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"I Want to Be Who I Am": Stories of Rejecting Binary Gender

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"I Want to Be Who I Am":

Stories of Rejecting Binary Gender

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Sociology
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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Date of Approval:
June 29, 2018

Keywords: queer, non binary, narrative, genderqueer

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ABSTRACT

Historically, in academic literature—sociological and otherwise—surrounding the daily lives of LGBT+ people, people who reject binary gender are very marginally represented. In this study, I specifically seek to understand the way my participants articulate their sense of their gender identities through the stories they tell of their experiences. This study attempts to answer the following questions: What are the stories of gender identity construction for people who reject binary gender? How do they understand the ways they are held accountable to binary gender in the day-to-day? How do they perceive and make meaning of gender in their lives? Through ten in-depth interviews with participants accessed through online groups and snowball sampling, this project reinforces gender surveillance and accountability theories such as West and Zimmerman's. Although participants largely identified the root of their feelings about gender as within their selves, the stories they told about their experiences of gender revealed that interactions with others were important and thus have a large effect on their lives. This indicates that these interactions with others where participants are held accountable to binary gender do have an impact on the ways they construct their gender and selves but because this has been such a consistent part of their lives, participants perceive this as innate to their selves and private feelings.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, in academic literature—sociological and otherwise—surrounding the daily lives of LGBT+ people, people who reject binary gender are very marginally represented. According to Clare Howell (Nestle, Howell, and Wilchins 2002:19), people who reject binary gender "express their gender in ways that defy societal norms and feel the weight of cultural pressure to conform, to 'act their proper gender.'" In other words, people who reject binary gender do not want to be categorized into the binary of what is traditionally heteronormatively known as man/woman. It is much easier to find studies that do examine daily experiences of LGBT+ people but that often focus on cisgender women and men or gender-conforming transgender individuals. Even then, these studies generally do not incorporate a narrative analysis on the stories of gender identity construction. Further, of those studies that do focus on people who reject binary gender, a small amount of those apply a personal narrative or narrative identity approach (Somers 1994; Mason-Shrock 1996; Klein et al. 2005; Loseke 2007; VanOra and Ouellette 2009). But as the visibility of people who reject binary gender begins to increase worldwide and cultural narratives about what it means to reject binary gender continue to circulate, these individuals have to consider these wider narratives to create their own personal stories, or their selfhood (Loseke 2007). In this study, I seek to understand the way my participants articulate their sense of their gender identities through the stories they tell of their experiences.

To understand deeper what one may mean by rejecting binary gender, it must be understood that typically to conform to it is to abide by traditional, stereotyped, and

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heteronormative forms of gender regardless of gender assigned at birth. Male = masculinity =

desires females and female = femininity = desires males (Crawley and Broad 2008:548) are the

essential and binary identities of gender to move away from. Binaries of gender may exist in a

plethora of ways such as racial binaries of gender or binaries of marriage attitudes (Eng,

Halberstam, and Muñoz 2005). This study seeks to understand how individuals perceive their

refusal of binary gender and how this refusal has manifested in their lives.

LITERATURE

Queer Theory

"Queer" has a long history most publicly from 1980s HIV/AIDS activism, a movement

rooted in the institutionalized discrimination against gays and lesbians. Because HIV/AIDS

disproportionately impacted the gay male community, there was an urgent need to rethink LGBT

politics. By adopting the word "queer" as a new political identity that necessarily opposes

homophobic institutions, activists were able to displace the oppressive logic of healthcare

injustice. Queer politics allowed gays and lesbians to resist normative understandings of

sexuality and heteronormativity that threatened their lives. Queer represented the breaking of

normative social structures and thus new ways of being (Edelman 1994:111, Jagose 1996:95).

Queer was adopted to challenge the notion of a stable identity (i.e., "gay" as essential) because of

its inability to benefit those it claims to represent. Historically, normative identities were used as

dominant discourses to stigmatize and control (Jagose 1996:96; Crawley and Broad 2008:555).

The same heteronormative discourses were used during the AIDS crisis that targeted the lives

and health of gay men. To deconstruct stable identities was and continues to be difficult, as

binary gender categories seem so woven into everyday life. But, as Butler points out (1988,

1990, 1993), gender feels natural because it is well practiced, performative, and thus necessarily

repetitive (Crawley and Broad 2008:548).

Queer theory has most typically been used in the humanities to question political systems

imposed through scientific inquiry. For instance, Queer Feminist Science Studies may question

the way compulsory heterosexuality is embedded in medical practices that claim to focus on

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male vs. female bodies—as though a natural binary were to exist with no variation. As a young academic, learning about queer theory opened my eyes to the ways our binary notions of gender and sexuality attempt to explain our daily lives and experiences as innate, *which necessarily then organizes our lives into binaries*. Although I am still bound by a gendered upbringing, I can actively reject essential gender and sexual categories once examining the history of these notions.

Sociological Gender Theory and Accountability

In his *Discipline & Punish,* Foucault (1975) extends Bentham's image of the panopticon with its focus on constant surveillance and policing to our physical bodies. Because of similar messages of what gendered and sexual bodies are supposed to look like surround us in, for instance, media images and institutional policies, our bodies are constantly judged for our appearances and behaviors. Like in a panopticon where the prisoners are not able to observe their jailers, we ultimately become our own jailers and preemptively monitor ourselves (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008:89). We have become so accustomed to being watched and judged that doing it to ourselves becomes automatic. While Foucault focuses on discourse and bodies, he does not address social interaction. Sociology adds a focus on social relations, everyday interaction, and accountability.

Accountability is conceptually an extension of surveillance, specifically referring to surveillance in everyday interactions we have with other people (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008). Through these interactions, others judge our bodies and behaviors through compliments or insults, whether subtle or explicit. Since our entire lives are comprised of interactions with others, this practice of accountability is ever-present. In this way, gender becomes *unavoidable* (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008:100). Gender, then, is an accomplishment that is both

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performed and assessed: we constantly produce gender in social interactions with others during which one is policed with praise or criticism (Kessler and McKenna 1978; West and Zimmerman 1987). But surveillance also occurs during moments alone when we effortlessly evaluate ourselves (Crawley and Broad 2008:547-548). Further, the evaluation of our bodies and behaviors affects our entire construction of self: how we think about ourselves, our safety, and gendered messages in the first place (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008:100). Everyday gender accountability is thus an important part of our everyday lives, including the lives of the participants in this study. Although participants largely identify their feelings about the ways they reject binary gender through their bodies, identities, and behaviors as originating internally, the stories they tell are mostly about their relationships with others.

