer. Jesse’s speed also increased when he was speaking about gendered speech patterns and growing up, as can be seen in the following example:

“A:nd we were a very introverted family we didn’t socialize much and so like in a lot of ways my mother was like the adult role that I had and I was completely unaware that I was not “supposed” to emulate her because we were different genders and I was just like no this is my adult role model that’s clearly the way an adult human is supposed to be
Um and so I picked up a lot of her speech patterns um
I’m trying to think of a good example now I know I have learned in adulthood um that I have
picked up some of those very stereotypically feminine speech patterns”

While Jesse primarily spoke slower and without much change in tone, when discussing
emulating his mother, he used a lot more emphasis and tone raising. This pattern repeated each
time he spoke of such topics.

The other exception is Terry:

“So I’ve been seeing

(3)
That it is really important for some other people that are my friends how other people perceive
them and that they present so that people will perceive them a certain way and

(3)
I’ve been thinking more

(2)
if I want to also do that sort of thing and present

(2)
specifically in a way that will make people realize that I’m not cisgender
I: a:m genderqueer that I don’t fall into these nice neat categories

(2.5)
and there a bunch of different ways that
Sharone: [mhmm]
Can you get a little bit more specific, you’ve
T: [right]
S: been very general and-
T: [yeah] I’ve been very
I’m good at being general *laughs*
I’m good at being general I’m not so good at specific
U:::m
*speeds up* If I’m specific about something then I could be wrong and that would be horrible”

While Terry did speak slowly and in a low pitch, they are the participant who was most reluctant to be specific in their answers, speaking in generals and being fairly hesitant in their answers. However, the above part of their interview has a striking difference from the rest. As can be seem, when asked if they could be more specific, they responded that, “If I’m specific about something then I could be wrong and that would be horrible!” Even just a few lines before this they had still been speaking very slowly, and taking many pauses to collect their thoughts. When responding to being specific, however, they began to speed up. When they spoke that last sentence, they suddenly spoke extremely quickly and raised their pitch, using the most feminine register they had used during the entire interview.

These results show that while they may not be capable of discussing their non-appearance based presentation, these amab non-binary individuals are still using a mix of masculine and feminine linguistic markers to create their registers of presentation. This mix can be easily seen by the
fact that in table 5 every row has both colors. The main commonality is that when it comes to “taking up space,” all six sat in ways that physically took up less space. In addition, while they all used primarily feminine sitting styles, and many used a large number of feminine speech markers, many of them specifically spoke to wanting to be read as not male, and all spoke about contrasting a masculine appearance. This intermediate presentation, for example, is spoken of by Zane:

So I normally think of actively presenting as female as if I’m wearing a skirt or a dress or something like that,

Like I mean right now I’m sort of ambiguous cause like I’m wearing this hoodie thing that’s sort of culturally female but not like dramatically so and I’m wearing I’m wearing pants that are technically women’s pants but not obviously so

U::m

And I’m like y’know I’m not wearing falsies or anything um

So I wouldn’t I wouldn’t really think of this like actively presenting female but more of like (2)

You know more more intermediate

While it is clear that despite only being able to speak about appearance, these amab individuals still contrasted with their speech and body language. There is missing data that would better exemplify this, unfortunately, as these are interviews and none of the six were able to be at the participant observation gatherings, no claims can be made as to the ways they take up space linguistically. It is also important to quickly note here that this can be contrasted with the amab
trans women, who described themselves as using primarily feminine markers. In theory, a
similar table for them would be primarily pink as opposed to table 5’s mix of blue and pink.
### AFAB Non-Binary

#### Self reported

**Table 7: afab self reported**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>Speed</th>
<th>Pitch</th>
<th>Speaking with hands?</th>
<th>other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adrian</td>
<td>Wide spread leg and slumped</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cee</td>
<td>Prefers to spread out</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sometimes and does not like it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kay</td>
<td>Take up space</td>
<td>Higher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Question statements when nervous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>When comfortable, direct, authoritative, and snarky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>Man spreads</td>
<td>Tries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>lower it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Assertive posture</td>
<td>low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tal</td>
<td>Depends on current gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>Take up space</td>
<td>Tries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tries to deepen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### In Practice

**Table 8: afab in practice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sitting Position</th>
<th>Overall Tone</th>
<th>Overall Speed</th>
<th>Overall pitch</th>
<th>Speaking with hands?</th>
<th>Rising tone at end of sentences?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adrian</td>
<td>Cross legged</td>
<td>flowing</td>
<td>fast</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cee</td>
<td>Cross legged</td>
<td>flowing</td>
<td>slow</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ink</td>
<td>Cannot see</td>
<td>flat</td>
<td>fast</td>
<td>mid to low</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kay</td>
<td>Cross legged</td>
<td>In the middle</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Legs spread</td>
<td>flowing</td>
<td>Fast</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>When talking about feminine speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>Reclining on couch</td>
<td>flat</td>
<td>Medium-slow</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sal</td>
<td>Cross legged</td>
<td>In the middle</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Spread on couch</td>
<td>Fairly flat</td>
<td>Medium-fast but never rushing</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>Only to accentuate</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>Cannot tell</td>
<td>flowing</td>
<td>fast</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky</td>
<td>Cross legged</td>
<td>flowing</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tal</td>
<td>Sitting on chair with spread legs</td>
<td>flowing</td>
<td>slow</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>Cannot see</td>
<td>flowing</td>
<td>fast</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appearance

Table 9: afab appearance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hair</th>
<th>Makeup?</th>
<th>Clothing</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adrian</td>
<td>Short and pink</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Hoodie over plaid shirt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cee</td>
<td>Long in ponytail</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>All black</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ink</td>
<td>Shoulder length</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Short sleeve shirt and pants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kay</td>
<td>Long tied back</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Sweater vest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Chin length</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>All black</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>Short and curly</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Tee-shirt and jeans</td>
<td>earrings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sal</td>
<td>short</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Buttoned down shirt</td>
<td>Necklace and bowtie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Shirt and pants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>short</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Long sleeved striped shirt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky</td>
<td>short</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Blue hoodie</td>
<td>Ear piercings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tal</td>
<td>Hair in ponytail</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>sweater</td>
<td>Dark colors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>short</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Tee-shirt</td>
<td>earrings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Unlike those participants assigned male at birth, three quarters of the afab participants spoke of at least one of these non-appearance based markers. In general what they self reported was reflected in their speech patterns. In the times that they were not, they reported a more feminine marker that they wanted to or were attempting to change. The exception to this is that more claimed to spread and take up sitting space than were doing so. Still, while many sat cross legged, these were all still wider positions than the amab participants.
Amongst the afab participants there was even less consistency. There is no marker that all share. In addition, most used a mix of masculine and feminine markers. Adrian, Pat, and Sam are the exception to this. Adrian used a primarily feminine register. Adrian identifies as genderfluid, and did not specify where they were at the time of the interview. They are one of the participants who discussed the most aspects of gender presentation, as well as the ways that their presentation differs based on where they are and how safe they feel. Pat and Sam, on the other hand, used a primarily masculine register. Pat spoke in their interview on how they feel neutral, and the fact that they are unable to be on hormones. They also said their goal is to be ambiguous. This register matches the “laid back” style that Pat describes for themselves, and the feminine markers that they self-reported are all ones that would not appear in an interview, such as being compassionate, emotional and maternal. For example, despite the fact that in the follow transcript they are speaking about a topic that can be fairly emotional, their tone never raises nor do they emphasize any words. They maintain a flat steady tone:

I mean I aesthetically bind my chest I mean I’m not going to get top surgery any time soon and I feel like right now you’ve heard people who are female to neutral like just getting top surgery is still confusing to people

Um

Cause like my ideal like bo:dy I guess would be kind of like a Ken doll

You know like I’m fine with my genitalia I just don’t really want breasts

Um

And then like I mean I just am not gonna be able to go on testosterone ever because of just like health issues and stuff it’s just not something that I’m going to be able to do::
So I just kind of have to like

(2)

make those changes on my own rather than doing anything hormonally

so

A lot of my focus is on outside appearance because that’s what people are judging me on first

That’s why I get misgendered a lot

(2)

because I still do carry on a feminine appearance at first because that’s kind of all I’m

those are the tools I’m working with

Sam claims that he has “always been on the masculine side of things,” and also self-reports feminine aspects that would not appear in an interview, especially the willingness to change his opinion in arguments. For both Pat and Sam, their registers match these self descriptions.

Ink, Sal, Sandy, and Sky all did not self-report aspects of speech that were coded for here. It is important to know that contrary to the other three, during Sky’s interview they spoke at length on multiple aspects of gender presentation. While when discussing their own presentation they focused more on physical appearance, they also spoke about how their lack of directness and tendency to “soften the blow” when criticizing someone come across as feminine. While Sandy and Sal did not speak much of their own presentation, Sandy did speak about tone and pitch and Sal talked about the way that they can recognize gender signifiers but still have difficulties actually discussing them—a thing that amused them as they are a linguistics student. Ink is really the only participant who did not discuss any aspects of presentation outside of appearance,
but e discussed the way that for em their family were consistently focused on eir appearance, and that while e can not change eir voice e can change eir appearance and deal with eir dysphoria surrounding eir body. E also stated that in a way eir “gender is geek.”

Interview analysis

For all sixteen of these non-binary participants, their individual registers of speech match their gender identities. In the cases where there is less of a mix of masculine or feminine markers, there are either additional indexes that did not appear in the interviews or they discussed other aspects of their identity that matched their speech patterns.

All amab and afab non-binary participants mix linguistic, physical, and appearance based feminine and masculine markers whether or not they are aware that they are doing so. The majority of the afab individuals do so with more intentionality, as can be seen in the similarities between tables 7 and 8. At least, these patterns persist through the interviews, during which all participants are consciously thinking about their own presentation.

The question remains as to whether these patterns will persist through larger conversations when gender presentation is not being discussed. In addition, there are still a large number of indexes that could not appear in the interviews. Once again, this leads to a need for non-interview data.

3. Participant Observation

Methods
In order to collect participant observation data, I invited all former participants as well as individuals who had previously expressed interest to small gatherings. In order to control for safety, privacy, and consent, these gatherings needed to take place in a private location. This means that all participants self-identified as being non cisgender, and were aware of this fact about each other. These gatherings took place at a room in an office owned by Kelly, with every sitting around a table. I was able to organize three such gatherings, with a total of ten participants. During the gatherings, a video camera was set up in a corner, recording the total conversation. As the majority of participants identified as gamers, board games were available in order to provide a central focus, with participants also bringing some of their favorites.

