Performing Genders: A Study of Gender Fluidity

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Abstract

The subjective quality of identity and the relativistic nature of gender bemuse and attract social scientists. In this study I combine both topics by examining gender fluidity – an inconsistent gender identity – within the framework of Western ontology. Within my informants’ narratives I identify what I term feelings of gender as feelings that influence how people perceive and interact with their bodies. Gender fluidity entails a constant yet inconsistent fluctuation of those feelings. Furthermore, I found other important elements that may have influenced my informants' understanding of their gender identities and bodies: upbringing, previous relationships and interactions, communities, and language.
Introduction

Despite growing up as a male in what he calls a “conservative religious community,” Stephan, a twenty-five year old college student, has always felt that he is more than just male. As a child, Stephan sometimes wanted to dress in feminine clothing and would occasionally risk wearing his mother's clothes in secret. In middle school, Stephan was friends with a girl whose father owned a wig shop. Amongst wigs of various sorts inside the girl’s garage, a denim bucket hat with flowers and brown hair extensions drew Stephan's eyes. When his friend loaned it to him, Stephan wore that hat for entire week, although his family disapproved.

For the majority in his community, Stephan was simply a boy. Yet Stephan understood that his periodic sensations of wanting to be a girl were real. Using the only term he knew, Stephan called himself a cross-dresser. However, Stephan was aware that cross-dressing implies the act of dressing as the opposite gender, which was not true to his experience since he identified with both at different times. When, in his freshman year of high school, Stephan had private access to the internet, he read forums concerning people not identifying with their assigned sex and discovered the concept of transgender identity. Still, Stephan felt transgender did not quite fit as it implies that one must either be male or female, and Stephan identified as both.

Not only did he struggle to find an appropriate label for his gender identity, Stephan experienced severe cases of gender dysphoria\(^1\) repeatedly feeling female when his body was male. Although he considered transitioning, Stephan feared that with his gender constantly fluctuating he would still experience dysphoria as a male-identifying female. In other words, Stephan knew that transitioning would not solve the problem but instead ultimately be “trading

\(^1\) An uncomfortable sensation that occurs when gender and body do not align.
one hell for another.” One night in 2013, after six hours of crying due to his struggle with gender dysphoria, Stephan finally decided to describe his struggle online. Minutes later, someone replied suggesting Stephan might be *bigender* or *gender fluid*². At that clarifying moment, Stephan finally came to understand fluctuating his sense of self. Although Stephan continues to experience dysphoria to this day, he has been becoming more comfortable with his fluid identity as he has become more cognizant about his gender identity.

While Stephan's story is unique in itself, it resembles stories of others with a fluid gender identity. How Stephan's story relates to and contrasts with these other stories, which I present throughout this thesis, not only reflects the intricacies of gender fluidity itself, but the complex nature of gender and identity as well.

This study examines gender fluidity within the framework of the Western ontology of gender. This ontological framework accentuates assumptions and conceptualizations of gender that influence how my informants understand their own fluid gender identities. Here I describe gender fluidity as a constant but inconsistent fluctuation of feelings that are related to the body – which I call *feelings of gender*. These feelings do not affect my informants' personae, but rather how they attend to and thus carry their bodies. Their manner of somatically attending to these feelings, in various ways, is influenced by three distinct yet related assumptions of gender: the sense of self that is found within the body, the biological attributes of the body, and the external expression of the body. Furthermore, I examine six other stories in depth to unveil patterns of social and cultural influences that affect how my informants understand gender fluidity and how gender is constructed and perpetuated throughout society.

Ultimately, the terminology *feelings of gender* is a new way to describe the relationship

² Unlike *cross-dressing* or *transgender*, *bigender* or *gender fluid* both imply that one can be both male and female.
between gender and the body under Western ontology. *Feelings of gender* forces us to not only recognize that our presumptions of gender influence how we perceive the body, but how those presumptions affect the manner in which we attend to and interact with our bodies as well. This wider scope can then allow us to talk about issues such as dysphoria on a different level (i.e. in what ways dysphoria impacts how people feel about their bodies and why those feelings are difficult for others to understand).

Furthermore, since this study addresses the Western ontology of gender, I show – in addition to the presumptions that gender is related to the biological or Cartesian body – that gender is also assumed to be the external expression of the body. More important, I describe the relationship between ontology and *feelings of gender* ultimately affects one's sense of agency over their *feelings of gender*.

As this thesis explores gender fluidity contextualized within Western ontology, I engage with the anthropological discourse of gender ontologies cross-culturally. My exploration into *feelings of gender* primarily expands upon Thomas Csordas' phenomenological *somatic modes of attention*. Furthermore, the importance of language in gender fluid identities fortifies Butler's emphasis on language, which scholars have criticized. Through the narratives of gender fluid individuals, we come to an anthropological understanding of how people conceptualize, attend to, and carry themselves based upon their gender identities.
Ontologies of Gender

To grasp what gender fluidity means within the United States, it is necessary to examine gender fluidity within the framework of Western ontology. Thus, the goal of this literature review is to compare and contrast the Western ontology of gender with others throughout the globe to capture a holistic conceptualization of the Western ontology of gender. This comparison will accentuate the taken-for-granted definitions of gender for Westerners, thus offering a more thorough framework for conceptualizing gender fluidity.

As noted by many scholars (Bolin 1996; Butler [1990] 1999; 1993; Finkler 1994; Herdt 1996a; Karkazis 2008; Lacqueur 1990; Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987; Valentine 2007), Western ontology relates gender to the body. This ontology is not novel, as it has persisted within Western mindset since the times of Aristotle. For instance, Thomas Lacqueur’s (1990) depiction of gender prior to the Enlightenment era reveals that Westerners once perceived the body as one sex, one gender. In other words, male and female were one of the same body. For example, Lacquer draws from Galen, a Greek philosopher and physician of the second and third century, to point out the assumption that men and women “have exactly the same organs but in exactly the wrong places” (1990: 26). To be more precise, what Galen means when says these organs are in “the wrong places” is that female genitals are male genitals that are inside out – or rather, outside in. Galen's explanation to why females appear more “inside out” than males is related to body heat; that is “women were essentially men in whom a lack of vital heat – of perfection – had resulted in the retention, inside, of structures that in the male are visible without” (1990: 4). In other words, and to be blunt, the female body was assumed to be inferior as it lacked the vital heat to maintain its “perfect” masculine form.
Just as people presumed that sex was reversible, they believed that gender was reversible as well. Hence, there was the assumption that “[girls] could turn into boys, and men who associated too extensively with women could lose the hardness and definition of their more perfect bodies and regress into effeminacy” (1990: 7). In relation to Galen's claim that women are the inside out form of men due to lack of vital heat, this indicates a correlation between sex and gender; that is, the body defined whether one's gender is “perfect.” What this indicates is body and gender were not necessarily defined as essentially male and female, but as masculine (“perfect”) or not. Hence, the body was a political symbol in distinguishing within a hierarchical ladder of a “perfect” being.