Rejecting Binary Gender

Although queering ultimately refers to a deconstruction of all norms, especially categorical identities, "queer" identities and categories have been ironically created. In January 2017, National Geographic—an influential magazine in popular culture—published their special issue: *Gender Revolution*, which attested to the explosion of sexual and gender identities in the past decade or more. Inside the issue, a two-page spread titled "A Portrait of Gender Today" lists and defines twenty-one terms related to "today's gender revolution" such as cisgender, gender binary, pronouns, and transgender. One of the terms is genderqueer, defined as "someone whose gender identity is neither man nor woman, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders" (Green and Maurer 2017:15). According to queer theory, it is counterintuitive to create a stable identity and define it as queer, especially when it is directly defined in terms of binary gender: that which queer rejects. But this practice has been popular recently as National Geographic has highlighted with other neatly defined terms such as agender ("person who does

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not identify as having a gender identity"), genderfluid ("gender identity or expression shifts between man/masculine and woman/feminine"), and non-binary ("based on the rejection of binary gender") (Green and Maurer 2017). Further, under the term non-binary, the terms agender, bi-gender, genderqueer, genderfluid, and pangender are included, illustrating an even wider range of possibilities for gender self-identification when rejecting binary gender. While this may be only one source where contemporary gender identities are defined, it is important to note that such a prominent one such as National Geographic is attempting to inform their massive audience of possible ways to identify one's gender. The participants in this study may be influenced by this list of terms and identities. But considering the queer origins of these identities and the apparently now culturally approved way of rejecting binary gender, how do these participants understand they are rejecting binary gender? Because there exists an infinite number of gender identities individuals may adopt for themselves, it is impossible to conceptually encompass all possible identifiers for participants. Participants, thus, may identify their gender however they choose.

Given that identities around rejecting gender are new, studies on the experiences of people who reject binary gender are sparse in wider academic literature, including the social sciences. Although many studies do focus on transgender spectrum individuals—using the concept of "transgender" as transitioning away from *any* type of gender to include people who reject binary gender—most are not focused solely on people who reject binary gender and their experiences navigating it. In a study about the pressures transgender men face in their daily lives, Catalano (2015) found that when seeking a balance of self-confidence, trans men struggled between navigating internal confidence in their own gender identities and external recognitions or pressures that did not necessarily align with their identification. McKinney (2005) and

McLemore (2015) also found that transgender individuals in several contexts, including higher education institutions, experienced pressures between their self-identifications and external pressures to conform to recognized pronouns or types of dress. Similarly, in an autobiographical study, Lucal (1999) found that although she was gender nonconforming in dress she was still held to binary notions of gender every day. For her, this meant navigating the emotions of herself and others to not be attacked in a bathroom, for instance (Lucal 1999). Lucal published her study before specific identities that reject binary gender were named. On the other hand, my study seeks to focus specifically on what it means to take on a named identity that focuses on existing outside the binary system of gender.

In line with a queer theoretical and constructionist framework, my findings clearly indicate participants as being part of the social construction of gender order. Here, I specifically take from Berger and Luckmann's (1966) social construction of reality to understand how my participants construct their gender identities. The authors conceptualize internalization as the interpretation of an "objective event" as meaningful and, thus, as a manifestation of another's "subjective processes" that becomes meaningful to the individual (Berger and Luckmann 1966:129). Although participants explicitly admit that their gender identities are rooted within them and often have been a part of them since a very early age, their stories of community actually reveal that a large part of their identity construction comes from talking with others who share similar experiences surrounding gender and identity. Being a part of these groups and communities gives participants opportunities for the sharing of knowledge and language that helps them conceptualize and understand their feelings about gender. For example, talking with others can give participants exposure to new gender identity labels that they had never encountered before, such as pangender or transmasculine. When such knowledge and language is

acquired socially, participants thus have to engage in reality-maintenance. This requires attempting to achieve some sort of symmetry between participants' "objective and subjective" realities (Berger and Luckmann 1966:147). A prominent way that participants have engaged in reality-maintenance is by adopting new gender identities for their selves in interactions with others. When participants tell others that they now identify as non-binary, for instance, they are not only "trying out" new identities but also they are testing the reactions of others and thus the coherence of their gender identities in a social world. Depending on the success of this interaction, participants will adjust their identities, their approach, or their emotions; in other words, they will engage in reality-maintenance.

Narrative Identity

In addition to queer and gender theoretical frameworks, this study stems from Somers's (1994) notion of narrative identity. The present study seeks to find the stories of gender identity construction for people who reject binary gender under the notion that "it is through narrativity [and storytelling] that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world" (Somers 1994:606). It is through placing ourselves in time, space, and relations that we create and recreate our personal social identities. But this identity work is not without understanding and using the cultural narratives that have been historically circulating in our lives (Loseke 2007). Thus, if people who reject binary gender identify outside a culturally and historically established system of a gender binary, then how do they understand their gender, their lives, and this cultural system? Further, how do they break down the cultural narratives that are problematic for their lives to create their own? Living in a social world requires navigating cultural norms to create the stories of our lives. Although many studies have used this framework to understand how individuals make meanings of their lives, few studies focus on the ways

people who reject binary gender make meaning. Klein et al. (2015) studied the ways LGBT individuals experienced the "coming out narrative" as a right of passage for the LGBT community and as a narrative of identity self-discovery. This is a cultural narrative that LGBT people often have to navigate for many possible reasons perhaps such as safety and support, and also to be able to construct a coherent personal narrative in their social worlds (Loseke 2007). Mason-Schrock (1996) similarly studied the ways transsexuals constructed their selves through the construction of narratives. Although both studies focused on the notion of narrative identity, neither study focused on the stories of the lives of people who reject binary gender.

More closely related to the present study are those conducted by Nicolazzo (2016) and VanOra and Ouellette (2009): both not only focused on the notion of narrative identity, but also the complications that intersecting identities may have on the ability to create coherent narratives and meanings about one's life. While one (Nicolazzo 2016) studied the ways black nonbinary individuals sacrifice their racial identities for their gender identities and vice versa and another (VanOra and Ouellette 2009) studied the multiple identities of activist transgender women with varying class statuses, neither attempt to understand how gender individuals—perhaps with varying racial, class, disability, and sexuality identities—perceive and make meanings of their lives.