While coding these conversations, I again coded for gender markers as identified by my participants, as explained in chapter 5. Here, due to the attendance of multiple participants in one conversation, I was able to code for interruptions, assertiveness, and space taken in conversation. While initially I attempted to code for the significant markers of direct versus indirect requests, criticism, and politeness, these were all not in evidence in these conversations, and had a count of zero. In addition, while I attempted to code for displays of emotion, cases of aggression, and apologies, these did not appear during the gatherings. There were also no debates that broke out, so willingness to change opinion could not be coded for. Finally, due to the way chairs were arranged around the table as well as the way the camera was focused means that body language and physical space taken could not be seen well enough to judge.

In order to account for space taken up in conversation, I counted the number of conversation turns taken by each participant during the first ten minutes of the gathering (not including
minimal agreements due to the difficulty of keeping track of those while counting), as well as noting the length and types of these turns, and confirmed that this pattern lasted throughout the entirety of the gathering. Then, during the entire conversation I coded for:

1) Interruptions and type thereof
2) Participants tone and speed of speech
3) Who, if anyone, had authority in these conversations, and what type of authority.
4) Relative loudness

Again, I attempted to code for cursing, politeness versus rudeness, types of criticism, apologies, direct versus indirect requests, and aggression, but all of these either did not appear at all or appeared very rarely in the conversations that occurred. This is true even from participants I know to be fond of cursing or with a tendency to apologize.

As interruptions are evidence of assertiveness, dominating the conversation, and taking up space in a conversation, I noted a number of types of interruption. First, an interruption that ended someone else’s turn prematurely and took control of the conversation (this did not require a change of topic). Secondly, an interruption that ended someone else’s turn but was meant to affirm or add to another participant rather than to take control (this would be an interruption to encourage participation, which would be more feminine). I also coded for attempts to interrupt that failed, as well as when participants refused to let someone interrupt them, continuing talking rather than relinquishing their turn. More common than these interruptions were overlapping turns. These were when a participant began speaking before the previous speaker finished, leading to a period of both speaking at once. Most often in these cases, the new speaker would still respond to things said while they were talking, proving they were still listening to the other
during the overlap. Here I coded four types of overlapping: 1) overlaps where the speaker took control of the conversation; 2) affirming overlaps, or overlaps where the new speaker was confirming something said, providing support, or in some way taking a short overlapping turn that relinquished the control back to the original speaker; 3) moments when a speaker’s turn overlapped entirely with another speaker on a new topic, but did not lead to a topic change; and 4) cases where someone overlapped while speaking primarily to themselves.

**Participants**

I was able to arrange for three gatherings with a total of ten participants altogether. Five of these were part of the interviews, and five were not. As the office where these were held was Kelly and Jesse’s, Kelly was at least shortly present at all three. For the first gathering, Kelly attended the entire time, along with five new participants, Nicky, Jason, Jordan, Saraya, and Dani. Nicky returned for the second along with Lily and Cee. At the third, Nicky and Saraya returned again along with Adrian and Ink.

Nicky is afab non-binary, describing themself as “femme not female,” using the pronouns they/them and she/her. They use queer, pansexual, and bisexual interchangeably to describe their sexuality, as well as being grey asexual and polyamorous. They are Jewish and—as is evident in the transcripts—an avid gamer. Nicky is also dating Jordan.

Jordan is amab non-binary and their pronouns are they/them. They are also panromantic, asexual, polyamorous, and Jewish.
Jason is afab transmasculine and pansexual. His pronouns are they/them and he/him.

Saraya is a lesbian trans woman. Her pronouns are she/her.

Dani is afab non-binary, as I do not know their pronouns I am defaulting to they/them. I do not know their sexuality.

For discussion the three gatherings, the video recorder divided each gathering into three separate videos. In each case the coding was for the first of the three videos unless something else changed this.

**Gathering #1**

During the first gathering, everyone decided they wanted to play a board game before the recording started. Coding began when the last participant, Dani, arrived. In addition to coding the first ten minutes for the number of turns taken, at 25 and a half minutes in they began a game, and I counted turns for the first round of the game as well.
Table 10: First gathering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nicky</th>
<th>Saraya</th>
<th>Dani</th>
<th>Kelly</th>
<th>Jason</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># full turns taken in the first ten minutes</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># turns taken 25:32-35:7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative volume of speech</td>
<td>loud</td>
<td>loud</td>
<td>mid</td>
<td>Quiet-mid</td>
<td>mid</td>
<td>mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed</td>
<td>fast</td>
<td>fast</td>
<td>mid</td>
<td>fast</td>
<td>slow</td>
<td>Varies on topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>flowing</td>
<td>flowing</td>
<td>flat</td>
<td>flat</td>
<td>flat</td>
<td>Flat unless excited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling interruptions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirming interruptions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed interruptions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusal to be interrupted overlap</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overlap</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>So often I lost count</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirming overlap</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total overlap</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking to self</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this gathering, Nicky and Saraya dominate the conversation, followed by Jordan. While Saraya takes more turns than Nicky, all of Nicky’s turns are longer.

10  N: I’m also totally willing to run a:: game or help facilitate a game cause I’m the one who owns Sentinels, [cause it is a five person yeah]

11  S: [You’re gonna have you’re gonna have to teach me]
It is um up to five people but I would easily run the villain and the environment, um the nice thing about it being co-op is that means that if anyone’s not sure about it you can always ask everyone else.

13 S: This is valid

14 Jo: Yes

15 N: Yup. Um [best part about it]

16 Jo: [like I said]

17 N: being co-op is that it is mostly a game of follow the cards so if you’re used to other card games *gestures* um it is pretty easy to pick up. Um Jordan and I are on a quest right now to slowly make it through every single villain, every single environment, and I at least to play every single hero

18 D: Wo::w

19 S: [Wow]

20 N: [Um, the] order alpha[betically um]

21 S: [It’s a quest!] is it an epic quest?

22 N: [It is an epic quest]

23 Jo: [It is an epic quest]

24 S: Okay

25 N: I think I said so on Facebook even

In the beginning of this meeting, before the recording begins, some topics of gaming were discussed where Saraya set herself up as knowledgeable about games and therefor an authority.
As games are chosen and Nicky’s favorite game, a co-operative board game called Sentinels of the Multiverse, is discussed, they quickly set themselves up as the expert. When Jordan suggests the game at line 3, they also set themselves up as knowing the game. Nicky’s first response, on line 10, says they will run the game, they brought it, and as Saraya says that Nicky will have to teach her, Nicky continues explaining the game. During this explanation, at 17, Nicky also sets Jordan up as an authority on the game based on their “epic quest” together. As many of Nicky’s turns throughout the first ten minutes continue explaining and setting up the game, they have more turns and longer turns. Jordan also answers questions about the game. Saraya, on the other hand, has set herself up as knowledgeable about games in general.

During the first ten minutes there is also food being ordered, so everyone takes time away from the conversation to order on Kelly’s phone. This accounts for, for example, lines 80-106 where Nicky barely takes part in the conversation and the topic changes for a short time.

As the game starts, Nicky continues taking the most space in the conversation as they are running the game and teaching it. The many times they refuse to be interrupted are times when they are in the middle of explaining a rule or running a turn. Jordan again also jumps in to help at times. Saraya spends most of her turns either explaining Jason’s cards and the game to him or asking questions through making statements. Kelly asks general questions as well.

In terms of gender registers, it is unclear through just this one gathering as to whether the way Nicky and Saraya take up the most conversation space is a feature of gender presentation, conversational authority, or something else. In this conversation it is also the three participants
with the conversational authority—the expertise on the game—who interrupt and overlap the most.

When it comes to tone, volume, and speed, Jason takes on a masculine register, speaking slower and flatly, though the lack of space he takes would be more masculine. Saraya and Nicky both take up large conversational space, overlapping and interrupting often. They also both have flowing tones (feminine), speak quickly (feminine), and speak loudly (masculine), asserting themselves often (masculine). Dani, Kelly, and Jason all have more masculine indexes of tone and volume, though they assert themselves less often.

As the first video segment ended, 35 minutes in, the food arrived, and Dani discovered that they had received food with gluten in it and had to leave early. The coding ends here.

**Gathering 2**

The video opens with Lily, Cee, and Nicky in the middle of a discussion about a convention that Nicky and Cee will be going to in February. Lily does not go to the same convention, but has been to many others.
### Table 11: Second gathering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nicky</th>
<th>Lily</th>
<th>Cee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># full turns taken in the first ten minutes</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative volume of speech</td>
<td>mid</td>
<td>mid</td>
<td>mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed</td>
<td>mid-fast</td>
<td>mid</td>
<td>mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>flowing</td>
<td>flowing</td>
<td>flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling interruptions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirming interruptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed interruptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusal to be interrupted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overlap</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirming overlap</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total overlap</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking to self</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The distribution of space in the second gathering is very different from the first, despite the fact that Nicky is at both. Here there are almost no interruptions, fewer overlaps, and the number and length of turns are nearly even. While there are less people, the genders present are similar.

Nicky’s speech is still very flowing, but they lower their volume to match the other two. They also slow down to match the others closer, though still talking quicker than them. Cee and Lily both maintain their registers from their interviews.

1 L: Recall it being March that
2 C: February [(xxxxx)]
3 N: [Yeah]
4 L: [(xxxxx)]
5 N: It used to be March and I preferred it March and now it’s [earlier] but ce la vie
6 C: [mmhmm]
7 L: (xxxxx)
8 C: (xxxxx)
9 N: Yup. It’s what can they schedule so
10 L: So which weekend is it
11 N: Um
12 C: U:::m
(4)
13 N: The link I need (xxxxxxxxxxxxx)
14 C: Is it I forget if it’s the week after Valentines day or two weeks after Valentines day
(4)
15 L: You know with lets see some years
16 C: I think it might be the very last weekend in February
17 N: It might be, I don’t remember. I should know considering I talked scheduling over when we wanted to get things out for (LARP name) especially
18 C: I mean I could check
19 L: Right

It seems that the main differences between the first and second gathering are twofold: 1) there are half the number of people in the second gathering, and 2) in this conversation all three participants are equally versed in the topic. All three trade turns discussing the policies and travel to different geek conventions, including a few that all three have been to.
Twelve minutes in the three decide to start a game and end up playing Sentinels again, which Nicky once again leads. When this happens, Nicky again has the longest turns as Cee has played other board games but not Sentinels, and Lily has played Sentinels but it has been awhile. Still, as all three are used to board games the lack of interruptions and overlaps is maintained.
Gathering three

The third gathering starts with Ink, Adrian, Saraya, and Nicky deciding what they want to do. Adrian and Ink are not really board gamers, and the conversation turns to video games.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 12: Third gathering</th>
<th>Nicky</th>
<th>Saraya</th>
<th>Kelly</th>
<th>Ink</th>
<th>Adrian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># full turns taken in the first ten minutes</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative volume of speech</td>
<td>loud</td>
<td>loud</td>
<td>mid</td>
<td>loud</td>
<td>mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed</td>
<td>fast</td>
<td>fast</td>
<td>fast</td>
<td>Speeds up with enthusiasm</td>
<td>fast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>flowing</td>
<td>flowing</td>
<td>Flowing when enthusiastic</td>
<td>flat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling interruptions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirming interruptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed interruptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusal to be interrupted overlap</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overlap</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirming overlap</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total overlap</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking to self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here Nicky, Ink, and Adrian all match nearly equally for number of turns and length of turns.