By the turn of the Enlightenment era, this one model ontology of sex and gender diverged into two – from masculine to male and female (Herdt 1996a; Lacqueur 1990). The works of evolutionary scholars – Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and Charles Darwin, to name a few – collapsed body, sexuality, and gender into an interconnected binary system (Herdt 1996a). As biology emphasized the role of sexuality, and thus the body's role in procreating, there developed a more distinctive dichotomy between male and female. As Lacqueur notes “[not] only are the sexes different, but they are different in every conceivable aspect of body and soul, in every physical and moral aspect” (1990: 5). As males and females developed a new sense of self, that sense of self began relating back to their biological role in procreation. Entailing the rise of biology, medical institutions became a nexus for perpetuating this new binary definition of gender within Western ontology (Bolin 1996; Finkler 1994; Foucault [1976] 1990; Herdt 1996a; Karkazis 2008; Valentine 2007).

American anthropologist Anne Bolin, for instance, describes in her 1979-1982 and 1992...
ethnographies\(^3\) on MTF\(^4\) that “genital reductionism is the template for the medical construction of the transsexual identity since that which cannot be seen is not essential in the construction of identities for individuals” (1996: 454). That is, the legitimacy of being female for MTFs – at least those whom Bolin interviewed – derives from medical intervention of attaining a female body rather than visually passing the body off as female. In other words, the objective is not to be presumed as a “whole woman,” but to become one (1996: 458). Hence, one must achieve a biologically feminine body that is capable of meeting a set of medical guidelines that defines femaleness. This entails not only altering the body to acquire particular feminine features (e.g. vagina and breasts), but being able to experience the hormonal cycles associated with women's ability to reproduce. Although Bolin's participants are unable to achieve such goals, they can at least simulate the experience and thus legitimize this becoming a “whole woman” through hormonal treatments. In other words, their medical transition is what legitimates their becoming a “whole women.” Bolin's study exemplifies not only Western emphasis on the body as the defining point for gender, but a Western tendency to conceptualize gender in a medical, and thus, biological manner.

At this point, it seems clear that the Western understanding of gender has always been grounded within the body. Yet can we assume that everyone conceptualizes gender as a coherent characteristic of the body? To answer this inquiry, it is crucial to examine other ontologies. I begin with several Native American ontologies (e.g. Cheyenne, Crows, Mescalero, Navajo, etc.) that define gender as one's social role in context of the grand scheme of the universe (Epple 1997; Farrer 1997; Roscoe 1996). To grasp this concept a little deeper, it is useful to note two-

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\(^3\) Bolin's 1979-1981 participants were members of the Berdache Society while her 1992 participants came from the National Transgender Annual Meetings and the Fantasia Fair.

\(^4\) Male-to-female transsexual/ transgender
spirits — a third gender variant for some Native Americans groups (Epple 1997; Goulet 1997; Jacobs 1997; Jacobs, Thomas, Lang 1997; Roscoe 1996).

American scholar Will Roscoe (1996: 332), by thoroughly analyzing previous field research, depicts three characteristics of two-spirits: societal roles (male two-spirits taking on domestic work and crafts while female two-spirits pursue hunting and leadership roles), divine sanctioning (being bestowed super natural powers), and gender variation (expectation to meet cultural expectations for male and female genders). Regarding the latter, Roscoe (1996: 333-335) notes that although there are visual markers for gender (e.g. articles of clothing), there are cases where these markers do not necessarily defines one's gender identity (Goulet [1997: 51] also points this out in his analysis of the ethnographic records on Northern Athapaskans).

Can sexuality be a marker of gender? Although Roscoe (1996:338) notes many cases where two-spirits are involved in a “homosexual” or “bisexual” (referring to Western notions of sexual orientations) relationships, he also points out that this is not always the case. As Farrer (1997: 243) notes from his case study on Bernard, a Mescalero two-spirit, sexuality does not necessarily influence one's gender in this cultural context.

Rather than the body or sexuality as necessary elements to define gender for many of these Native American groups, many scholars have pointed out that gender is defined as one's assumed social role (Elledge 2002; Epple 1997; Farrer 1997; Goulet 1997; Roscoe 1996). That is, the roles that one takes in society underlie their gender identity (e.g. someone who partakes in hunting is understood to be male, and someone who engages in weaving textile is presumed to be female). A two-spirit often assumes the role of their opposite assigned sex. As one naturally is

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5 Another term is berdache. However, due to its etymology deriving from French as 'a younger male homosexual partner,' therefore carrying a negative connotation, the term has been looked down upon (Roscoe 1996).
born male or female, one becomes a two-spirit by a supernatural phenomenon (i.e. vision or
dream) (Elledge 2002; Farrer 1997; Roscoe 1996). Because two-spirits transcend into beings
who embody both male and female qualities, they are capable of seeing a more holistic view of
the world and often serve the roles of healers, mediators, and interpreters of dreams (Farrer 1997:
248-249). This is one of the reasons why many Native American societies elevate two-spirits
(Elledge 2002; Farrer 1997; Roscoe 1996). However, because they are bestowed with
supernatural qualities by a divine force, they must abide by the will of that divine force unless
they are desire to bear the consequences in these cultural contexts (Farrer 1997).