Contribution

Since literature on the experiences of people who reject binary gender is often scant, this study will focus solely on these individuals to expand the conversation in this emerging set of identities. Even fewer works focus on the narratives and stories individuals create about their lives in the creation of their gender and their selves. Not only do I hope to expand existing understandings of the experiences of people who reject binary gender, but also I hope to add

knowledge to works on narrative identity and gender identity. Although the studies of both of these areas have long been established, I hope to contribute to sociological literature an example of understanding the narratives of individuals that adopt identities that not much is known about. This study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What are the stories of gender identity construction for people who reject binary gender?

2. How do they understand the ways they are held accountable to binary gender in the day-to-day?

3. How do they perceive and make meaning of gender in their lives?

METHODS

I conducted ten in-depth interviews with participants that reject binary gender. I have accessed these participants, first, through online and in-person support groups of people who reject binary gender and, second, through snowball sampling. Some of these groups were primarily based online on social media platforms such as Facebook while others were based on monthly in-person meetings. These groups of those who reject binary gender engaged in both online and in-person interactions. The interplay between virtual and face-to-face mediums of socializing, sharing stories, and offering support was complex. For instance, while sitting together in-person at a meeting place, members would often share online information with each other via phones or computers at the table. In other words, the lines were often blurred between this online and offline boundary. I had obtained access to these groups and their members by my own personal membership prior to this current study. Additionally, all participants were encouraged to spread the word about this study to others they believed could be interested.

Participants were provided with officially approved recruitment documents if they chose to help recruit others. The participants' ages ranged from 20 to 36 years old. More than half of participants (6 out of 10) self-identified as white while others self-identified as: Indian, Asian American, Puerto Rican, and half-Colombian. Although the majority of participants were not recruited using methods tied to higher education, universities, or academia, all participants had either finished or were in the process of finishing 4-year university degrees. Participants somewhat varied in socioeconomic class; almost as many participants were from working class backgrounds as from other class backgrounds. Since the sample of this study is not large and

thus not racially or socioeconomically diverse, I can only speculate the effect that racial, ethnic, and class identities and experiences of participants have on their gender identities and experiences. Of course, this is a large limitation of this study and future research that duplicates this study would benefit from a larger and more diverse sample that allows for a far more intersectional analysis. Finally, 9 out of 10 of participants were living in or around Tampa, Florida at the time of their interviews, with one participant living in the Midwest United States.

Participants for this study were recruited through a post and a flyer online requesting to interview people who felt they rejected binary gender in some way (see Appendices I and II). This post included a description of the study, criteria for inclusion, and my contact information. Those who were interested in participating were able to contact me to receive the informed consent form (see Appendix II) and then set up a meeting date, time, and location of their convenience. Locations were in-person or over Skype. Most participants were able and chose to meet in-person for their interview. At the end of each interview, each participant was asked if they would like to ask others that may be interested in this study and that they know to fit the eligibility criteria. The eligibility criteria are as follows: All participants were 18+ years old and spoke English. They also were selected into the project because they reject binary gender. Additionally, only individuals that could legally consent for their own selves were included in the sample.

Since participants were asked about the stories of their lives, the participants were able to construct their own narratives. This study is rooted in the belief that individuals have unique and important knowledge about the social world. A main goal of this study was to access the marginalized knowledge of these participants, as their experiences are often hidden from mainstream—both academic and non-academic—conversations of gender (Hesse-Biber and

Leavy 2011). Interviewing and researching these experiences is a way I have continued to attempt to give volume to muted voices as a sociological researcher and as a person who rejects binary gender myself that often feels muted in all spaces.

During each interview, I always had an interview guide with me to help guide the interview (see Appendix III) but it was not required for interviews to be regimented to this outline. Participants often had information or insight about the topic of study that I had not foreseen or realized prior to collecting data. Although in-person interviews were preferred as interview quality decreases otherwise (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011:99), participants had the option of choosing Skype or FaceTime interviews. In fact, at least one participant chose this method of interview. Most of all, the privacy and comfort of the participant were of utmost important in this study especially when discussing personal matters.

Analytical Methods

Once I completed all ten transcriptions, I read them all at once without taking notes. During a second read-through, snippets where participants talked about gender in any way were copied and pasted into a new document and printed to aid in organized coding. During a third read-through of these new shortened transcriptions, I wrote codes in the margins of these pages. Shorter snippets were then taken and organized all together in a separate document. These were typically in the form of short paragraphs. After a fourth read-through of these deconstructed and coded data, they were organized by codes. Some of these codes included "Strategies," "Misgendering," and "Community." During a fifth and final read-through, I electronically organized and wrote notes for each coded sub-category. For example, under "Strategies" there included "Emotion Management" and "Legibility." These final codes, their sub-codes, and the data within the sub-codes were the results of my analysis for this project.

The study framework, research questions, ethical procedures, and interview questions had undergone thorough review by my self, the researcher, and my committee members. As the study progressed and data were collected, I took field notes immediately after every interview in a private setting. To aid my final analysis, these field notes were always written in direct reference to the research questions, ensuring that the data being collected was viable. If concerns arose, inconsistencies were brought to my Faculty Advisor. Ultimately, per the inductive qualitative methodology on which this study is based, I did not force the data to answer original research questions. In fact, research questions adapted to what the data said.

The Researcher

As a person that rejects binary gender, I identify very closely with the targeted participants of this study. In fact, my own experiences have informed my rationale. Finding representations of others like me—or experiences similar to mine—in academic literature has proven rather difficult. Often in academic settings it is very easy to feel erased and without a voice without representation, especially in one's own field of study. My own story, for instance, does not often have a space in the mainstream academy. This study will serve to not only expand scholarly literature by representing an often-invisible group, but also to enrich and validate my own knowledge of the stories of others like me.

FINDINGS

Based on my own experience in the LGBT+ community, the ability for individuals to name their own selves is important. For instance, for female-to-male transgender individuals who were given traditionally feminine names, being able to give their selves a traditionally masculine name is crucial to their agency over their own bodies and identities, and can make it easier for them to navigate public and binary gendered spaces. Although not all of my participants identify as transgender, I gave them all the option of choosing their own pseudonyms for this project. Unfortunately this practice is not common. Many of my participants expressed gratitude for having this choice and that the ability to choose one's own name is also important for those who reject binary gender. More often than not, when participants chose their pseudonyms, they made sure to pick gender-neutral names.