As the conversation turns to video gaming, all three are gamers. Kelly only comes in briefly in order to set something up with the office. Adrian takes less turns, but can be seen to be enjoying listening, not knowing much of video games. Later in the gathering Adrian takes more turns themself as topics shift.
Unlike the first gathering, while there are a few interruptions Ink, Saraya, and Nicky fall into patterns of overlapping speech. While they overlap frequently, they are still responding to what was said while they were overlapping. If they missed something said they check in, but this happens more rarely. For Ink and Nicky, at least, this overlapping conversational style is a very Jewish register of speech, something both of them are used to. Saraya and Nicky also both start loud and fast, just as in the first meeting, while Ink speeds up as e gets enthusiastic about the topic and seems to feel less awkward. As can be seen in the transcription, Ink, Nicky, and Saraya all trade moments of being the main speaker.

Starting about 20 minutes in, the conversation becomes impossible to follow from the camera. At the table, Nicky sits across from Saraya, who is next to Ink, who is across from Adrian, who sits next to Nicky. For the rest of the time conversations switch between all four and sets of two, most often with Nicky and Ink talking across Saraya and Adrian. As the conversations cross each other and occasionally mingle before separating again, I could not follow well enough through the video recording in order to code past those first 20 minutes.

Still, during this time the above strong patterns emerge and seems to continue. As topics change Adrian takes more turns, and the majority of space is taken up by whoever is most knowledgeable about the topic.

Speaking of Adrian, in their interview Adrian said they present more masculine when the feel like they are safe to do so. During this gathering, their tone is flatter and they join in the fast
flow of the conversation once it gets to topics they do know, both being more masculine speech markers. This contrasts to the more feminine register during their interview.

Compare Adrian’s speech in the conversation:

100 A: I don’t really do any kind of video gaming

101 S: I do both, I get my board game, like I have a board game group that like I meet up with on Wednesdays

102 N: Nice

103 S: It’s at of all places the u::m what’s that name, Wegmans, it’s at Wegmans

104 A: It’s at Wegmans?

105 S: The second floor is all tables so you can just chill out there

106 I: Yeah there’s a Wegmans is that like (City) is that the one

107 S: (City)

108 I: Yeah (City)

109 A: Oh really I that’s where my mom goes for her I go to the Market Basket my mom shops at the Wegmans

110 S: **Wegmans** is pretty awesome

To Adrian’s speech in their interview:

“and, yeah trying to navigate finding somewhere along there that makes me feel comfortable, makes me feel comfortable, is pretty easy it’s just like what clothes do I fee:l comfortable in what clothes can I look at myself in the mirror and not cringe um
but then to others that doesn’t always translate exactly the way I want it to because I am female bodied, because I have the boobs, “

In the interview, Adrian speaks quickly, and can be seen to use far more emphasis and elongation, as well as repeating themselves a fair amount, where in the participant observation Adrian’s tone is steady and slow. They appear far more comfortable at the gathering.

3. Analysis

Adrian’s use of a more masculine register suggesting their being comfortable alludes to the overall dynamics between these three gatherings, and the difference in the way turn taking takes place. For example, during these three meetings Saraya and Lily’s turns look very different from each others despite them both being trans women, and Saraya’s turns look different between the first and third. Nicky too takes a different amount of conversational space in each of the three conversations, and their registers look very different from Kelly, Ink, or Cee who are also all afab non-binary.

First, as has already been shown, there has not been any one shared register between non-binary participants. The commonality was that for each individual their personal presentation was a mix of masculine and feminine indexes. What that mix was different from person to person, with major influences being how strongly the individual was trying to be read as off the binary, and body playing heavily into the equation as well—for example, as stated previously, breasts
can be a major unwanted signifier, and a number of afab participants would weigh aspects of presentation on countering physical body.

During these three gatherings there similarly was not a repeating pattern. In fact, the two most similar registers were shared by Nicky and Saraya: both took more space, were loud, spoke quickly, spoke very tonally, and proved to be very opinionated. Both also physically shared a more feminine physical appearance, with long hair and skirts. However Saraya is a lesbian trans woman and Nicky is a queer grey ace non-binary person. Besides the shared geekiness—taking Ink’s statement of geek as a gender as a serious possibility—the overall category the two share is being non-cis and not-straight.

In fact, this is shared by all ten participants in the three gatherings. Due to issues of privacy, all participants were invited knowing that all attendees would also identify as non-cis. Which means that unlike most of society where everyone is assumed to be binary, during these meet ups no one would make this assumption. So no one had to put effort into being actively read as their gender in a way that they have to most of the time. In each case, the person taking the most space in conversation was the person, or people, who had the expertise. When Cee, Nicky, and Lily had the same incoming knowledge, they shared their turns. In the first gathering, between there being six people all engaged in the same conversation with only three experts, the balance was very lopsided. The interruptions often seem to be more accidental from too many attempted active speakers rather than on purpose. In the third case, when discussing video games Nicky, Saraya, and Ink traded turns. As topics shifted the conversations paired off and flowed back
together in continuous—impossible to follow through a video—patterns, with the main speaker shifting as well.

In the first situation, Sentinels of the Multiverse stayed the main topic for the entire two hours. The one change was when food arrived and Dani accidentally had gluten, which they are allergic to. When dealing with the restaurant Kelly took charge despite having been mostly observing beforehand. Based on the other gatherings it seems highly likely that if the main topic had changed so too would the patterns of the conversation. Especially if the group had split into smaller conversations rather than maintaining one large one.

The shared comfort of not having to present to the cis gaze seems to have changed the conversational dynamics. Kelly’s directness and Adrian’s more masculine register are both self-reported signifiers of comfort as much as of gender. In each case it seems that everyone shared the space, no one needing to take more or relinquish space, with the deciding factor instead being the conversation topic. This may be especially true seeing as how the amount of space taken was one of the most discussed index of gender and one of the ones more likely to be intentionally affected.

This suggests that in a non-formal situation, non-binary registers shift based on the other participants—a thing that multiple interviewees mentioned. In the shared understanding of gender identities and the lack of a need to constantly affirm identity, these indexes of gender could shift through the conversation itself.
What these circumstances also mean is that without the cis gaze as part of the conversation, the registers of non-binary presentation are not fully apparent. Without the enforced binary putting pressure on the situation, markers fall to signifiers of personality rather than gender. While this highlights a direction for future research, it also highlights the weight that is felt in fighting for recognition within a society that still assumes a non-existent binary.

(A quick note must be made here that there is a possibility that something similar would occur even if all participants were cisgendered. After all, most past gendered linguistic research began with an assumption of the existence of the gendered language dichotomy. So while previous studies affirmed these gendered markers being used in cisgender group conversation, there hasn’t been a reexamination such as this study for cisgender individuals. While I would posit that in a mix of cis and binary trans people, the binary trans individuals presentations would appear extremely gendered based on the discussion of the trans women participating in my interviews, and cisgender styles of presentation would likely depend on how transgressive it is to break gender roles. However, this may also be a place for follow up research.)

These findings further highlight the conscious use of gender signifiers. As discussed previously, many participants—especially afab non-binary participants and trans women—were able to discuss different gender markers in detail, and many identified the ways they differ their use of these aspects of presentation depending on the situation. This included most of the individuals who participated in both the gatherings and the interviews. While further data from gatherings containing both cis and non-cis people is required for comparison, it is apparent that during these events gender is not something being performed. Again, this appears to contradict with the
concept that what is performatively materialized is outside the control of the performer, as discussed in chapter three with Kulick’s “No.” I would argue that due to their situation, and the aforementioned examination of gender presentation and all that goes with it, trans individuals also are intentionally making use of the materialization of gender performance. Multiple participants described the link between performance and perception, from Jesse explaining that gendering someone also maps ideologies onto that person to Adrian describing the requirement of being perceived as cisgender in court. Sky discussed the use of a feminine customer service voice as portraying, “look at me, I'm funny, I'm cute, I'm interesting, please don't hurt me.” Rather than merely describing gender markers, many participants described the effects of using those signifiers in mainstream society. This in turn suggests that many trans individuals have not only awareness of aspects of performance, but also the knowledge of what those performances materialize. As posited in chapter 5, within a majority cisgendered society, non-binary individuals are choosing what message their gender presentation is conveying. However, they are restrained by the associated materializations of those performances. The queer understanding that gender presentation is divorced from identity also divorces gender presentation from the inherent meaning that society gives that presentation. In these gatherings therefore, where this understanding is shared, participants could perform other aspects of their identity rather than being concerned with what their gender presentation was conveying to the room.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

To summarize from the previous chapters, between the interviews and participant observation, this research suggests a number of conclusions: First, there is no existing gender neutral language, currently all gender signifiers are masculine or feminine. In order to rectify this issue, non-binary individuals currently make use of mixing masculine and feminine aspects of physical appearance, body language, and linguistic patterns. In addition, there is an awareness of gender norms and signifiers that non-cisgender individuals are able to manipulate, so they create these mixed registers intentionally. Amab non-binary individuals are primarily aware of markers rooted in physical appearance while afab non-binary individuals have more awareness of body language and speech patterns as well. Here is more confirmation that female is marked and male is the neutral. This is revealed through the fact that amab non-binary individuals have less awareness of gender signifiers as opposed to amab trans women who have significant awareness, as well as the general assumption that androgyny—or gender neutrality—is masculine of center.