Gender, however, is more complicated than simply categorizing one as either male,
female, or two-spirit in this cultural context. A man who serves the role of a mother can easily be
dismissed as a two-spirit, but the neglect to recognize his role in connection with the cosmos
may lead to a misinterpretation of his true gender (Epple 1997). Is he a mother because he is a
two-spirit, or is he still a male but assumes the mother role for his motherless siblings? These
questions suggest gender is not only defined by one's role, but how that role is presumably
played out in the grand scheme of the universe.

While social roles define gender under many Native American ontologies, under a
Brazilian ontology sexuality conceptualizes gender. Anthropologist Don Kulick (1997; 1998)
analyzes this particular ontology in his rich ethnographic field work with Brazilian travestis – a
part of gender variants. Travestis are biologically⁶ born males who modify their bodies to appear
more feminine. While this may seem like a direct correlation to the Western ontology of gender
(i.e. the genital is the defining point for gender), this is not entirely the case. That is, while

⁶ When I say “biologically,” I am referring to the pre-given genital body as a way to emphasize negative or
positive correlations with Western ontology of gender.
travestis utilize silicone and consume female hormones (often in the form of birth control pills) to obtain a more feminine body, they do not modify their male genitals. Due to Christian influences, many travestis believe that God has created them as males and thus they can never become a complete women. Furthermore, there is the belief that if they were to remove their God-given penises, then their semen would eventually travel up into their brains and make them mad (1997: 577).

The body – more specifically, one's pre-given genitals – in this cultural context is still essential in determining gender. That is, one’s genitals enable what role one can take in sexual intercourse. As Kulick (1998) explains:

> While the anatomical differences between men and women are certainly not missed or ignored in Brazil, the possession of genitals appears to be fundamentally conflated with what they can be used for, and in the particular configuration of sexuality, gender, and sex that travestis draw on, the determinative criterion in the identification of males and females is not so much the genitals as it is the roles those genitals perform in sexual encounters. Here the locus of gender difference is the act of penetration – if one only penetrates, one is a “man”; if one gets penetrated, one is something other than a man – one is either a viado, a faggot; or a mulher, a woman. (P. 227)

While Westerners relate gender to the capacity to procreate, Brazilians (at least those described in Kulick's study) define gender according to the ability to penetrate. Hence, whether one has a penis determines whether they can be the penetrator. While only men can penetrate, both men and women can be penetrated. Thus, unlike the Western assumption that gender is either man or woman, within this Brazilian ontology, gender is either man or not man.

While Brazilian and various Native American ontologies of gender seem to contrast with that of the West, within India's ontology, gender is similarly ascribed to the biological male and female bodies (Nanda 1990; 1996; 2002). In this manner, male and female are complementary in
procreation and in marriage. This understanding of male and female complementary roles comes from Hinduism; that is, to become a complete person, one must be a complementary half for another (Nanda 1990: 147).

Hijras – a third gender variant in India – effectively illustrate Indian gender ontology (Nanda 1990; 1996; 2002). Hijras are naturally born or surgically-made male hermaphrodites. While they are “neither man nor woman,” they are also “both man and woman” (Nanda 1990; 1996). In other words, a hijra cannot be either man nor woman due to their inability to engage in procreation (hence, the inability to become someone's complementary half). On the other hand, they are often naturally born males who “mutilate” their genitals (to borrow Nanda's term) and assume a more feminine persona (e.g. use of a feminine name, wears feminine clothing, etc.) (1996: 382-386). While incapable of becoming a 'complete person' due to their inability to engage in procreation, hijras achieve a transcendent status through nirvan – a ritual of emasculation, which entails one's genitals being surgically removed (p. 384). Their ability to transcend to this divine state enables hijras to engage in ceremonies for newborn sons and weddings (Nanda 1990; 1996). Hence, similar to two-spirits, hijras obtain a supernatural role in society. Yet, more important, the fact that they cannot become a complete person due to an inability to complement another being accentuates India's binary gender ontology.

Similar to the fluidity of gender that Kulick (1997; 1998) depicts in his ethnographic fieldwork in Brazil, and its biological relationship that Bolin (1996) and Nanda (1990; 1996; 2002) articulate in their research, American anthropologist Gilbert Herdt (1994; 1996b) describes in his ethnographic study on Sambia in Papua New Guinea an ontology of gender that is connected to one’s bodily liquids. This culture conceptualizes women as being filled with cold.

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7 Herdt’s pseudonym for the group of people whom he studied (c.f. 1994; 1996b).
feminine fluids that are released during menstruation (Herdt 1994: 249). As these cold fluids are already within the body since birth, the process of becoming a woman is natural and requires no intervention. On the other hand, boys become men after they have separated themselves from their mothers and their feminine fluid and partake in the ritual of fellatio to embody the hot liquid of masculinity. However, unlike their feminine counterparts, boys cannot naturally become men as they are not born with this liquid, rather they must consume this masculine liquid that biologically transforms their bodies into an adult males'. Hence, while menstrual blood naturally defines a woman, semen is the natural and artificial essence of a man.

As these biological liquids quintessentially define gender for the Sambia, it is crucial to note the assumption that one is biologically subject to change when they interact with the liquid from their counterpart (Herdt 1994). That is, the exposure to menstrual blood can tarnish the masculine nature of men – which is why men separate themselves from women (Herdt 1994; 1996b). Nevertheless, intercourse, where couples interchange and mix both masculine and feminine fluids between each other, is capable to influence the biological structure of both man and woman. When a woman is inseminated, she becomes warm with men's liquid, which partially remains within her when she becomes pregnant. When men engage in sexual intercourse with a woman, they are not only exposing their penises to vaginal fluids, but they are also extracting their masculine fluid – which becomes depleted and must be replenished afterwards by rubbing tree sap around their genitals. As Herdt (1994: 251) explains, failure to replenish their semen may completely conclude their masculine nature.

This biological fluid ontology of gender resembles the Western assumption of gender prior to the Enlightenment era – that is, gender is coherent with the body and is subject to change
depending on how one behaves. It is also interesting that both the pre-Enlightenment West and Sambia assume that the biological difference between male and female relates back to their vital heat that maintains masculinity.