Additionally, unless participants have clearly expressed which pronouns to use for them, I used they/them/their pronouns. Using gender-neutral pronouns as a default for participants not only speaks to my project's effort of confidentiality but also to my efforts of practicing gender inclusivity in my language. In this project just as the language of participants is powerful in showing me what gender means to them, my language as a researcher has the power to determine which audiences, readers, and participants are welcome to engage with this project: all genders and lack thereof. Ultimately, I aspire to set an example for other queer and LGBT+ studies and their researchers. In giving participants the choice to pick their own pseudonyms and in normalizing gender-neutral pronouns in my study, I am actively engaging in my own construction of gender. This construction also partly recreates commonly established and

traditional constructions of gender where, although gender neutrality is the norm, it specifically

hinges on the existence of binary gender and, ultimately, its rejection.

When participants were asked about the ways in which they reject binary gender, they

almost immediately understood those types of questions as referring to their gender identities. It

is quite clear in the language they use and the stories they tell about their experiences that almost

all participants felt that to reject binary gender, one has to identify in some way with a non-

binary gender identity. Thus, my data and their analysis are embedded with this grounded

perspective.

Relationships with Others

Pervasive throughout all interviews, participants told countless stories of what others

have said or done to them in regards to their gender identities, appearances, or overall gender

performance. Whether participants were reflecting on the ways others have reacted to them or

were recounting incidences and confrontations with others, participants often focused their

stories on other people around them. Sina, 23, white, identifies as a femme lesbian most of the

time although sometimes they experience "suffocating and upsetting" times when they question

their gender and reject their daily performance of womanhood. During these periods of

questioning, Sina also identifies as non-binary. These uncomfortable times for Sina are also

sometimes tied to lapses in mental health but not always. Here, they attempt to paint a picture of

how they generally perceive others:

> Nobody thinks anybody who is feminine is anything other than a straight, attractive
> woman. So no one ever assumes that I'm not a woman. No one ever assumes that I have
> any non-binary identification ever. Most people don't even assume I identify as a lesbian.

Based on their overall experiences in their social world, Sina acknowledges that others never perceive them as a non-binary person, let alone a lesbian. Most people actually assume that Sina is a straight woman. But Sina rarely tells others of their non-binary identity: "9 out of 10 days I am really feminine." Since others consistently perceive Sina as a straight woman because of their femininity, Sina acknowledges that their non-binary identity is "on the back burner all the time. It's not a thing." This, in turn, informs their expectations moving through and interacting in the world. Eventually, this became the norm for how Sina interacts with others.

Merry, 27, white, identifies as queer because it can encompass their gender, sexual, *and* political fluidity, which allows them to "flip and flop back and forth" from masculinity to femininity. Like Sina, they also acknowledge how others have perceived them in the day-to-day:

> I think a lot of it [my views on gender] has stemmed from being told I look like a boy as a kid and as a teenager and in college, and then I kind of allowed that to shape my view of myself.

Although Merry was raised as a girl, being consistently perceived and mistaken as a boy throughout their life has affected the way they view their own self. In many ways, this has affected the way Merry navigates the world, which is often as a masculine person that shows their masculinity by, for example, attempting to protect feminine people. Today, Merry rejects binary gender by identifying as gender queer and preferring they/them/their pronouns that allow them to be fluid in their performance of gender in the presence of others.

Many of these stories about others also more specifically focused on the ways family members view participants while other stories focused on the ways romantic and sexual partners have influenced them with regards to gender, appearances, or sexuality. Overwhelmingly, though, participants told emotional stories about being misgendered (or gendered when lack thereof) by others.

Family. Participants often talked and told stories about their families or family members, and their relationships with them. Like for many of us, participants frequently identified that their families had a large impact on their development as people. Nebula, 20, half-Hispanic white, identifies as trans and non-binary, and they have been on hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for almost a year. They used to identify as a trans woman, but realized over time that they wanted to "transcend the whole binary to begin with" and started identifying as non-binary. They primarily use they/them/their pronouns but are comfortable with she/her/hers pronouns as well "mostly for the people who don't understand non-binary." Here, they tell me how they feel about their parents dealing with their trans gender identity:

> Both my parents are trying to mourn and deal with it. And I'm not really interested in helping them through that process; you know what I'm saying? I spent a good chunk of high school and middle school dealing with this and I'm finally fine with it. How am I supposed to help my mom be okay with my existence, you know? And so, I'm glad that she's trying but at the same time, there's not really anything I can do. She just has to do that on her own. And my dad does, too.

For Nebula and for many other participants, having family members that do not readily accept their identities is quite disappointing. Nebula shows that the emotional stress, time, and energy it took to accept their own feelings about gender were too taxing to go through again, and ultimately serves as a rite of passage for acceptance of non-binary gender. River, 26, white European, identifies as both trans and non-binary and views both of these identities as umbrella terms for other identity terms such as agender or bigender. River also physically expresses their self as androgynous, which they have always felt comfortable with. For River, too, having a parent that doesn't accept them is disappointing, but also unacceptable:

> I just don't want to interact with somebody who doesn't accept me for who I am. I don't need him [my dad] in my life. I'm not dependent on him at all in any way. I don't even have health care anymore, so he can fuck off. That's the way I see it.

Many participants like River and Nebula choose to not help their family members come closer to understanding and thus accepting their rejection of binary gender. Participants expressed that although this process was and continues to be painful for them, it is a way for them to protect their emotions even at the cost of losing a family member. Although participants expressed that these decisions were extremely complicated, many ultimately prioritized their own protection over the acceptance of others.

Partner Influence. In addition to their families, participants frequently acknowledged how their previous romantic and sexual partners have influenced their appearances, views, and performances of gender. For Merry, partners in the past have influenced them to think about the idea of transitioning:

> I've had people in the past who I've dated encourage me to consider transitioning and helped me kind of conceptualize what that would even be like… Intimate partners have definitely shaped my identity.

Having others around them that have encouraged them to think about transitioning to a male gender has influenced Merry to construct their masculinity within relationships: a large part of Merry's identity and gender performances. But while Merry's partners have encouraged them to embrace masculinity, Merry continues to feel between binary genders and the ability to be fluid. Sam(ira), 33, identifies as queer and as a masculine-performing woman, or gender non-conforming woman. They are Indian-American and were raised in a Hindu and Muslim household, which Sam(ira) acknowledges has much to do with their queerness and the ways they blur boundaries of religion, nationality, race, gender, and sexuality. Sam(ira) also has had partners influence them in reference to gender:

> Each woman that I dated, my style changed a little bit because she would make a suggestion or she'd say, "Wow, I could totally see you in that." And then I'd wear it and I'd be like, "Damn."

Much of how Sam(ira) rejects binary gender lies within being a self-identified masculine-performing woman. For them, appearing masculine through clothing is a key part of their gender. Thus, for previous intimate partners to have continually improved their dress is a large factor in how they reject binary gender today.