In addition, those who are not cisgender have had to examine their own relation to gender roles and norms in a way that many who are cisgender never do. This leads to increased awareness of not only gender signifiers, but also the societal assumptions attached to those signifiers. Relatedly, non-binary individuals do not always use non-binary registers, sometimes there are social benefits to presenting as their gender assigned at birth of which they need to take advantage or it is dangerous to present as something other than cisgender. Many trans individuals, furthermore, separate the individual from expected gender roles and binaries, and therefore seek to separate appearance and presentation from gender identity. In cases where this
understanding is shared, gender presentation is no longer a concern. Non-binary gender presentation is primarily performed for the cisgender gaze. When not having to perform, many individuals instead default to individual personality markers. Or, as Ink eloquently claimed, “I speak geek.”

1. A Place in Trans Linguistics

Earlier I discussed Lal Zimman’s call towards a trans linguistics in his keynote at Lavender Linguistics in 2018. While this research began years before his presentation, it still fits into this growing field. For one thing, it answers directly to a number of future areas of study that Zimman set out: Firstly, in grammatical and discourse questions, it studies what people do with different systems. In this case that is maneuvering within gender systems that while not explicitly a grammatical part of English, are still a binary structure set into language use. Secondly, it is focused on a barely studied population of study, that of “non-binary people of a variety of sorts.” It is true that non-binary pronouns have very recently become a focus, to the point where from June 11-13 in 2019 Queen’s University in Kingston Ohio held They, Hirsself, Em, and You Conference: Nonbinary pronouns in research and practice. The study of language as used by non-binary individuals, however, especially in languages without inherently grammatical grammar systems, is only beginning to be studied. Part of this may be the lack of research schema for studying patterns outside of the binary. Again, however, non-binary individuals are an intrinsic part of the trans population, and therefor must be accounted for if this field of trans linguistics is to be a comprehensive body of research.
In terms of the six fields Zimman described—dynamic, denaturalizing, recentering, politicizing, imaginative, and empowering—this research relies on a number of them. First is the dynamic field, non-binary individuals change linguistic usage not only through their lifespan but also as they navigate through binary society. Some genderfluid individuals will also change their presentation to fit their shifting gender identity. Secondly, an understanding that gender is complex, and “non-binary” is in and of itself a complicated umbrella term that may mean different things to different people even amongst those that claim the term. Along with complicating gender, allowing participants to claim their own identities and describe for themselves what the terms mean for them is crucial to understanding and beginning to study the vast array of genders that fall into this umbrella term. This part relies on a denaturalizing field. While this research does focus primarily on trans people and a comparison to cisgender binary gender presentation, the focus is on non-binary individuals themselves rather than using them to inform research on cis people—that is, fitting the recentering field. As to an imaginative field, in order to study non-binary populations a researcher first must break from binaries and be willing to look for exceptions. It is true that this research focuses more on generalizations, but from a perspective that could not throw away exceptions. Finally, this is a non-binary researcher studying non-binary participants in a way that seeks to center those participants and allow them to speak for themselves, the empowering field. In this research I do not focus on the sociopolitical, but it is certainly true that politics and what is socially safe has a large influence on the ways that non-binary individuals are able to use language.

To further the expansion of this piece of the field, I lay out the beginnings of a methodology to examine the ways that different non-binary populations manipulate the binary societal structures.
Semiformal interviews with open ended questions allow for participants to both be able to fully express their own identity but also to be able to discuss gender presentation to the extent of their awareness. Again, this is a community that has had to question and come to a realization that they are not the gender they were assigned at birth, and therefore do not fit into society’s prescribed boxes. Therefore, being able to use that knowledge is key to understanding non-binary use of language and gender norms. To performativity, this potential to intentionally manipulate performance leads to a potential break in the repetition and recreation of gendered patterns, which may be able to lead to a more abrupt change in speech patterns—at least abrupt comparatively to the long slow change that may occur as described by Butler. This does, however, rely on this awareness being found in communities outside of the Boston geek community. To this end, this is a large potential for expanding on this research.

2. Suggested Follow Up Research

While this research has many interesting implications, there is a large amount of space to follow up on this paper. One focus that needs more understanding and study in academia is the range of gender identities that exist. Within only 26 individuals there was wide variability in usage and meaning of similar labels, as well as a large number of gender and sexuality terms that rarely appear in the current body of research. As to the main focus of this paper, that of gender presentation, as stated above I have laid out the beginnings of a methodology that should be used in larger participant pools, in different geographical areas, and with a greater set of participant observation scenarios.
First of all, my participant pool is small and focused primarily in a white geeky community in a geographical location with some of the greatest protections for trans individuals. This same set of questions should be taken to different geographical areas, different racial groups, and larger groups. What gendered markers of presentation are identified in these different communities? While I expect that currently there will still be a strong binary structure no matter where the research takes place—as long as it is in a western culture that primarily makes space for only male and female gender—the specifics will change. With a greater number of participants, there may be some more commonalities of non-binary registers that can emerge.

In addition, my participant pool was heavily weighted towards afab non-binary participants. While there were strong commonalities in the self-reporting of amab participants, would this still hold with a larger pool? Also, all participants of the participant observation were either trans women or afab non-binary individuals. In larger groups of non-cis participants with a mix of afab and amab individuals, would these registers of comfort and lack of focus on gender performance still emerge? If this pattern continues, then the implications for the future of performativity of gender and presentation are extremely interesting, as will be discussed below in the following section. If not, then what patterns do emerge and what does that say for the future of non-binary registers?

Furthermore, there are a number of linguistic markers that participants discussed that did not appear in the participant observation I did. Politeness, directness, criticism, and debate barely came into play in the small gatherings. What happens with these markers when everyone is not-cis? Would these patterns of expertise maintain, where the dominant individuals for each topic
would take the most space in these aspects as well, with different participants taking the dominant role as topics or scenarios shift? What about if there is a mixture of cis and not-cis participants?

Speaking of mixing cis and non-cis participants, if mixed gatherings could be observed then there could be more research into the appearance of these non-binary registers when the cis-gaze is present. Admittedly, engineering this situation in a way that minimizes harm would be difficult, as those who are not-cis would need to feel that they would be safe to present as not-cis. In addition, there would likely be different results if it was known who was cis and who was not, versus if all cis participants thought that everyone in attendance was cis, versus if cis participants knew there were non-cis participants but did not know who. If these situations could be safely engineered, this would lead to far more data on non-binary registers outside of interview situations. Follow up interviews with the non-binary participants would also allow for more understanding of whether they were intentionally performing non-binary gender, what their comfort level was during the gathering, whether they felt they could present as not-cis, as well as discussions of what they were aware of doing during the gatherings. This follow up would also be important to continue the examination of awareness. If non-binary people continue to show consciousness of the way they manipulate gender performance, this answers to Zimman’s question of how trans people use binary forms in a very important way. Counter to Cameron and Kulick, identity becomes the origin which leads to intentional use of the “codes of signification” in order to intentionally present a specific picture to society.

3. Non-binary Performativity
This all leads back to the question of how this research fits into performativity theory, and what it means that non-binary people may have more awareness, more control over their use of gender performance, and are performing not for themselves but for the cis gaze. In addition, I have made the claim more than once that gender presentation needs to be acknowledged as separate to gender identity. Once again, in many queer communities non-cis people are leading the push for an end to assuming a stranger’s gender based on appearance and perceived presentation. While this push has gained more traction recently, even in the 1990s this could be seen in critics of facial feminization surgery:

[They] rejected the premise that womanhood was dependent on recognizable femaleness. They rejected the idea that access to the category woman ought to be determined by the assessments of those operating in a gender system that consistently denied and perpetrated violence against those who did not fit its norms. One should be recognized and affirmed as a woman not on the condition of occupying a normatively female body, they argued, but as a result of naming oneself a woman. Period. (Plemons, 1917: 98)

This argument, that one should be recognized and affirmed as their gender solely as a result of identifying as that gender, is at the core of seeking to end the automatic assumption of gender based on perception.

This leads to an apparent issue, as previously discussed in chapters three and five, if gender is performative, we are “materializing gender / sexual identity/ desire by repeating, consciously or not, the acts that conventionally signify ‘femininity,’ or ‘butchness’ or ‘flirting’…[it] focuses attention on the codes of signification that underlie particular performances…identity is not the origin but the effects of practices of signification” (Cameron and Kulick, 2003: 150).

Furthermore, “in a performative model…the conditions of recognition are the conditions of gender” (Plemons, 2017: 10). So then how can identity exist in this separate state? Is
performativity theory non-applicable here? I believe that the theory is still important to understanding the underlying structures that require an active push against the linking of presentation to identity and cause there to be a strong backlash against the idea of not assuming gender.

After all, despite this separation of identity and presentation, the forms that gender identity can take highly vary from culture to culture. As what femininity or masculinity look like, what it means to be male or female, varies, so too does the appearance and understanding of transgender and non-binary individuals. As the gender binary is reinforced through media, through society, through direct and indirect enforcing, so too are the forms that these separate identities can take. Most of Western society is performing a certain set of acts that signify masculinity or femininity, with no room for acknowledgement of genders that are not on the binary. This too is reinforced in academia, when such structures are so entrenched in the way that we think that divorcing ourselves from our preconceived categories has only begun recently.

This ties in to another question that is important to this discussion. Why has there been such a drastic increase in the number of people who are identifying with non-binary genders? Or, more accurately, such a drastic increase in acknowledgement that such people exist, even if there is still a strong push back from society. The truth is that gender nonconforming, trans, non-binary, and agender people have existed throughout history. The historical record is thin for many reasons: unintentional erasure through those individuals living all their lives as their gender identity and never being noted as trans, intentionally destroying records of those seen as other (for example the destruction of the Institute of Sex Research by the Nazis), as well as the fact
that much of our historical records of other cultures were filtered through a Western lens, and
missionaries not only recorded from their viewpoint but sought to conform their subjects to said
Western views. There have always been those that chose a performance that fit with their
identity, found an identity in an existing performance but had to hide it, or just knew they felt
other or wrong and had no way to figure out why.