The literature on gender ontologies is indeed expansive. While scholars have shown historical developments of the Western ontology of gender (Herdt 1996a; Lacqueur 1990) and have examined the various forms of ontologies of gender through different gender variations (Bolin 1996; Elledge 2002; Epple 1997; Farrer 1997; Goulet 1997; Herdt 1994; 1996b; Kulick 1997; 1998; Nanda 1990; 1996; 2002; Roscoe 1996), it is beneficial to examine the Western ontology of gender through an inconsistent gender identity – in this case, gender fluidity. Although scholars have examined fluid gender identities to understand other forms of ontologies (Herdt 1994; 1996b; Kulick 1997; 1998), and have dissected the Western ontology of gender by scrutinizing fixed gender identities, I explore fluid gender identities in context of the Western ontology of gender. In this manner, this study accentuates various taken-for-granted assumptions that studies on fixed gender identities have failed to capture.
Theory

As this study examines gender fluid identities, it is important that we understand what identity entails. Jenkins in *Social Identity* (1996: 4) points out that “identity is not 'just there', it must always be established.” This notion that identity is always being established suggests that there is a preconceived history behind it. A particular useful framework to understand this contingency of constructing identity is Pierre Bourdieus's (1990) *habitus*, which he defines as:

> systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (P. 53)

Here Bourdieu is saying that through a series of previous practices, we have formed structures (rules that limit our possibilities) that influence our agency (our “free will”). Because our approach to these continuous practices can never remain consistent, these structures are constantly being modified in the process of their construction. This returns back to Jenkins' notion that *identity* is simply never “just there,” but is always being established. It is important to note that “*habitus* – embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product” (Bourdieu 1990: 56). In other words, the practices we follow that construct and reconstruct our perceived identities are embodied as second nature by us.

Because my analysis focuses on gender identity, it is beneficial to reframe Bourdieus's *habitus* in a way that captures the essence of gender. With her concept of gender performativity, Butler attempts to strip the body as an object of “political” influences:

> [The] gendered bodies are so many “styles of the flesh.” These styles all never fully self-styled, for styles have a history, and those histories condition and limit the possibilities.
Consider gender, for instance, as a corporeal style, an “act,” as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where “performative” suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning. ([1990] 1999 P. 190)

Similar to Bourdieu, Butler recognizes that our conception of gender is created through a history of gendered acts. The consistent practice of performing man or woman “congeals” (using Butler's word) how we interpret the body as a representation of our gender identity.

Butler, however, argues that there is more to gender than simply the body; that is, there is a linguistic quality as well. Drawing from Althusser's (1971) interpellation (the recognition of oneself through a discursive ideological influence) and J.L. Austin's (1975) speech acts (the notion that words have the ability to influence the world in which we live), Butler points out that “[femininity] is thus not the product of a choice, but forcible citations of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment” (1993: 232). In this sense, it is clear why Butler argues that “there need not be a “doer behind the deed,” but that the “doer” is variably constructed through the deed” ([1990] 1999: 195). In other words, it is impossible to perform man or woman without either terms preexisting within the discourse of gender. Thus, as we continue acting in ways that allude to man or woman, we perpetuate a history from which we are able to reference and understand how we ought to act and how we ought to perceive to the acts of others.

In relation to the idea that the contingency of practice influences our perception of the world, Bourdieu, in his Outline of the Theory of Practice (1977), talks about doxa as the self-evident natural and social world; the world we perceive has always been as it presents itself. In the context of gender, we assume that there are particular rules to be a man or woman. As I have indicated previously, the Western ontology of gender presumes the body as the representation of
gender. Butler even recognizes this presumption as she defines gender (in a manner that is relevant to her intended Western-influenced audience) as:

the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender. ([1990] 1999 P. 45)

Since Western ontology leads us to assume the body as the starting place for gender, it is important to recognize how we understand our bodies. Thus, if we approach gender from this angle, it then becomes critical to examine the body as, to draw from Thomas Csordas (1993: 135), “the existential ground of culture – not as an object that is 'good to think,' but as a subject that is 'necessary to be.'” Csordas (1993: 138) coins somatic modes of attention to talk about the “culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others.” That is, culture serves as a filter to how we make sense of our bodies, which actively participate with and internalize the exterior world. Because Western ontology suggests that gender is rooted within the body, when we attend to someone else's or to our own bodies, culture filters how we gender those bodies ('that person is a she since she has breasts' or 'although that person looks like a man he is wearing a dress').

One way to interpret the importance of somatic modes of attention is through James Fernandez's concept of metaphor. Fernandez, in Persuasions and Performances (1986: 8) defines metaphor as “a strategic predication upon an inchoate pronoun (an I, a you, a we, a they) which makes a movement and leads to performance.” For the sake of this thesis, I would like to expand the concept of metaphor to not only refer to language itself, but also to anything that serves as an analogy to something else. In other words, the body is a culturally recognized and accepted
metaphor that is used to predicate upon the inchoate known as gender. When we somatically attend to the body, we strategically make a series of predications to predict how we must accordingly act. For instance, a child trying to predicate on their body to determine how they ought to act in front of others may make the following conjecture: 'I must act masculine/feminine because that is how I and others recognize my body, or else I will suffer the consequences.' On the other hand, others can also predicate on the child's body to strategically approach the child as well: 'because the child looks masculine, I ought to treat him as a boy and not a girl.'

In our doxa, these strategies are not idle, but necessary. We constantly rely on them to smoothly carry out our daily tasks. If we were to break this “natural” flow, we lead the risk of creating tension, the possibility that people would look down on us – which is often preferably avoided. Hence, part of my inquiry deals with this constant predication on the inconsistent, inchoate self. How does one predicate on something not fixed? How is one supposed to act according to these presumptions despite the irregular contrasts between self and social expectations?

To define gender fluidity within the United States, it is necessary to interpret the term within the context of the Western ontology of gender, as a more accurate interpretation requires the subject within its proper context. Doing so will enable us to grasp how my informants conceptualize their gender identities and their perceptions regarding how they (must) carry themselves.