Misgendering. One of the most commonly told stories in our interviews were those where others misgendered participants. Here, River helps to introduce what it is like being misgendered by others:

> I just hate people misgendering me in general, it doesn't matter what binary gender they choose. It's not correct, so it doesn't reflect who I am. And when you're non-binary and society doesn't even recognize you it…almost feels like you're automatically silenced like, you're forced to come out every time because you're not even represented in anything. That's the hardest thing.

Misgendering typically looked like others using inappropriate pronouns—especially when previously made aware of which ones to use—and using gendered language directed at participants such as "ladies " or "sir." Bees, 21, Latinx, identifies as both trans and non-binary, although they feel that they are not part of any gender category, even one that rejects binary gender. Bees is often misgendered with she/her/hers pronouns and gendered words such as "girl" or "lady." Here, Bees explains exactly what happens when others misgender them:

> Even though I don't fit in the binary and I don't feel like I'm anything, what I mean by that [being misgendered] is that they [people] don't use my pronouns right or just gender me from what they see so they'll gender me with she/her pronouns.

Although Bees identifies as trans and non-binary and feel that they express their self androgynously, they acknowledge that others perceive them as feminine because of makeup, for example. So, when Bees is misgendered it is typically in the form of others using she/her pronouns.

> I always use that term, like "misgender" me and "don't gender me right" because I don't know what to fill in the void for not having a gender because I don't know what I would use to say when... I don't know how to describe it. But that term fits more perfectly to describe when people don't respect that I'm non-binary.

Here, Bees explains further why they use the word "misgender." Although some other

participants like Bees identified themselves as not having a gender at all, they still used the

language of being misgendered to signify others placing them in binary "gender boxes" based on

appearances.

Being misgendered often brings up many negative emotions. Lee, 27, white, identifies

their sexuality as queer and their gender as genderqueer, what they perceive to be a more specific

identity term under the umbrella of non-binary gender. For Lee, identifying in these ways allows

them to be fluid in their sexuality, gender, and appearances. Identifying as queer, for example, is

important to them because it doesn't "put their gender in a box" in terms of sexuality like

identities such as lesbian might. Here, they show exactly what they feel when they are

misgendered:

> I feel like literally my stomach hurts. I feel nauseous. I feel silenced… I'm a very
> opinionated, outspoken person in a lot of ways but that immediately silences me. I don't
> know how to mitigate it.

To have others not recognize, or even try to recognize, their gender by not respecting their

pronouns or by using binary gendered language for them feels like invalidation for participants,

which often triggers many negative emotions and bodily reactions. When River is misgendered,

it makes them "question myself, like how I'm looking that day, how I'm presenting." When

others do not see River as a non-binary person, they feel forced to question their efforts in

expressing their gender identity. To be misgendered, thus, is to be deemed inadequate as a social

actor, misunderstood and unrecognizable by others that one is trying to interact with, deeming

the interaction a failure for participants.

Strategies

When faced with difficult situations involving others, such as when being misgendered, participants shared their strategies. These were sometimes identified as "defense mechanisms" when faced with an unpleasant situation, and typically took the form of mental preparation before interacting with others, forming ways for their identities to be understood by other, appearance management, and emotion management.

Appearance Management. Before leaving their homes and going into public, participants often contemplated about the ways they are going to present and appear that day by attempting to predict how others will respond. For instance, Lee picks their clothing strategically:

> Just kind of where I'm feeling and how I want to be perceived I think is always related to my gender, like how I want people to treat me that day. So even if it's not necessarily fully 100% what I feel most comfy in… But I tend to wear things if I think people are going to treat me a type of way… So I just have to make sure it matches what I feel that day.

Although sometimes picking one's appearance each day isn't as much of an effort for some as others, participants like Lee have explained that that concern is part of every day. Ultimately, feeling comfortable in front of others is very important and participants want to make sure that what they're wearing is in some way representative of their gender that moment, however fluid their feelings about their gender may be. Noa, 21, white, identifies as genderqueer but has identified as a lesbian for a long time. In many ways, Noa has come to realize that their performance of lesbianism can be their gender, an explicit combination of gender and sexuality that others in this study have not expressed. Here, Noa tells me what it felt like to appear in a way that wasn't representative of who they were at the time:

> I used to wear a lot of dresses and makeup and long hair and then suddenly those things made me feel really, really, really unattractive. Not even unattractive but just feeling like something I really wasn't.

Like Noa expresses, the desire to physically express their selves as authentic and representative as possible to their inner feelings about gender is a priority. This is the case for almost all participants. (See *Authenticity*).

Participants also often thought about which contexts and spaces were more comfortable and accepting for participants to be dressed however they pleased. Other spaces, though, required careful maneuvering of choices:

> I'm comfortable wearing a dress around my other really queer awesome affirming friends. I'm not really as comfortable wearing a dress if I'm like, going to my grandparents' house because I feel like I'm sending different messages whereas my friends will still be like, "Oh, they're still genderqueer queer Lee." My grandparents are going to start making different types of comments.

Here, Lee is reflecting on which contexts they feel more comfortable dressing femininely. Afraid that their grandparents will think that typically feminine clothing will indicate an acceptance of binary gender and heterosexuality, Lee will choose to appear more masculine or androgynous in front of others who are not understanding or accepting of their gender or sexual identities.

Legibility. One of participants' strategies is to basically have a version of their identity that they typically use to identify themselves in front of strangers. For example, Sina has a version of their gender identity and sexual orientation that has been easily understood by strangers; namely, "femme lesbian." When interacting with others that don't know them very well, Sina will choose not to explain that they sometimes also identify with a non-binary identity. Here Sina explains further the ways they use this legibility strategy:

> So I think shorthand for legibility with interacting with people, I'll usually just say "lesbian." And I do identify with that word a lot but there are different periods of time where I don't feel particularly tied to womanhood…but especially for lesbian there's a lot of politicized womanhood tied to it.

Although Sina doesn't always feel tied to womanhood and their lesbian identity partly because of the politicization of a lesbian identity, they acknowledge that many people may not understand

their fluidity of gender. This both eases the flow of a conversation and lets Sina choose when to

have a deep and potentially emotional conversation about their feelings about gender. For

participants like Sina, these strategies require a daily analysis of how visible certain LGBT+

people are in most social situations, including how knowledgeable strangers typically are with

LGBT+ identities and experiences.