This can be seen in the descriptions given by many participants, the feeling that what they were
told they should be based on their assigned gender was not accurate. Or the search through many
different labels and identities to figure out what works for them. This is also a very common
discussion within trans and non-binary groups. For some people there is dysphoria, the feeling
that something is wrong. For some there is euphoria, recognizing when something feels right.
What is different now, if anything, is the way that technology has connected us. To quote myself
earlier, “as gender is created by repetition of performance, it is open to interpretations, open to
mistakes, open to parodies, open to subversions, and open to change, although that change is not
easy to enact. This change must take place by still using the existent gender indexes, and
working within the system.” As a whole, we have the opportunity to interact with far more
people than we have historically. Therefore, just as much as we have more repetition, there is
also room for more variation. More performances to encounter. More actors to create
interpretations, mistakes, parodies, and change. This causes two major changes: first of all,
when someone feels othered, they are a far greater number of identities to try rather than just
feeling something is off. Secondly, many people are given a reason to question rather than just
to unconsciously repeat the registers of gender.
This can especially be seen in many conversations in groups that contain a large portion of non-
cis individuals. While I cannot give direct quotes for the examples I am about to give as these
discussions happened in private communities, these are all conversations I have had or seen
numerous times with many different people. One common theme is “if I had known that was
option when I was younger, I would have identified that way.” When explaining my own gender
as well as the meaning of many gender terms to others, I have had multiple adults realize that
they have felt gender dysphoria but had no words for what or why they were feeling. There are
also binary trans individuals who knew that their gender as assigned at birth was wrong and
therefore transitioned, who have said that they would now align more with being some non-
binary identity. Another common theme is “I never would have questioned had I not known
there were other options, but now that I have questioned it I have realized I am not cis.” I myself
fall into this theme. I knew I was not male, and that was as far as I questioned, until I learned
both that there were other options, and that non-binary did not have to perform androgyny.
While there are far more narratives than these two, variations on them are extremely common in
queer circles.

Therefore, increased visibility of these genders leads to far more individuals being able to have
these conversations with themselves. The system of norms is constantly being questioned, rather
than being unconsciously repeated. In addition, as stated earlier, anyone who identifies as any
non-cis gender—including not having a gender—has had to go through a self examination that
includes questioning and thinking about the social practices and codes of signification that make
up gender identity and performance. This then requires conscious performance and direct
decisions, even if the decision ends up being not to change anything in their own presentation.
Why, then, do the binaries reemerge in terms of non-binary gender presentation? Why are there no specifically gender neutral markers or signifiers of being non-binary? This leads back to that constantly performed and reinforced set of gender norms. In Western society, the gender binary has been constantly acted and reproduced. Being other than binary was treated as not possible, as a mistake that must be stopped before it could be reproduced. Again, much of the historical record concerning those who were not cis was intentionally destroyed. Which means that the current state of gender presentation is based on a binary that has been replicated both consciously and unconsciously to the point where deviations have been denounced. As such, when seeking to present something other than the binary there is nothing to reach for. The only gender indexes are feminine or masculine. Therefore currently the only thing to do is to mix them, to use signifiers of both masculinity and femininity by flaunting or subverting these binaries.

However, as the visibility of non-binary individuals increases, and as these genders gain validity, the same systems that allow this greater connection will also allow for any new signifiers to spread far more quickly. So while change may be slow and currently is still stuck working within the existent system, the avenues are there to allow for new gender indexes in a way that did not exist in the past. At a relative level, there is far more room to intentionally work to expand the system than there was before—or the derived upon answer may be to divorce gender presentation from performance. By working to erase the link between presentation and gender, this may be a case of the non-binary community effectively declaring “this system does not work for us, burn it to the ground.”
After all, as Jesse pointed out, when someone assumes another person’s gender based on presentation, they also map a set of gender ideologies onto that person. For some who are non-binary, seeking to be read as such is partly an attempt to separate themselves from that mapping of ideologies. For most who are non-binary, gendering based on perception leads to constantly being misgendered. Many binary trans people who either have no desire to “pass” or who attempt to pass but do not as of yet also find themselves having this issue. They may “only” suffer the mental distress of constant misgendering, or they may face very real discrimination and danger to their safety. Between these binary trans individuals and the increasing understanding of the multitude of non-binary genders, there is that increased push to try to get general society to understand that one can only know someone else’s gender if they tell you.

The participant observation analysis supports this. When in a place where everyone shared this understanding, gender performance faded in deference to identity performance. The linguistic patterns that emerged were about the establishing of expertise or sharing the floor with others who were equally understanding of the topic being discussed. This suggests that if at some point there is a widespread understanding that presentation is separate from gender identity, then much of the current need to use non-binary presentation in order to separate oneself from binary roles or structures will be unnecessary. Instead of the emergence of a new non-binary register, those who are non-binary may end up not performing gender at all. In addition, this would aid binary trans people who do not wish to have to conform to societal gender norms. This in turn may end up being reinforced by cisgender individuals who do also do not conform to that set of assumptions based on their gender.
In conclusion, this suggests that in the future gender performance—or the practices of signification to use Cameron and Kulick’s terminology—may look very different than it does today, but only if society as a whole can embrace this divorcing of presentation and identity. This does not seem to be a thing that will happen any time soon, more likely signifiers of non-binary identity will first be created and come into common practice. In the meantime, non-binary individuals make use of performativity, using understanding of what these gendered signifiers signal to society to attempt to create a presentation that will produce the desired recognition from the surrounding community, and therefore “create” the desired gender identity. But in groups where everyone understands that presentation is separate from gender identity, these practices may already be losing traction.
Index: Short Description of Participants

All participants: over 18, in the general Boston area. Most part of the geek community, all white, most educated (in college or with degrees). This is just gender, pronouns, and sexuality.

Intersex Non-binary:
Quinn: Cisgender genderfluid (since born both male and female by being intersex) Pronouns: herm/herm/herms (him and her mixed together). Sexuality: Sapiosexual. Is straight and gay with any cis person at the same time.

Trans Man:
Jaymes: Transmasculine demi-boy (part male, part not-male. The not male part is also not female). Pronouns: He/him/his. Sexuality: Queer

Trans Women:
Lily: Transgender woman. Trans and woman are both very important. Pronouns: she/her/hers. Sexuality: Primarily attracted to women, attracted to fem through androgyny, not attracted to butch or macho.


Jennie: on the feminine side, but lacking the something classical training and graces a cis woman would acquire growing up. Pronouns: she/her/hers. Sexuality: pure sexual attraction is more towards the classical feminine ideals, romantically attracted to intelligence and compassion and a person's chemistry with gender not mattering.


Carrah: female. Pronouns: she/her/hers. Sexuality: bisexual

**Assigned Male at Birth Non-Binary:**

Ben: Gender non-conforming, feels language is not really there yet for them. Pronouns: Still figuring it out. Sexuality: Prefers people who seem more feminine, though not exclusively

Zane: Genderqueer. Pronouns: he/him/his, or if wearing a skirt, she/her/hers. Sexuality: only interested in women.

Terry: Genderqueer/non-binary. Pronouns: they/them/ theirs. Sexuality: bisexual with some qualifications

John: Genderqueer. Pronouns: they/them/ theirs. Sexuality: gynosexual (attracted to femininity)

Jesse: Genderqueer. Pronouns: he/him/his. Sexuality: heterosexual

Assigned Female at Birth Non-Binary:

Sam: Genderfluid. Pronouns: he/him/his. Sexuality: Queer/pansexual


Adrian: Genderfluid. Pronouns: they/them/theirs. Sexuality: pansexual

Kay: third gender/non-binary Pronouns: he/him/his. Sexuality: homosexual is the most accurate, he is attracted to other afab third gender people.

Kelly: Her gender depends on the time asked. It usually cycles, sometimes to the extreme in either direction, sometimes it is in the middle, sometimes none of it applies. At time of interview it is somewhere in the middle, drawn towards female presenting because it makes life easier. Pronouns: she/her/hers, they/them/theirs. Sexuality: free for all.
Tal: Complicated. Rapidly genderfluid, androgyne. Pronouns: usually uses she/her/hers, but is equally comfortable with he/him/his. Sexuality: When identifying strongly as female, is a straight female. When identifying strongly as male, is a bisexual male.


Sal: Genderqueer. Somedays they feel more feminine, some days more masculine, more days fall in between. Pronouns: they/them/theirs, she/her/hers. Sexuality: still figuring it out, queer, somewhere on the ace spectrum.


Sandy: non-binary. Pronouns: they/them/theirs. Sexuality: bisexual

Cee: non-binary agender. Pronouns: they/them/theirs. Sexuality: Queerish. Mostly dates cis men, but is not comfortable being “the girl” in a relationship with a cis straight male.

**Participants from Participant Observation:**


Jason: Non-binary trans masculine amab. Pronouns: they/them/their he/him/his. Sexuality: pansexual

Saraya: Trans woman. Pronouns: she/her/hers. Sexuality: lesbian

Dani: Non-binary afab. Pronouns: unknown so defaulting to they/them/their. Sexuality: unknown
Appendix I

Transcriptions from Interviews

At least one transcription from each non-binary participant of at least a minute

Key

(xxxxx)=couldn’t make it out
x::=elongated
[xxx]=overlap
*xxx*=action
XXX=louder
Xxx=quieter
Xxx=emphasized
Short pause accompanied by raising of tone: xxx,
Longer pause: (# seconds)
Xxxxx=tone raise
Xxx=laughing while talking

Sam

I favor u:m queer particularly because

U:h

well it's kind of a political descriptor but also

u::m
even though I am pansexual u:h I really feel like the sexuality is fluid that even though I don't have like overall preference with things, like I go through phases where I'm like way more interested in like one gender than others like that changes from like one thing to another every few years that feels like, so like right now I am mostly interested in men, but that has definitely not always been the case, u::m, and yea::h
*laughs*
So I feel queer kind of describes the fluidity of it

Ben
well,
so when I talk about it with people more
you know
I I I sort of talk about that uncertainty because that's really where I am, uh
I think when I was little I probably had a clearer idea that I just wanted to be female
A:::nd
but now that I'm older I'm you know I feel like there's maybe benefits to all types of gender and so I don't um
I don't have a really good way of like picking it out
Um so I certainly feel like I'm retaining some masculine characteristics and taking some feminine ones uh
Bu:t
Zane

So I normally think of actively presenting as female as if I’m wearing a skirt or a dress or something like that,

Like I mean right now I’m sort of ambiguous cause like I’m wearing this hoodie thing that’s sort of culturally female but not like dramatically so and I’m wearing I’m wearing pants that are technically women’s pants but not obviously so

U::m

And I’m like y’know I’m not wearing falsies or anything um

So I wouldn’t I wouldn’t really think of this like actively presenting female but more of like (2)

You know more more intermediate like where as

You know if I’m I’m like often I’m just wearing jeans and a teeshirt and I don’t really feel like I’m presenting female actively at all you know maybe a lttle and you know I’m wearing my my necklace that’s more

Like I feel that there’s just a lot of shades of grey

Sky

I think people have been fairly hesitant to tell me to do things, um but I know and a lot of my trans friends know that you know I would be

I guess taken a lot more seriously if I tried very hard to look more androgynous
Like

I’m wearing **makeup**, I don’t wear a binder any more and I feel like if I did those two **things** or did **something else** to **make myself look more like a dude** like something would magically fall into place