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8 "They" will be used as both third-person singular and plural throughout this paper. This is to address people who have not provided a specific gendered pronoun they prefer and to remove any sexism language as a part of the modern developing convention of writing (c.f. McWhorter 1998; Butler 1993).
Narratives: Representation of the Self

Identities of any sort are indeed subjective, therefore my ideal approach to grasp gender fluid identities is thorough narrative analysis. Narratives of personal experiences and beliefs can serve as windows into individuals’ perspectives of their gender identities. This is critical since gender and identity are two highly subjective concepts that cannot be grasped through straightforward, empirical observations. It is important to point out that these narratives are interpretations of the self in the present – rather than fixed descriptions of the self (Kerby 1997). The praxis of retelling one's story and opinions can be understood as part of the process of reflecting and reinterpreting personal experiences (Becker 1997). Therefore, what my informants say must not be seen as representing a fixed self, but instead as a present understanding of the self placed in the world that they currently know.

In addition, narratives can prevent over-generalization, which poses as a common danger in the social sciences (Abu-Lughod 1992; Said 1978). Valentine's ethnography (2007), for instance, demonstrates that what it means to be a particular gender – in his case, transgender – is not necessarily conceptually shared with everyone who views themselves as that gender. When we look at someone's story, entailed with their opinions, we are reminded that we are not talking to a population as a whole, but rather to an individual with their own distinctive beliefs and experiences that conflux into an ego.

Over the course of six months, I have interviewed eleven⁹ individuals who consider their gender to be fluid. I conducted these interviews either in-person, online chat, or email¹⁰. For ethical reasons, I was required to indirectly approach my informants – in other words, only my

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⁹ I had actually interviewed fourteen people in total. I have removed the other three participants from the study due to initial poor data gathering – on the researcher's behalf – and the possibility that one of my informants did not view themselves as gender fluid.

¹⁰ I conducted one of my interviews via email due to communication barriers between my informant and me.
informants could approach me. To overcome this obstacle, I announced my study at a couple of LGBT events, posted an advertisement on a couple of social media websites, and networked through acquaintances and informants. During each interview, I used questions that I thought were essential to explore and to guide the interview\(^{11}\). I did not limit my interview to those questions, as I probed responses that I believed needed greater clarification or could offer interesting insights into gender fluidity. I recorded each interview with my informants' consent. These recordings have allowed me to present and discuss my informants' narratives in a manner that allows others to discuss and challenge my interpretations.

I would like to note that what my informants have shared was limited to their perception of and willingness to respond to my questions. Out of their responses, I have selected excerpts and full-length narratives that I believe highlight important features that help us understand gender fluidity. Finally, I have edited, while trying to preserve the voice, of each narrative that I present throughout this thesis for clarity, coherence, and confidentiality.

As we go through each narrative, we must remind ourselves that we are only examining one perspective of gender fluidity. However, we must also keep in mind that when all unique perspectives are appropriately framed together, a deeper understanding of gender fluidity should be apparent. In addition, because a person's sex and gender identity are possible factors that may influence how my informants conceptualize gender fluidity, I indicate the biological sex and gender identity of each informant to whom I refer. Furthermore, to remain true to my informants, I address each one by their preferred pronouns.

\(^{11}\) See appendix for interview questions.
**Gender and the Body**

“Order begins with the body. That is, our understanding of ourselves and the world begins with our reliance on the orderly functioning of our bodies. This bodily knowledge informs what we do and say in the course of daily life. In addition, we carry our histories with us into the present through our bodies.”

— Gay Becker

**Disrupted Lives**

A motif I noticed throughout these interviews was the connection between body and gender. Cody¹², who is biologically female and identifies herself as gender queer with feminine pronouns, for instance, points out this relationship while describing how she initially identified as gender queer:

> I’ve kind of always had a weird relationship with my body. I didn't really like being a girl, I didn't want to be, but I didn't realize that there were other options. I also knew I wasn't a guy. I've heard of trans people, but I figured that you had to be one or the other. I didn't want to become a man, so I figured girl is the other option. I was fine with that [Then] I realized that there were non-binary identities; there was an option to identify as something else, something that wasn't woman or man, but something in between. That was around 19 and that's when I realized I was reading online some stuff written by gender queer young adult, and I was like, 'Wow, that's me.' And that fit my experience more than calling myself a woman ever did. Or a girl, because I was young.

When initially describing how she identified as gender queer, Cody starts by talking about her ‘weird relationship' with her body. Her usage of 'girl,' 'guy,' 'man,' and 'woman' reflects a series of terms that she once used to identify with and conceptualize her body. Although she acknowledges that her body is physically female, she understands that girl or woman – socially appropriate terms to identify her body – do not match. There is something deeper, more intricate for Cody about her body and the gender with which she identifies. She comments that ‘trans,'

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¹² Each name to which I refer throughout this thesis is under a pseudonym. In addition, I refer to each of my informants by their identified pronouns.

¹³ My decision to label each excerpt from my informants’ narratives is to clearly show the relationship regarding how they conceptualize gender and gender fluidity.
too, does not fit her actual identity as Cody does not want to become a man subjectively (gender) and objectively (body). Cody only comes to understand her gender-body relationship shortly after identifying as *non-binary* – not necessarily identifying as male or female – a lens that Cody feels is more appropriate to view her relationship with her body. This initial quote recognizes the body as the existential ground of gender for at least Cody.

Cody, however, was not my only informant who recognized gender's relationship with the body. Blythe, who is biologically female but identifies as gender fluid and with third-person pronouns, after explaining how they discovered their gender identity under *gender fluidity* points out this crucial realization:

(2) That's why I know that the body is a real important role in it, because even as a kid, when I didn't even have the concept of what gender even was, I would feel that way. I would remember being very little and trying to tie my hair back and go around and my mom would say like, “Don't do that. You'll look like a boy;” and I used to be like “Good!” I was happy about that. And then some days I'd like to have that ring that curls [for my hair], and everyone would say like, “Oh, you're such a pretty girl.” It was something where I was like, “I like being both.” And that was something that even as a kid I knew. When you're a kid, you don't know what *gender* is. So that's how I know it has more inherent than that cause as a child I knew that there was something different.