Another way some participants used this strategy is by choosing to be okay with others

using "binary gender pronouns" such as she/her or he/him that may be easier for others to use

more readily:

> The fact that I include "she" is mostly for the people who don't understand non-binary
> and it's like, "So since you don't understand that, just use 'she.' It's fine."

Nebula usually prefers to have others use they/them pronouns for them but, similarly to Sina,

they have accepted that others may use she/her pronouns instead. Using this strategy to ease

interactions with others has proven to be very successful for participants, success typically

measured by smooth interactions that do not involve conflicts, corrections, or confrontations.

This strategy is also a form of emotion management by attempting to manage the emotions of

others by using identities and pronouns that others may easily understand, minimizing confusion

and thus discomfort as much as possible.

Emotion Management. While some participants perceived being misgendered as an "act

of violence," other participants acknowledge that others who use incorrect pronouns, for

instance, are not at fault for their ignorance of non-binary gender identities. Shadow, 25, Asian-

American, identifies as non-binary and bi-romantic asexual, meaning sexual experiences are not

important in their attraction to others and their relationships. In public, identifying as bisexual is

a strategy they employ so that they don't have to explain to others what asexuality or

pansexuality mean, even though they can be attracted to any person. For them, managing others'

emotions in the day-to-day eases interactions:

> When people…call me "ma'am" or "sir" or "dude," or whenever they want to call me gendered terms, I usually don't correct them. It's not really a defensive mechanism on my part it's more like…I feel like I'm doing it for other people, for strangers. It's so that we can continue to carry on a conversation… So I usually don't really correct people because I feel like I'm kind of doing it to spare them and spare them the "embarrassment" that they'll feel, you know?

Shadow, like many other participants, has often witnessed the painful embarrassment and guilt of

others when they are corrected after using incorrect pronouns, for instance. Typically others react

with a shower of apologies, which results in a total halt of conversation. With similar goals as

attempting to be legible, managing others' emotions this way by not correcting allows Shadow to

go about their day with ease.

The management of emotions can also be quite taxing for participants. Unlike Shadow,

Sam(ira) quickly learned as a teenager that being a masculine lesbian was damaging their

relationships with family as they did not accept Sam(ira) that way:

> As I started getting to puberty and in my teens, I started finding the need to silence myself just a little bit. I wanted my father to like me, I wanted people to stop yelling at me all the fucking time, because I used to get in a lot of trouble just for being me… And so after a while, I was still a kid, you take a…beating you stay down. Verbal beating. It just got easier to stay down. It felt really nice to…not be yelled at all the time. It felt really nice to hear a compliment finally. I always had short hair. I grew my hair out a little bit to make people feel more comfortable with my appearance… Everybody was 100% on board with who I was becoming, except me.

Wanting their family to accept them, Sam(ira) chose to manage their own emotions and change

many things about their self. They changed their appearance to be more feminine by growing out

their hair and wearing dresses, and they chose to stop speaking up for their self as much.

Although it was internally unpleasant, Sam(ira) did appreciate being accepted by their family,

even if only temporarily.

Making Meaning of Rejecting Binary Gender

While much of participants' stories of gender involved others, the language that they used about their feelings about their own gender often indicated that being authentic is important or that they've always been this way.

Authenticity. Using words like "congruent," "genuine," and "authentic," participants often referred to the importance of staying true to their gender identities. This could mean many things, including acknowledging that they/them pronouns are truer to a non-binary gender identity. Here, they explains how pronouns have changed for them:

> I felt like still genderqueer and still using she/her pronouns, that felt congruent to me and then it stopped feeling as congruent and then I started asking my closest friends to be like, "Hey, let's try out they/them and see how that feels." And it felt pretty good. And then I started just asking my friends. And I went to a conference over the summer and I'm with my friend so I was saying, "They/them is good. I like they/them and it feels really good." I mean, generally in feminist and queer spaces, like the, "Hey, my name's XYZ and I use XYZ pronouns," is a general way to introduce yourself so at the conference it was immediately built in. So that was always reiterated. Like, "Okay, what's your name and your pronouns?" So that felt good and easy. And then with friends, too, it felt easy as well.

After she/her pronouns stopped feeling good for Noa, they found that they/them pronouns eventually became more representative of who they felt they were as a person that rejects binary gender. Nowadays, Noa prefers only they/them pronouns, further emphasizing the importance of letting go of what doesn't feel congruent to them. Similarly, Nebula explains how they came to identifying with a non-binary gender identity:

> Well, really I was just trying on different roles and bodies and identities and seeing which one felt the most right. So, I tried on the role of full trans and it didn't feel right. There was still this male side to me that I couldn't get rid of. So then I tried on the identity of being non-binary and that felt more right.

Much like Noa, Nebula noticed an inconsistency with how they felt their own gender and how they were navigating their world. To mitigate this internal conflict, Noa asked others to help with their internal feelings by trying out new pronouns, while Nebula tried existing in the world with a couple of new gender identities until they found one that was more consistent with their

internal feelings. Ultimately, participants had a goal when trying new pronouns and gender identities, which was to live authentically.

Always Been this Way. The most common way participants made sense of their gender was to express that they've "always been this way," such as always having felt comfortable with a non-binary gender performance. For instance, River has always felt comfortable with androgyny:

> …It's not like if you're non-binary you have to be androgynous. You can be feminine, masculine, or whatever. It doesn't matter. Just for me, [androgyny has] always been comfortable before I even grew into my authentic self and discovered the term non-binary. I was always androgynous and that's why I felt comfortable with it.

Much like Noa and Nebula previously, River is concerned with making sure their gender identity and expressions are authentic to their internal feelings about gender. In another story, River expresses that as a child their ideas of gender, or lack thereof, were authentic because children don't "have that idea [of binary gender] in their head until adults instill that into them." For River, then, being authentic means appearing and dressing androgynously as they've been comfortable presenting this way since they were a child. Additionally, River also expresses in the excerpt above that it is okay to be feminine or masculine and also identify as non-binary. While this is a common sentiment among participants, this reiterates the perception that gender identity is created within the self despite one's gendered appearance and thus the perception of others.

> Nebula also places importance in acknowledging long-term feelings about gender:

> I've always kind of known, at least in the very back of my mind. Like, even in middle school, I knew that if I had been given the choice at birth, I would have chosen to be born a woman. It was just…this thing in the back of my mind just gnawing at me constantly for several years. So, yeah. I just did a lot of research and I kind of became label crazy towards my sophomore year. I was just trying to find words that described me and I was really excited about finding these words that I understood, you know? And I knew I was under the umbrella of trans but I didn't know where I was under that.