Um

(1)

but I know I’ve also had um a couple partners who told me you know maybe you should talk more **decisively** or you know more **loudly** or you know people would pay attention to you: but if you mu:mble

e:::h

um

So I guess like you know people have **sugge:ste:d** speaking more clearly and you know not

(1.5)

uh like I tend to: kind o:f soften the blow of something if I:’m saying something critical and um

(1)

like I’m learning to be more direct **because of this**.

u:m which is hard

*laughs*

um and I think that is also a very gendered thing


**Terry**

16:40-17:30

So I have so:metimes descri::bed that my ambition is to be a nineteen fifties housewife
*laughs*

U:::m I want to stay at home and take care of the kids while Melissa my wife goes off and earns the paycheck

Um I mean I have, that’s, not,

(2)

The entire complete everything but that’s a good generalization

U:::m I:::::

(4)

20-23:20 (note, S=Sharone)

T: Other people see them

(2)

i:::s

(2)

Is very important u:::m

In relation to what pronouns I use for them or what

U:::m

(3)

How people perceive them when they see them by their appearance so what they look like

S: [mmhmmm]

T: U:::m

(2)

A:::nd
That had been something that I’ve thought wasn’t important to me, that really mostly what I care about was,

what in my mind I see myself and

how

other people what other people think of me isn’t important so I’m just going to

act however the hell I feel like acting (xxx)

and present whatever feels like me without any labels on that other than [gives full name]

u::h

a::nd

So I’ve been seeing

That it is really important for some other people that are my friends how other people perceive them and that they present so that people will perceive them a certain way a::nd

I’ve been thinking more
if I want to also do that sort of thing and present
specifically in a way that will make people realize that I’m not cisgender
I:: m genderqueer that I don’t fall into these nice neat categories
(2.5)
and there a bunch of different ways that
S: [mhmm]
Can you get a little bit more specific, you’ve
T: [right]
S: been very general and-
T: [yeah] I’ve been very
I’m good at being general *laughs*
I’m good at being general I’m not so good at specific
U::m
*speeds up* If I’m specific about something then I could be wrong and that would be horrible

Ink
one is the narrative of a die
Everyone is familiar with a six-sided die, some of us who are gamers are familiar with dies of other size
*gestures to a 20 sided die e sees on the table*

there we go

um and, with a die all the states are coexistent at any given point but only one is pointing upwards at any given time

And that's kinda how I feel about my gender in that I have multiple discrete gender states um and they're all part of me continuously but only one is pointing up at any given point

U:m I choose this metaphor instead of saying genderfluid because there's no point at which there is a fluidity to the gender, that is what it appears to the outside, from somebody else looking in, um who sees things changing and therefore perceives it as being fluid I do not actually perceive myself as being fluid

U:m or really even feel the the changes it's just about you know paying attention to myself more and my behavior and how I'm thinking of myself and that's how I know

John

*gesturing with hands throughout the entire part*

So during the: day I’m I’m working at my day job I tend to present as masculine

Uh and I I do that mainly because I’ve been working here far longer than I’ve considered myself genderqueer

I’ve always as manual uh as masculine and it’s relatively easy to do so:

U:m I do tend to mix clothing to a degree, but always in a very like straight workplace wa:y

U::m so people don’t really double guess it you know people al- I’m almost always identified as male it’s very rare that anyone would ask me one way or another

U:m uh
So I mean I don’t really feel like I’m trying to present as masculine though I’m just leaning more towards conservative elements in my wardrobe that I think are work appropriate anyway like I purposely don't wear skirts, but I am wearing a little bit of makeup right now, which I tend to do sometimes, Uh I have female pants that I’ll wear to work that look nice, Uhm but I just don’t go out of the way to bring up the question

Adrian

In the ways that I have observed of presentation is that it’s very very hard to present off of a linear gender spectrum So on one end you have masculine and one end you have feminine and it’s very very hard to present off of that Um because that’s not how society is wired society and the ways because the whole way that I try to present and figure out how I’m going to present is using the concept of looking glass self I imagine how other people will react to me being whatever, and then I change how I do based on what reaction I want them to have, Um so it’s very very hard to present off of what they perceive, what the traditional gender spectrum looks like Um
because they’re just

(1)

like I don’t even know what that would look like because the::
culture that I’ve been raised in doesn’t have that
so you have the spectrum from masculine to feminine of one end being skirts dresses tights and
makeup, and the other being beard flannel jeans and timberlands

(8)

and, yeah trying to navigate finding somewhere along there that makes me feel comfortable,
makes me feel comfortable, is pretty easy it’s just like what clothes do I fee:l comfortable in
what clothes can I look at myself in the mirror and not cringe
um
but then to others that doesn’t always translate exactly the way I want it to because I am female
bodied,
because I have the boobs,

um

unless those are completely bound flat people still pick up on that and read me as feminine no
matter what else I do

Kay

So for me I think my presentation is

I:: tend to wear

U::m

I tend to present visually I think as androgynous is what is what I aim for
Um::

For me that means doing a lot of things that would be associated with say trying to pass as a guy um I wear binders sometimes, I tend to wear what people would consider more traditionally masculine clothing, Um I work at a law office so like I wear I wear a business suit u:m you know like shirt sh you know like dress slacks with a belt tucked into the pants the::: you know the um tie things like this where: what’s considered masculine clothing um I tend not to do um skirts or dresses,

U::m

And yet at the same time

Like

I like having my hair long I like long hair and I think that’s one of the things the fact that I don’t cut my hair short usually means that I I’m frankly not going to pass as straight up male and I know that and I’m kind of fine with that because I don’t consider myself male

Um

Granted I don’t pass as third gender because no one knows what the hell that is but you know I do what I can

You know if I look like an elf from Lord of the Rings I’m doing it right so like

If I look like a male elf from Lord of the Rings I’m doing it right

Jesse

One of the things that is really interesting for me there is that

U:m
For as much as I was on the one hand raised in a very gendered environment I was also pretty unaware of gender growing up.

Um

And I was primarily parented by my mother my dad was getting a PhD and then trying to get tenure and was really not around much for the first like ten fifteen years of my life.

Um

And we were a very introverted family we didn’t socialize much and so like in a lot of ways my mother was like the adult role that I had and I was completely unaware that I was not “supposed” to emulate her because we were different genders and I was just like no this is my adult role model that’s clearly the way an adult human is supposed to be.

Um and so I picked up a lot of her speech patterns um

I’m trying to think of a good example now I know I have learned in adulthood um that I have picked up some of those very stereotypically feminine speech patterns um

(2.5)

I’m trying to think what they are

Kelly

Oh I present masculine

Unless I’m nervous in which case I don’t

Sharone: [so]

Kelly: [like] I’m socialized female so when I’m nervous I get quieter and more

(3)
I don’t want to say deferential because I don’t feel like that’s a thing that applies to me but it looks that from the outside,

When

When I’m comfortable I’m very authoritative
I’m very direct
And a little snarky

*laughs*

u:m

(2)
does that answer that question

Tal

if you dropped me into a into my favorite fictional world, or holodeck or something and said here's a magic wand you can make the world whatever you want it to be uh I would be a Betan Hermaphrodite from the Vorkosigan series

*laughs*

uh

which is to say
it's a fictional universe in which there are genetically engineered true hermaphrodites

That's that's that
It's just you are both male and female and they tend to be sort of androgynous in appearance, and

U:h
dress according to what they feel like that given day
And that's the closest parallel I have found to how I feel **internally** hermaphrodite is a **very** bad word in large swaths of the transgender community which pisses me **off** like I understand the history of it and why they get upset by it, but it annoys me that I can't identify that way without pissing them off

So:: the closest parallel I've found in terms of the "modern gender theory thing" is "androgy::ne" which I don’t

Androgyne is the (xxxxxxx) I have no idea how to pronounce it which is

*gestures with hands*

approximately the equivalent

u:::m

but mostly I go by genderqueer cause it just makes life **easier**

---

**Riley**

So u::m

I suppose I’m technically in the computer science club but I sort of hate it because it’s

*sighs*

for fuck boys basically

u::m

am I allowed to say that on [the]

Sharone:         [yeah]

Riley:           okay

U:m the::res a **member** of the student court
U:::m
Which is part of the student government there
U:::m
And that process helped me to realize
U:m
How much I’m actually not a fan of the school and the administration and the staff and so I
won’t be doing that again I don’t think u:m
Yea:h
I’m looking for other schools but it’s really hard because it’s really important to me that I have
that there’s a good computer science program, small classes, and it’s not too expensive
And that’s hard to get all three of those
I mean it’s hard to get small classes and not expensive in the first place

Taylor
Yeah I have felt a lot of that
So my best friend and I actually came out as agender at the same time which was kind of funny
And
They kind of take it I guess a little bit more to the extreme than I feel I do where they: got a
binder before I did and they feel a lot more affected when they are misgendered than I do
So: sometimes I feel like they kind of push a little bit more of the needing to be androgynous on
me than:n
I’m not going to say than I’m comfortable with because that is how I’m comfortable but I guess
it’s not as important to me
So it’s just interesting to see that kind of being pushed and because I see that also pushed a lot on like tumblr and other spaces where like that’s the way you know you’re “supposed to” present, it kind of you know made me question myself for a while like Am I not you know non-binary does that does the fact that I’m okay with you know using shes every once in awhile for people who don’t know like does that you know make me less valid it’s it was you know a little unexpected to get that and by the same token my parents know about this this is not something they really get necessarily they’re not unsupportive of it but my mom definitely And my dad too both you know get confused about why I stopped wearing makeup even though I never wore it to begin with and the they know how I present they know you know who I am but they also say be careful when going on job interviews and things like that and they kind of tell me I sometimes have to conform and play the game a little bit in order to you know protect myself

Sal

I feel like the whole well I don’t know
Like I don’t I don’t agree with the idea that non-binary is masculine clothing like I think non-binary can be wearing dresses absolutely that’s just not who I am so like I haven’t gone along with it but I also haven’t like thrown it over my shoulder or anything
But yeah I don’t know if I can think of any like specifically

Pat

A lot of my focus is on aesthetics because that’s really the most that I can do to like openly transition or change

Like I I’m not

(1)

I mean I aesthetically bind my chest I mean I’m not going to get top surgery any time soon and I feel like right now you’ve heard people who are female to neutral like just getting top surgery is still confusing to people

Um

Cause like my ideal like body I guess would be kind of like a Ken doll

You know like I’m fine with my genitalia I just don’t really want breasts

Um

And then like I mean I just am not gonna be able to go on testosterone ever because of just like health issues and stuff it’s just not something that I’m going to be able to do::