Since childhood, Blythe has realized the various 'techniques of the body' (drawing from Mauss' *les techniques du corps* [1950]) that convey gender. The way Blythe has always known the symbolic meanings of adorned body (such as short hair for boy or curly hair for girl), and how to appropriately adorn their own body to convey a particular gender, demonstrate this acute somatic awareness of these various bodily techniques for gender. Blythe's awareness of these techniques from such a young age – a time they were unaware of gender – is Blythe's epistemology that the body is the fundamental component for gender.

Both Cody's and Blythe's perspectives on the body and gender suggest that the body is
crucial for my informants to conceptualize gender. Though this body-gender correlation may currently seem opaque, this relationship will become clear as we continue to explore my informants' perception of gender as a feeling of the body and the body as the (mis)representation of those feelings.

**Feelings of Gender**

Throughout my conducted interviews, my informants often describe gender as a 'feeling' that is connected to the body. Jay, who is biologically female and identifies as gender fluid with feminine pronouns, for instance, mentions this connection after I asked her to define gender:

(3) Gender is a construct that represents feelings that people have. So people might have feelings that make them feel in particular categorizable ways, and we call those things male and female. But that's sort of a construct and we also lump other things into those behaviors and appearance, and associate them, a lot time, with people's birth sex, whether or not that's accurate.

Jay's description of gender suggests that people who have these feelings are often categorized as either male or female. Although Jay is not entirely certain whether gender is actually related to one's prescribed sex, she acknowledges people's tendency to lump gender along with behaviors and appearances with sex. It is particularly interesting to note that these feelings, according to Jay, are connected to sex, appearance and binary categories – in other words, the feelings gender encompasses relate to the male and female body.

Similar to Jay, Blythe also perceives gender as feelings:

(4) I think that gender is just something that you personally identify with. [It's] something that you feel. [It] doesn't necessarily have to necessarily connect with what society views as what that is. If you feel male, that doesn't necessarily mean you have to like football or wear jerseys or anything. Just because you feel female [doesn’t necessarily mean] you wear dresses or play with dolls.
In their definition, Blythe describes gender as a feeling with which people “personally identify” themselves. Like Jay (3), Blythe also notes that these feelings can be categorized as “male” or “female.” Although one may recognize their feelings according to these distinctive categories, Blythe indicates that these feelings – that are personally identified – are not necessarily related to social roles or bodily adornments.

While Blythe claims that gender is not necessarily connected with societal views of male and female, they nevertheless continue to categorize their gender in this binary manner. For instance, notice how Blythe describes gender fluidity:

(5) [My gender identity] isn't always consistent. Some days I feel male. Some days I feel genderless. I don't typically feel female. Typically [I don’t feel feminine], but I do occasionally [feel that way]. It's kind of an up and down slope. It's weird.

Yet, what does Blythe mean with inconsistently identifying as _male, female_ or _neutral_? Already, Blythe has made it clear that these feelings are not necessarily associated with social roles such as playing football for males or dolls for females. Rather, these inconsistent feelings, according to Blythe, are internalized within the body:

(6) It's more that when I feel female, I feel correct in my own body. [...] I feel comfortable. When I feel male [...] it's a lot more discomfort. I try to like bind\footnote{The act of flattening the chest by means of constrictive materials.} or I try to... it's a lot more like things about my body I'm less comfortable with. But typically it's mostly genderless. So like a-gender, I guess, which is why I usually use _they_ and _their_. I usually don't identify with one gender, typically. But some days I prefer male, and so I go with male pronouns.

In other words, these gendered feelings are associated with how one feels with their body. Blythe describes that these feelings influence how comfortable they feel with their own body. That is, when Blythe's gender appropriately aligns with their prescribed sex, which for Blythe is female, then they would feel comfortable. On the other hand, when Blythe feels male, then they would
try to adapt their body in a manner that is more coherent with their feeling – which for Blythe is binding. While this may seem to contradict Blythe's previous description of gender (4) – that is, gender is not necessarily how one adorns the body – the fact Blythe binds suggests that adorning the body may have some relation according how these somatic feelings are embodied. Of course, in contrast to Jay's (3) comment, these feelings do not necessarily need to be male or female, as Blythe notes there are time when they feel genderless. Here I would like to refer to these feelings as feelings of gender.

While it seems clear that these feelings of gender are connected to the body, the question that remains is how they are connected. Both Nil and Cody acknowledge that the feelings of gender relate to this internal sense of the body that is related to the male-female binary structure. Nil mentions that: (7) “Gender is a very internalized thing. It's how you feel, what you are, but kind of based on the binary system we have, but that doesn't mean you have to conform to it.” Cody's response is very similar, as she explains that: (8) “Gender is someone's internal sense of how they relate to cultural norms of masculinity and femininity in their own bodies. So it's kind of the intersection of those things.” Both of these definitions imply that the feelings of gender is rooted within a male-female binary structure – whether one decides “to conform to it.”

Furthermore, according to Nil's and Cody's definitions, the feelings of gender are related to the Cartesian Dualism that is interwoven within Western ontology (Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987). Both Nil and Cody relate the feelings of gender according to a structure that emphasizes male-female binaries. Alex, who is biologically female and identifies as MTF with masculine pronouns, also shares a similar perception with Nil and Cody:

(9) I think gender is something that not everyone has. I met people who are a-gender, or genderless. It's a combination of mental, spiritual... not really spiritual, but like
a sense of self – to some people that would be spiritual – and also physical characteristics. I don't believe that gender is something that someone decides as much as it is something that they are. I do think that gender for all people is fluid, and that gender identity and gender expression are not the same, although they may be linked.

Alex's definition of gender relates back to Western Cartesian Dualism assumption – that is, gender is both spiritual and physical. For Alex, spirituality can also refer to “sense of self.” What complicates Alex's definition, however, is that he describes gender as a sense of self that not everyone necessarily has. There are two ways to interpret Alex's description: one, it is possible for someone not to have these feelings of gender; two, the feelings of gender can also be categorized as “a-gender” or “genderless.” I suggest the latter, as I recall Blythe (5-6) explaining that there are days when they “feel genderless.” Blythe's acknowledgment that there is a feeling associated with “genderless” implies a feeling associated with the body. Although Alex describes meeting people who classify themselves as “a-gender” or “genderless,” from what I have gathered so far, those terms nevertheless reflect a specific kind of feeling associated with the body. Hence, it is safe to say that “a-gender” and “genderless” are associated with the feelings of gender.