Although Nebula doesn't admit to having certain feelings about gender since childhood, in hindsight they have known for many years that living in a male body and being raised as a man would not have been their choice if given the opportunity. At first, Nebula felt that if they did not want to be male, then they must want to be female:

> I have come to the point where I acknowledge that I embody both genders... Like, I didn't really want to just cross over to "the girl side" [laughs]. I more wanted to just transcend the whole binary to begin with and that's kind of what I did by being non-binary.

Over time, Nebula realized they didn't want to be a woman but instead reject binary gender as a whole by identifying as non-binary. Even so, Nebula looks to their past confusions about gender as a child to continue to explain being non-binary today while also acknowledging that their gender identification has changed. In many ways participants like River and Nebula found comfort in looking back to their pasts for indication that they have always felt this way about their gender because it legitimated their feelings. When faced with others who "silence" them by sexually coercing, not accepting, or misgendering them, it makes sense that participants find solace in their long-term and thus concrete feelings about gender. For the participants in this study, rejecting binary gender has often meant identifying as non-binary, but it also means rejecting and resisting heteronormativity in general. When acknowledging that they have refused or have felt confused by gender since an early age, participants are thus alluding to a refusal of gendered expectations more so than a refusal of gender altogether.

The Importance of Others and Community. Perhaps the most common sentiment that participants shared in reference to their gender experiences and identities was the importance of having others to speak with that also reject binary gender, which can help participants understand their own bodies, ideas, experiences, and feelings about gender. Here, Sina expresses the benefit of having others to speak with and listen to about gender:

It is good to talk about it sometimes and have other people validate whatever I'm experiencing doesn't need to be my main life crisis but it can be a thing that, you know, happens or you feel sometimes. All my friends in college were really gay. A lot of my friends are non-binary, a lot of my friends are trans in some flavor and regard. And just being around so many people who just don't give a fuck about their gender, you're just kind of like, "Yeah, okay." You see how other people make sense of it and they give you the language to make sense of your own shit going on.

For participants, a large benefit of having others to speak with about similar gender experiences and feelings is the exchange of language and knowledge that can help make sense of, for instance, confusing or contradictory feelings. In other words, through these communities participants can learn of different ways of rejecting binary gender and are able to negotiate which identities, for instance, they would like to adopt. River, too, shares a similar sentiment:

I started to research online and I mean, a lot of people that I know think that Tumblr has helped them a lot, which is a blog, and I felt like that definitely helped me. I followed some really cool trans people, not even just non-binary people, but a lot of trans women that would talk about gender and stuff. And I feel like that really helped because it gave me the language and I didn't have to feel so weird anymore like I didn't fit or "what was wrong with me?" I knew who I was.

These communities can come in all different forms and they give participants a space where they can feel validated, especially in the face of family that doesn't accept them, misgendering by strangers, or gatekeeping where participants question their own identities and experiences when they don't fit a cultural narrative of being LGBT+. Some of these cultural narratives that participants contend with include experiencing body dysphoria as a trans person, coming out to friends and family, or appearing androgynous. When the gender experiences of participants don't align with these cultural narratives—sometimes referred to as "rite of passages"—they often question the validity of their experiences.

In combatting these feelings of inadequacy, Nebula finds solace in their community:

Pretty much all my friends are, at least a good chunk of my friends, are not cis. That's been really helpful with me figuring things out, just being in an atmosphere where it's normal to be trans and non-binary and gay. I can say with a decent amount of certainty that I would not be as confident in my gender and sexuality today, near as much, if I had

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gone anywhere else [for college]. Everyone there is so supportive and even if it'll take them a bit to get used to pronouns and names…I don't feel pressured to present in any certain way…which has been really helpful.

Much of Nebula's rejection of binary gender has involved "trying out" new pronouns with others and new gender identities to find what feels best for them. A community of like-minded people has ultimately helped them find a space where they feel comfortable to, for example, try new clothing or performances of gender. Similarly, River's community of other non-binary people has helped them combat feelings of inadequacy by no longer feeling alone:

When I first came out, I found my first non-binary friend and it was online through Tumblr and I met them like, twice because they live upstate, New York area. I think that's what probably helped me the most, was early on having someone because I was literally the only non-binary person I knew. I think that helped a lot just to know that I wasn't alone and I wasn't an alien because that's how I felt a lot of times.

Many participants expressed this hardship of solitude being one of the hardest obstacles they have faced. Especially when beginning to question their own gender identities, not knowing others with similar experience and not having a non-binary or queer community makes participants feel as if no other person will ever understand their unique experiences. Ultimately, being understood by others is a priority.

DISCUSSION

While participants largely identified the root of their feelings about gender as within their selves—sometimes existing since birth or childhood—the stories they told about their experiences of gender revealed that interactions with others were important and thus have a large effect on their lives. This shows that participants continuously have to think about the reactions of others, moderate their own emotions and those of others, and manage their appearances while attempting to predict how others will react to their preferred pronouns, gender identities, or appearances. In this day-to-day process, participants have created countless strategies that mitigate awkward or hurtful interactions with others. For participants, these are essential for their comfort, mental health, and sometimes survival.

Many have expressed the necessity to adopt pronouns, identities, and performances of gender that feel authentic to their "true selves," which they admit typically develop at a very young age before adults instill ideas of binary gender and heteronormativity into them during childhood socialization. Like Mason-Schrock's (1996) participants, this image of the "untainted" child that participants used to be is pure and innocent. The identities of participants, though, have changed over time. For example, Nebula used to reject binary gender by identifying as a trans woman and by taking steps to transition from male to female. Over time, Nebula has instead decided to identify as non-binary and use gender-neutral pronouns so that they can reject binary gender instead of transitioning from one binary gender to another. Participants had other ways of rejecting binary gender from an early age that changed over time over time. Merry, for instance, had always felt boyish growing up and although they still perform masculine daily, they can also

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be fluid with femininity. Thus, although participants insist that a "true self" exists within them unaltered over time, their strategies of rejecting binary gender and heteronormativity can and have changed. Perhaps, too, they will continue to change.

Ultimately, though, the communities of non-binary and queer people that participants have been a part of have tremendously helped them understand their own experiences and identities. In the exchange of language and knowledge about gender identities and experiences, participants have been able to construct not only a space of acceptance and validation but also a sense of their own self as they reject binary gender. It is within this contradiction of a true self yet a relational self that participants construct their gender identities and make sense of their experiences of rejecting binary gender. Participants have often iterated this contradiction of needing to find community in the rejection of conformity. In many ways, one's gender being validated within one's community helps counteract invalidation by those outside of said community. As some participants such as River have stated, having a community, or even just knowing that there are others with the same identities, has helped participants feel less alone in the day-to-day. Participants, thus, live with this contradiction by finding some respite in their communities when faced with, for instance, being misgendered by others.