So I just kind of have to like

(2)

make those changes on my own rather than doing anything hormonally

203
so

A lot of my focus is on outside appearance because that’s what people are judging me on first

That’s why I get misgendered a lo:t

(2)
because I still do carry on a feminine appearance at first because that’s kind of all I’m

those are the tools I’m working with

Sandy

So this one time um this is a weird story but this one time my sister told me:

U::m

She went to like to this flea market with her friend and she bought a gun

A::nd

They were like driving in a car

A::nd she was like they had like a sunroof or whatever cause he was like a really rich ki:d

So and then like she like was waving the gun out of the top of the car and then like a cop drove

by but they did not pull her over

So that’s a story

Like this came to my mind I don’t know why but

She’s she’s fun

Cee

I actually had a conversation with someone who:

someone asked me if I were interested in coming to a u:m
trans and genderqueer group at Fenway Health

but I said you know well will is it okay if I go I mean I I present female

And

(1)

she said yes it's okay that you go it doesn't matter if people see you as female

*laughs*

that's not what you know that's not the question

but

I really spent a very long time thinking that oh well to be anything you know other than female I would have to somehow manage to present androgynously

And I would love to present androgynously my breasts are weird

they've been weird since I was 13 and they first stuck out from my chest enough to touch the rest of my body before the rest of my chest did

(2.5)

but major surgery's a problem

and nerve issues are a thing

so:
you know a lot of us joke about um oh it would be so nice if we could just kind of take off the extra bustage that we don't want and give it to someone else or put them in the closet the way various science fiction comedy stories have have posited um and it would be so nice

But I can’t
Appendix II

Transcriptions from Participant Observation

Key

(xxxxx) = couldn’t make it out

(words) = description of what would be identifying information and therefore is removed

x:: = elongated

[xxx] = overlap

*xxx* = action

XXX = louder

Xxx = quieter

Xxx = emphasized

Xxx = sing-song

Short pause accompanied by raising of tone: xxx,

Longer pause: (# seconds)

Xxxxx = tone raise

Xxx = laughing while talking

Participant Observation number 1

Nicky (N)
Kelly (K)
Jordan (Jo)
First 5 minutes and ten second of the gathering, once Dani has entered

1 N: So. Is anyone partial to any of the games.

2 S: I vote Thunderstone I brought [it]

3 Jo: [I totally] vote Sentinels

4 Ja: You made Sentinels sound really good

5 Jo: It’s so much fun it’s my favorite table[top]

6 S: [(xxxxxxxxxxxx)]

7 D: [I mean it’s the only] one here that I’ve played, so

8 S: (xxx[xxxxxxx])

9 D: [I wouldn’t] mind playing a different one

10 N: I’m also totally willing to run a: game or help facilitate a game cause I’m the one who owns Sentinels, [cause it is a five person] yeah]

11 S: [You’re gonna have you’re gonna have to teach me]

12 N: It is um up to five people but I would easily run the villain and the environment, um the nice thing about it being co-op is that means that if anyone’s not sure about it you can always ask everyone else

13 S: This is valid

14 Jo: Yes
N: Yup. Um [best part about it]

Jo: [like I said]

N: being co-op is that it is mostly a game of follow the cards
so if you’re used to other card games *gestures* um it is pretty easy to pick up. Um
Jordan and I are on a quest right now to slowly make it through every single villain, every
single environment, and I at least to play every single hero

D: Wo::w

S: [Wow]

N: [Um, the] order alpha[betically um]

S: [It’s a quest!] is it an epic quest?

N: [It is an epic quest]

Jo: [It is an epic quest]

S: Okay

N: I think I said so on Facebook even

Jo: You might have, [usually I’m really good at remembering]

S: [I actually (xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)]

Jo: people’s exact wording but
this one I just did not pay enough attention. U:::h what the [heck do I want]

N: [That’s cause you] were part
of it. You don’t [have to (xxxxxxxxxxx)]

S: [Wait a minute are those] dragon wings? (2) [on your clips]

Jo: [bat wings]

S: Bat wings? Okay
Jo: Yup just the singular. Uh I have an affinity for vampires and I picked this up at a steampunk festival one year and it was like I have to have this

?: There you go:

Jo: Definitely

D: Can I get everybody’s names

N: Right

D: *laughs*

S: Wait oh that’s right

N: Right because you came in [last]

S: [Alright]

(8 seconds of everyone giving their names)

D: Thank you *laughs*

K: I’m a little bit hard of hearing, Can I get yours one more time?

D: *has just taken bite, gestures towards mouth*

K: Sure, you can take a moment

N: *laughs*

S: Stop chewing and say your name

D: *swallows* Dani

K: *nods* Cool. Thank you

S: Oh my goodness. I like Dani. Is it like (spells it out)

D: (Corrects spelling, gives example of name)

S: I love it

N: *examining a Star Wars shaped cheese snack* I guess this is a [(xxxx)?]
54  S:  [Wait!] Is that like the definition of (example of name)?

55  D:  It’s a purely like man’s name in (country)

56  S:  Oh man’s name like [I wasn’t sure if it was translated into (language) from (definition)

57  D:  [that’s not being used anymore]

58  N:  *still examining cheese snack* I think what you mean

59  D:  *laughs*

60  N:  *gestures to cheese snack* This is supposed to be BB-8, what

61  D:  Oh

62  S:  So BB-8 maybe?

63  D:  That’s creative

64  N:  It’s supposed to be BB-8!

65  D:  [laughs]

66  N:  [yea::h] I mean you can, I completely wouldn’t know if I hadn’t been looking at what each one is supposed to be::. *holding up snacks as they say each one* BB-8, Um Millenium Falcon,

67  S:  [Su::re?]  

68  N:  [Sure]

69  K:  [*starts laughing loudly*]

70  S:  [(xxxxxxxxxxxxx) on the grou:nd] You

71  N:  Um Tie-fighter, that looks the mo::st

72  S:  That looks tie-fighterish
N: And *looks through snacks* no that’s another BB-8 I don’t think they have a stormtrooper

D: These can also just be like viruses

N: They look way more like viruses, you’re [right]

D: [*laughs*]

(4)

N: Alright

S: *to Jason* Did you make that scarf yourself?

Ja: [No:::]

Jo: (*quietly to themselves* [I think] I’ll get the onion rings *passes phone to Nicky*

N: Okay, [let’s see what I can eat]

S: [I like scarves] I did not wear one tonight but I like scarves

Ja: Someone left it, and I took advantage [*laughs*]

S: Did you acquire it?

Ja: Yes

S: That’s how rogues say it, acquired

Ja: [*laughs*]

S: [*laughs*]

?: It’s stealing

Ja: I don’t really know what a rogue is

S: Oh we were talking earlier, you hadn’t been here yet. Um. I said, I was, that’s why I did the cheese I said I’m good cause I’m a rogue [(xxxxx)]

Ja: [I kinda] got it what it
93 Ja: [meant but like]

94 S: [like thief] you [know]

95 Ja: [o::h]

96 S: like sneaky, stealthy

97 N: Yeah

98 S: Like dexterous-

99 N: We were referring to ourselves as gaming [classes]

100 S: [yeah] gaming classes

101 Ja:I’m like very new to it

102 S: There’s ro:uges, there’s fighters, there’s rangers, there’s, ba::rds

103 Ja: uhhuh

104 N: *ordering food on phone* I think I actually found [something ]

105 S: [ba::rds,] bards are like, they play [music and inspire their] [their their their co- party members cause you have]

106 N: *handing phone back to Kelly* [Alright, (xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx) that thing]

107 S: Rogues [are like the ones]

108 N: [(xxxx) side]

109 S: who make sure the traps don’t go off and kill everyone

110 N: mmhmm

111 S: They unlock all the treasures when they’re found and [(xxxxxx) buying things]

112 N: [Alright, there’s a bard in] here, is there a rogue in here

113 S: U::::h

114 N: I think the rogues are all the are villains [mostly]
115 Jo: [No I think] I think some of I think Guise could be qualified as a rogue

116 S: Well see the thing is-

117 N: Guise is Deadpool.

118 S: Oh-

119 N: Straight out

120 S: Really?

121 Jo: Yeah [he’s just straight] up Deadpool cause-

122 N: [Oh god yes]

123 S: -I’m currently playing Elder Scrolls online and I’m playing Nightblade. Oh my god. So many (xxxx)

124 N: So I’m move these out of the way

125 Jo: Good idea

126 N: So it seems like the primary vote was Sentinels?

127 ?: [yeah]

128 S: [I’m] totally down with learning a new [game]

129 Jo: [Yup]

130 N: [Okay,] awesome. So::

131 Jo: [Do you want me to control either the villain or the environment?]

132 D: [(Saying something to Kelly in the background)]

133 N: I’ll actually do both

134 Jo: You’ll do both

135 K: [(responding to Dani in background)]
136 N: [Cause I’m gonna not play]

137 Jo: [Oh you’re not gonna play]

138 D: [Sorry is there a (xxxx to Kelly in background)]

139 N: [Which is actually (xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)]

140 K: [(responding to Dani xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)]

141 Ja: [Can you pass the trashcan?]

142 S: [pass the trashcan]

143 K: [these are technically forks]

144 N: [(xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)]

145 S: I don’t- [Oh there it is, underneath (xxxxxxx)]

146 N: [(something about setting up the game)]

147 S: Passing

148 N: So::: a few things that will be needed-

149 S: It comes with a comic book?

150 N: Well this is the descriptions. There are comics for this, but this is not, this is

   [the description]

151 S: [oh this is not] they just make it look like a comic book

152 N: Yeah and um for those of you who haven’t played, you’ll want the description of the turn

   order, which is on the back of that
Participant Observation number 2

Nicky (N)
Kelly (K)
Lily (L)
Cee (C)

Video starts mid conversation about a convention that Cee and Nicky are going to.