On one hand, some of my informants perceive gender as internalized feelings that can perhaps be described as almost spiritual; on the other hand, some of my informants perceive these feelings as slightly different from the Cartesian Dualism. For instance, Alexvina, who is biologically male and identifies as gender fluid with masculine pronouns, describes gender fluidity as a mood. To understand what Alexvina means when he describes these feelings of gender as a mood – and to help him conceptualize and describe gender fluidity – I asked him to differentiate between moods associated with gender and emotions:
(10) Certain things will make you happy and sad, and that's what a mood is. But [...] it's much harder to change your gender when you're gender fluid. Like I don't really have any control over it. Like, maybe if I'm a five, I can become a six or seven, or maybe a four or three. But, you know, [it's] not going to change that much. It's kind of day to day, and, you know, it just changes, and I'm up for certain things.

Alexvina differentiates these “moods” of gender with emotions by contrasting the difficulty of one's ability to control them. He views himself having very little – if any – agency over these moods. In addition to Alexvina having practically no agency over these “moods” he experiences, these 'moods' are also constantly changing from “day-to-day.”

Similar to Alexvina, Jay associates gender fluidity with moods as well. For instance, in the following narrative, Jay explains her subtle awareness regarding her flux in gender:

(11) I think sometimes I notice that I'm in a particular sort of mood, and I can be self reinforcing where it'll happen and I'll sort of notice it and then I'll feel good about it, or something like that. I'll stick with it. But it's not like a decision, it just sort of happen and I notice it. But I'll say that it's not totally subconscious. [Yet] it's not that I'm trying to carry myself in a confident way, I just feel confident and it happens.

Similar to Alexvina (10), Jay also describes her lack of agency over these moods associated with the feelings of gender. While these changes are not completely unconscious, they are nonetheless uncontrollable. Furthermore, building off of Alexvina's description, Jay notes that these change of moods influence how she perceives and carries herself.

When Alexvina and Jay refer to their feelings of gender as moods, how are these moods conceptualized in relation to the body? At one point during her interview, Jay proposes a theory that reflects how she perceives these gendered moods:

(12) I think being gender fluid, in general, is very confusing. I have this theory right now that my gender related feelings are very sensitive to my cyclical hormonal changes. You know. If you look at a chart from day one to day twenty-eight of a menstrual cycle, you'll see testosterone and estrogen doing that [changing]. This is
just a theory of mine that I'm just very sensitive to those changes, and it really manifest in the way I feel about my gender on a day-to-day basis. But I haven't really tracked it well enough to really know. It could be other things.

Once more, these moods associated with the feelings of gender are connected to the body. Unlike Nil's (7), Cody's (8) and Alex's (9) conceptualization of the feelings of gender in relation to the mind-body split, Jay's theoretical understanding collapses the dichotomy to just the body. This fusion with body and feelings – or “moods,” as Jay and Alexvina would word it – is biologically related for these informants. Notice that Jay relates the fluctuation of these moods with her cyclical hormonal changes. Though it seems she has doubt whether this is the case, her proposed theory suggests this is one way to understand these moods.

In a similar manner, Collin, who is biologically male and identifies as gender fluid with masculine pronouns, also suggests that these 'feelings' are related to a biological aspect of the body:

(13) It's not something that I just decide. Like, “Oh, this is how I'll express myself.” It's more like an overwhelming feeling of this is who I am. This is how I feel like I should be expressing myself, rather than just a decision. Like it is my decision, but at the same time it's like it feels hormonal, it feels chemical, it feels like something more in my body than in my mind.

Like Jay (12), Collin also describes the feelings of gender as chemically related to the body. Similar to Jay (11), these feelings of gender correlate with Collin's understanding regarding how he ought to carry – or express – his body. Collin acknowledges that these feelings are more ingrained within the body rather than completely separated from it. Hence, compared with Nil, Cody, and Alex – whose conceptualization of the feelings of gender is connected with the Western Cartesian Dualism assumption – Jay's and Collin's view on gender relates back to the eighteenth and nineteenth century ontological shift to biology (Herdt 1996a; Lacqueur 1990). In
addition, Collin emphasizes that he, like Alexvina (10) and Jay (11), does not have any sense of agency over his gender, as he describes it as an “overwhelming feeling.”

While it seems clear that the feelings of gender are also recognized as a biological feature of the body, Jay indicates that there is more to gender than simply hormones:

(14) I think gender itself is labels that we put on things, but the feelings we're labeling are probably related to biology. So I don't see man and woman as inherit categories, but I do see people having feelings that might be related to testosterone or the way their brain is arranged, or other things. But I also think that interacts in a cultural way. The culture that we're in can change the way we think about things, just as the language that you use changes the way your brain processes. You know, if you use the same word for blue and green, you can't tell the difference between blue and green anymore. [...] So the culture that we live in can change our biology, can change the way we interpret it. I'm not a fan of really essentialist views of gender: where we say that if you're brain scan looks like this, then that means you're this gender [...]. Because the feelings that those brains might generate would be very differently interpreted by people that are experiencing those feelings. So gender is partially the feelings and partially the interpretation that you put on top of the feelings.

While still acknowledging that the feelings of gender are related to biology, Jay points out that culture inevitably influences how people interpret those feelings. For Jay, while hormones and testosterone chemically influence one's psyche, culture and language serve as a lens to interpret those influences. Cody (8), despite her mind-body dichotomy understanding of gender, also shares this insight that culture affects how people perceive and categorize the feelings of gender.

Currently, I have shown that my informants conceptualize the feelings of gender as a split and separation between the mind (or spirit) and body and as biologically ingrained within the body. However, these distinct conceptualizations of the feelings of gender are not completely separate from each other. Stephan, for instance, differentiates sex as “What's down there [the genitals]” with gender as “What's up here [referring to the mind].” While Stephan differentiates mind and genitals for gender and sex, he refers to gender – the mind – in a medical manner. For
instance, notice how he describes his gender identity:

(15) People thinking that they can fix it when it can't be fixed. It's a medical condition. I suffer with this on, not a daily basis, but incredibly frequently. This is not something that I choose. I would never to choose to suffer from something like this. I would never choose to feel wrong in my own body. This is a medical condition. Just like anyone that would have another medical condition like diabetes, or epilepsy, or AIDS, we need support and help too.