This project also reinforces gender surveillance and accountability theories. Foucault's (1975) panopticon related to our bodies in terms of gender and sexuality suggests that after becoming so accustomed to being watched and judged by others both explicitly and subtly, we end up watching and judging our bodies and behaviors in the same ways. Such pervasive accountability affects every construction of our selves, especially the ways we think about our bodies and our gender identities. My participants view their feelings about gender and their gender identities as originating from within them, though their stories highlight how their own

identities are achieves in negotiation with others—whether in resistance to norms or in coalition with those who resist norms. In interviews, the majority of their stories were focused on their interactions with others, whether it is about being misgendered, with sexual and romantic partners, or with others who also reject binary gender. This indicates that these interactions with others where participants are held accountable to binary gender do have an impact on the ways they construct their gender and selves but because this has been such a consistent part of their lives, participants perceive this as innate to their selves and private feelings. Thus, public images become private issues about their bodies, gender, and sexuality (Crawley, Foley, and Shehan 2008). Ultimately, then, the "true self" of participants that has always rejected binary gender and heteronormativity has always and continues to be necessarily created through social interactions with others. It is only within these social interactions that participants *continuously* receive public images and ideas about gender and negotiate them to create their "true self."

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APPENDIX I: Recruitment Information

Research:

Stories of Rejecting Binary Gender

Study #Pro00031562

Hi everyone! My name is Ana Balius and I am a graduate Sociology student at the University of South Florida (USF) in Tampa, FL.

I am currently conducting a study that seeks to understand how people work to resist binary gender.

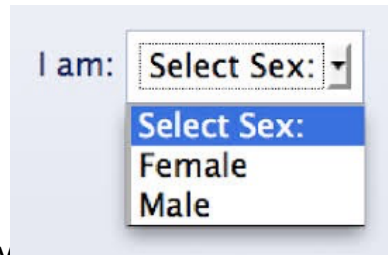Are you 18+? Do you speak English? If so, would you like to participate and share your story?

Your cooperation will involve a 30-60 minute interview after signing a consent form. You may opt for a Skype interview or an in-person interview at a location of your convenience.

If you would like to participate, please let me know! Also, if you are not sure you'd like to participate, you may also contact me and I will do my best to answer your questions. You may send me an email at anabalius@mail.usf.edu.

APPENDIX II: Recruitment Flyer

PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH!

https://binarythis.com/tag/binary/

I am: Select Sex: ▾

Select Sex:
Female
Male

Are you 18+? Do you speak English? Do you reject binary gender?

I'D LOVE TO HEAR YOUR STORY.

My name is Ana Balius and I am a Sociology M.A. student at University of South Florida (USF) in Tampa, FL.

I am currently conducting a study that seeks to understand how people work to resist binary gender.

Your cooperation will include:
- Signing a consent form
- Choosing a Skype interview or in-person interview at a location of your convenience
- A single 30-60 minute audio-recorded interview

If you are interested or would like more information, please contact me at anabalius@mail.usf.edu

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APPENDIX III: Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Stories of Rejecting Binary Gender
Principle Investigator: Ana Balius
anabalius@mail.usf.edu

You are being invited to participate in a study conducted through the University of South Florida (USF), for which I must obtain your informed consent in order to participate.

Below, you will be explained the purpose of the study, the procedures that will be used, the expected time the interview will take, and any benefits or risks to you. Please ask the researcher any questions you may have to understand the study. If you choose to join the study, please sign your name and date at the bottom. You will also receive a copy of the consent form to keep.

The purpose of the study is to access the stories of people who reject binary gender. Very few projects study the lives of people who reject binary gender, and fewer projects study their stories. The researcher wants to shed light on lives that often academically go unnoticed.

If you agree to join the study, you will be asked to participate in a recorded interview about your experiences. The researcher plans to talk about your gender identities, about your experiences in the day-to-day, and about any instances when others have (mis)gendered you. Interviews will last between 30 to 60 minutes and will be conducted in one sitting. The researcher will conduct the interviews and transcribe the recordings. During the interview, you may request to stop the recording at any time to discuss or clarify how you wish to respond to a question or topic before proceeding. You may choose to skip any question for any reason.

The interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed, and kept privately for only the purposes of this study. *The transcription of your interview will be given a pseudonym, and any other identifying information will be deleted, hidden, or changed.* The researcher also plans to conduct research analysis that will result in a Master's thesis project in the Sociology department at USF.

Consent forms will be kept completely private and secure, until the project's completion when they will be destroyed.

There are no anticipated risks to participating in this interview other than revisiting times in your life that may have been emotional or difficult. However, you can withdraw from the interview at any time without any consequence or penalty. Also, if you exhibit extreme distress, the researcher may discontinue the interview and offer you the possibility of resuming at a different time. There are no anticipated benefits to participating.

In the event that you choose to withdraw during the interview, any audio recording made of the interview will be destroyed, and no transcript will be made. There is no cost to participating, and no payment.

If you have questions about this study, you can contact the researcher (above). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the office of the Institutional Review Board at USF at (813)-974-5638.

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I have read this form and I understand it. The researcher answered my questions, if any, about the study. My signature indicates that I volunteer to participate in the study. I understand that if I become uncomfortable with the study, I am free to stop my participation at any point. I also understand that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an interview project, and I believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

Interviewee signature _____ Date _____/_____/_____

Interviewee printed name _____

Phone number _____

Email address _____

APPENDIX IV: Interview guide

What is your name?
Tell me a bit about yourself.
What is a typical day for you?

Can you tell me a bit about how you feel about rejecting binary gender today?
How did you get to this point?

Have you changed your name?
If so, what was that like?

Are pronouns important to you?

For you, is rejecting binary gender related to sexuality?
Related to racial/ethnic experiences?
Related to economic class?

Do appearances play a part of you rejecting binary gender?

Have there been any instances where other people have made you feel uncomfortable about binary gender?
If so, can you give me some examples?

Are you a part of a community of people who also reject binary gender?
What is that like?
How does your geographic location affect your experiences of gender?

General Demographics
Job?
School? Education level?
Economic class?
Race/ethnicity?

If you would like a pseudonym in this study, what would you like to be called?