This is the first 5 minutes of the recording

1  L:  Recall it being Ma:::rch that
2  C:  February [(xxxxxxxxxx)]
3  N:  [Yeah]
4  L:  [(xxxxxxxxx)]
5  N:  It used to be March and I preferred it March and now it’s [earlier] but ce la vie
6  C:  [mmhmm]
7  L:  (xxxxx)
8  C:  (xxxxx)
9  N:  Yup. It’s what can they schedule so
10 L:  So which weekend is it
11 N:  Um
12 C:  U:::m

(4)
13 N: The link I need (xxxxxxxxxxxxx)
14 C: Is it I forget if it’s the week after Valentines day or two weeks after Valentines day
(4)
15 L: You know with lets see some years
16 C: I think it might be the very last weekend in February
17 N: It might be, I don’t remember. I should know considering I talked scheduling over when
we wanted to get things out for (LARP name) especially
18 C: I mean I could check
19 L: Right
20 N: But yeah
21 L: That might explain the total confusion then
22 N: *looking up date on their ipad* I mean at this point a lot of the games are full
23 C: mmmmm
24 N: and most of them will probably fill tonight cause this is, this is open sign ups, right?
25 C: ##, January ## to ##
26 L: Oh January okay
27 C: Sorry, February I mean February, the week after Valentines day
28 L: (xxxxx) That probably conflicts with (Convention 2) the board gaming convention
although I haven’t checked what dates that is this year
29 N: *checking something on phone, hums to themself* yeah
30 L: Yeah, that’s that’s really more my scene except for the fact it’s now moved to a place
that’s nearly impossible for me to get to
31 C: [oh no]
N: [where] is it
L: (City 1)
C: E: w
N: I don’t know where that is
C: Is it even possible to get to (City 1) without a car?
L: Nope
C: Yeah. I’m glad that [(xxxxxx)]
N: [(I’m not sure] how you get to I don’t know how you get to (Convention 1) without a car
C: Getting to (Convention 1) without a car is fine, getting home from (Convention 1) is a problem, u: m becau: se u: h getting there you can take the:: um you can take the:: T out all the way to (City 2). It’s the last stop. Um and then you can if you’re staying at the hotel you can get a (xxxx) shuttle bus u:: h
N: mmhmm
L: Actually that’s the next to last [stop]
C: [getting]
L: (T station) is the last stop
C: That’s true. U:: m but u:: h
L: It the trains don’t run there on weekends [I’ve never been there]
C: [exactly]
N: [o::: h]
L:
C: [so you can get there on Thursday or Friday just fine]
[okay so it’s so it’s so it’s another] event at the (Hotel) now

Indeed

Yu::p

I’ll be spending a lo::t of time at the (Hotel) in February, because um (Convention 3) is first weekend and [I’m going there (xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)]

[Right. Yes the the thing that took over the niche] of (Convention 4] used to [have]

[right]

Until it until it (xxxxx) moved to August followed by not happening

(xxxxxx)[(saying something to themselves)]

Thou:::gh [I gather I gather next year] the (Convention 4) people are trying something new

mmm? I always thought that it was a terrible idea that they tried to make a four day con. It’s awful as a vendor it’s -

I mea:n

You have to take extra time off work if you have a day job [(xxxxxxxxxxxxx)]

[I think (convention 5)] is a four day but it’s [over]

[(con 5)] is a four day con with a Monday, not with a Thursday

Oh go::sh

yeah [no one]

[that] yeah

yeah [(xxxxx)]
but but] but it was great for the attendees because it was another day to go do
[stuff]

[except] no one much showed up on Thursday, except hard core uh (xxx) gamers which
was [fine but (xxxxxxxxx)]

[this is so hard to open]

nothing going on for the (xxx) side of folks

But I know it as a vendor and it was it was impossible for a vendor. And it would be even
worse now that apparently (City 3) has u::h instituted so::me tenacious policy where
they’re requiring any temporary vendors to pay them 50 dollars a day to vend

E:w that’s unpleasant

So:: u::m so even when we decided to give it one go for (Convention 6) but it basically
triples your vending fee

The one time I did (Convention 5) I wanna say it was 100 per table but I’ve heard it’s
shot up since then

It’s no, [I don’t think it’s]

[I I don’t know] it was one year and I

It’s still about a hundred per table

What has gone up is the hotel costs

That’s true

And it’s very it’s hard to get the main space in (Convention 5), it’s always
oversubscribed, (xxxx)

I uh the one year I did it I shared a table
85 C: yeah [that’s what I do]
86 N: [it worked well]
Participant Observation number 3

Nicky (N)
Saraya (S)
Adrian (A)
Kelly (K)
Ink (I)

This is 2 minutes 15 seconds into the video, as the topic of video games comes up, through 4: 51

1 S: I’m currently playing Elder Scrolls Online

2 I: Yeah well I don’t play that, I don’t [play Zelda I mean (xxxxxxx) horrible]

3 S: [(xxxx) friends, my character’s 16th level] now

4 I: It’s more my thing

5 N: I missed the Overwatch free weekend, one of my partners [(xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)]

6 S: [Oh I missed it too:::] is trying to

7 N: see if I wanted to play with them but I just did not have the energy

8 I: (xxxx)

9 N: Zombie Dice literally is-

10 S: I watched Archer instead

11 A: I haven’t seen that yet
I: Oh my gosh see it

I: I spent last night watching all the episodes of Epic NPC Man again

N: *looking at a board game* [this is a different version than the one I know]

S: [Epic NPC man]

I: [Okay, so it’s a youtube thing] Um where they’re making fun of various games by like live action acting out all the random funny glitches and things that go wrong in games, as if like, so it’s written from the point of view of the NPC in the village [as like]

N: [oh my gosh]

I: the players come along in a World of Warcraft type thing

S: [*sound effect*]

N: [That sounds amazing]

I: But they like it was like special effects but it’s written from the point of view of the NPC as various ridiculous glitches and funny things happen that as they actually happen in the game

S: Oh okay

I: Like, Don’t kick the chicken, please I’m warning you don’t kick [the chicken]

N: [*laughs*]

I: And of course, he kicks the chicken and the whole town comes and kills him but like you can see watch this as [like the town]

S: [that’s hilarious]
I: yeah and it’s all live action. So: it’s really funny,
like, you know, there’s like a glitch and the guy ends up in the tree and then he ends up in
the pond and then he ends up on the roof and then he ends up sideways cause he’s like
 glitching out
S: oh that’s horrible
A: How do they do that live action?
I: They use special effects
A: Oh okay
I: They just like use bluescreen like it’s they show you the the out takes for this and it’s so
it’s it’s all just filmed in this little it’s not like um it’s kind of like it’s uh it’s a
(xxxxxxxx) kind of site, they just like rented it, and so the guy’s just standing in front of
like a thatched roof cottage and then they have people walk by and do various things and
the rest of it is just really basic special effects with like hold up the blue screen monitor
and like do it *laughs* and he’s like
S: I was an adventurer like you: til I took an arrow to the knee::
N: [this reminds me of something]
I: and he’s aware that like it doesn’t make sense like he kicks a rat and it turns into a
chair and he’s like this makes no sense at all cause the rat dropped like a chair for loot
and he’s like why:::
S: How did a rat drop a chair
I: *laughs*
N: Right
S: My old favorite was, you could it was a cheat for Diablo, the first Diablo
40 I: Yeah

41 S: You would have nine of a potion and if you had the tenth it would fall out so you
basically morphed more

42 I: Yeah

43 S: And so you’d just be like, now another one. Now another one. Now another one. So
it’s cheap

44 I: Yeah

45 S: But it was a thing they never fixed

Skipping a few minutes to 6:25 transcription goes through 10:09

46 N: Strangely this reminds me of a game I actually desperately want to play but keep failing
to actually get my hands on

47 S: Which one is that

48 N: But I don’t know why, it’s called Elsinore. And [it takes place]

49 I: [never heard of it]

50 N: I learned about this at

Pax East.

51 I: Okay

52 N: It takes place in in [the world of Hamlet]

53 S: [is it a video game?]

54 N: Yeah.

55 I: Like Shakespeare Ham[let]
[Shakes]peare Hamlet. And you play as Ophelia, and your quest

[as playing as Ophelia]

I: [*laughs* okay]

A: Is to fuck shit up?

N: Is to stop the tragedy from happening. But you’re a side character, you can’t directly

interfere with the plot in the same way. So you have to change other people’s actions.

And so it’s just like there’s rewinding and there’s you know you go through and you see

what changing what where’s this one person walks does to the end story. And you

interact with people and you just change what they do in order to try to:


S: So that would be like [sneak sneak sneak] thwoop that guy’s dead

N: [stop the tragedy]

S: don’t have to worry

about him now

I: [*laughs*]

N: [*laughs*] but you know the whole [point is to try to, yeah]

A: [(xxxxxxxxxxxxxx)]

N: the whole point is to try to

[make it so that nobody]

S: [(xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)]

N: you know the tragedy doesn’t happen so people don’t die

S: They didn’t have forensics back then

I: So and it’s a [video game ]

A: [they(xxxx)]
72 N: Yeah, I didn’t get a chance to play the demo cause I spent all of Pax East demoing Fluxx [and]
73 S: [uch]
74 N: a few other games
75 I: The game that u::m I know someone who’s really really into now is a Hyper Light Drifter, u:m it’s a fairly simple game in terms of graphics, and it ha::s almost no dialogue whatsoever so you have to figure out what’s going on from the images on the screen
76 S: That sounds weird
77 I: And it is really weird but people are like this game is the most amazing thing. Like, people are just like raving about it and I know someone who’s like obsessed with it now. So. I wanna play it,
78 S: What game system is it on Steam or
79 I: U:m it’s on PC
80 S: I don’t do PC games
81 I: PC or Mac
82 S: I just do xbox one, that that variation that
83 N: I have an old 360 [a:::nd] I have Steam
84 S: [I hate that it’s old now]
85 S: I feel weird that it’s old now. I have my original, and my one of my partners she accidentally broke it
86 I: oh no
87 S: So so the the [the the the tray]
88 N: [I managed to red ring mine]
The disk tray. I have aphasia too that’s one of my things. Um the disk tray would sometimes be like stick, it would literally not come out so you’d have to like pop a knife in, hit the button at the right time, almost like a lockpick.

A: okay

S: We’ll she:: managed to not do it right while I was sleeping. She’s like honey I’m sorry I broke your game and I’m like that’s an origina::l it was doing fi::ne it didn’t have the red eye of death

N: Mine red ringed

S: Yeah it didn't have the red ring of death

K: We’re going to go sound proof our office,

N: Okay

K: So we won’t be able to hear you and you won’t be able to hear us. If you need anything, call Jesse

N: Awesome

K: Cool

S: Um so you know

A: I don’t really do any kind of video gaming

S: I do both, I get my board game, like I have a board game group that like I meet up with on Wednesdays

N: Nice

S: It’s at of all places the u::m what’s that name, Wegmans, it’s at Wegmans

A: It’s at Wegmans?

S: The second floor is all tables so you can just chill out there
106 I: Yeah there’s a Wegmans is that like (City) is that the one

107 S: (City)

108 I: Yeah (City)

109 A: Oh really I that’s where my mom goes for her I go to the Market Basket my mom shops at the Wegmans

110 S: Wegmans is pretty awesome
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