Though Stephan considers gender fluidity as a medical condition, this “medical” perception of gender is still connected with the ontology of biology (Hertz 1996a; Lacqueur 1990). While describing the feelings of gender as medically ascribed to the body, he also separates both body and gender, describing that he would never choose to feel wrong in his own body. Like Nil (7), Jay (8) and Alex (9), this is feeling is inside rather than a part of the body. However, similar to Jay (12, 14) and Collin (13), Stephan framing these feelings as a medical condition with the body suggests that he also perceives the feelings of gender as an integrated aspect of the body. Within Stephan's description, we do not merely see one of these two ontologies of gender, but rather a mixture of both. Hence, the ontologies of gender are not necessarily distinct from each other, but they may be interconnected as well.

Besides these “feelings” relating to the sense of self within the body and the biologically defined body, some of my other informants referred to these feelings as external expressions of the body. Rin, who is biologically male and identifies as gender queer with masculine pronouns, for instance, defines gender as “self-expression,” the way masculinity, femininity, or any other gender identities are expressed. While describing why he continues dressing as a female regardless of negative comments, Rin mentions:

(16) Cause every time I do this, it feels really cathartic. It feels good to do this. It feels like I'm expressing myself properly kind of thing. I am very comfortable being a boy too. [But] I need to get out of it every once and a while and express myself in
a different way, because I really like clothes. Like a lot. And I feel that just men's fashion is way too restricting to be able to express myself the way I want to, so that's why I try to do what I do, very well, here.

For Rin, the feelings of gender relate to one's capacity to externally express themselves with their body. Unlike my other informants, Rin does not frame gender as one's soul or mind nor as a biological component of the body. Instead, Rin recognizes gender as the feeling that arises through “properly” – or freely – expressing oneself. However, because the expressive qualities of men's fashion is limiting for him, Rin acknowledges the necessity of women's clothing for him to properly express himself. Ultimately, Rin's comment suggests a third ontology of gender: gender is the body's expressions. Furthermore, in comparison to the other two ontologies of gender, this third one does not relate gender within the body – whether it be one's soul or biological chemicals – but rather what is externalized by body.

As Rin views gender as an external expression of the body, it is clear that clothes carry symbolic significance for him. Because of this, I asked about Rin's perception of clothes:

(17) Clothes can say a lot about a person. The way anyone dresses. Men's clothes can only do so much. Women's clothes can do all kinds of things. You can have socks, short skirts to long, gloves, jackets, blazers. You know, it's just endless with women's fashion.

With men's fashion I like to make myself look more like cool or powerful kind of thing, or kind of like… I guess handsome is a good word [...] And then there's cute fashion for guys too, but when I want to express myself in a cute way, I'd prefer to do it in a female fashion.

Already somatically attuned to the symbolic meanings that clothes convey, Rin notes male clothes can make the body be perceived as either “cool” or “powerful” while women's clothing can makes the body “cute.” These adjectives convey social implications that have influenced Rin's perception of what it means to be a man or woman – thus influencing how he somatically
attends to gendered bodies. Furthermore, his comment (16) regarding the capacity that male and female clothes can convey about a person seems to come from the vast varieties of clothes designated for particular genders. Hence, Rin's recognition of the wider variety of ways to ornament the body with feminine adornments influences how he attends to gendered bodies and how he attempts to fit into the social male-female binary system.

Unlike my other participants who view a lack agency over their feelings of gender (i.e. Alexvina [10], Jay [11], Collin [13] and Stephan [15]), the manner in which Rin describes gender almost seems as if he has complete control over it:

(18) If I'm just me, like a guy me, I tend to be … more... stern, I guess. More straight to the point. Where when I put on this [feminine] persona, I get to be more happier or more bubbly kind of person.

It seems clear that Rin's idea of gender fluidity remains coherent amongst my other informants' definition: the change of feelings associated with the body. Again, clothes have a psychological, symbolic effect for Rin – that is, wearing male clothes influence Rin to be more “stern” and “straight to the point” while female clothes affect Rin to feel “happier” and “bubbly.” By comparing Rin's assumption of gender with my other informants', it seems as if ontology impacts people's presumption regarding their agency over their feelings of gender and thus their ability to influence their own gender. Nil, Cody and Alex carry the assumption that gender is related to but distinct from the body. Alexvina, Jay, Collin and Stephan conceptualize gender under the assumption that biology is a critical component for gender. Hence, gender must either preexist inside the body or be inherited and biologically manifested within the individual – thus one has no agency over their own gender. On the other hand, as Rin assumes that the feelings of gender are associated with how one expresses themselves, gender can be altered by merely the change of
bodily adornment. Thus, our doxa has a psychological influence regarding the recognizing and
(re)creating the self and its assumed agency within the world.

Rin is not my only informant who holds this assumption of gender. Ursula, who is
biologically female and identifies as gender fluid with feminine pronouns, for instance, similarly,
defines gender as:

(19) [The] way you present yourself to yourself and others. [It] has nothing to do with
who you were born as genetically. It's about who you identify yourself as and feel
like you are. If that was who you were born as, or the opposite, or a mix, neither,
or something else.

Like Rin, Ursula views gender as the manner in which one present themselves. When Ursula
says “present yourself,” she is referring to the presentation of the body and whether it reflects
one's predisposed body since birth. In other words, gender relates to les techniques du corps –
however Ursula conceptualizes those techniques. Unlike Jay, Collin and Stephan who assume
that gender is biologically connected with the body, Ursula explicitly disregards such assumption
– stating that gender is not connected with one's genetics. Hence, Ursula further illustrates this
third ontology – gender is the capacity to express oneself with their body – relating to the
feelings of gender.

While Ursula denies genetics as a determining factor in gender, she nevertheless
acknowledges that her presentation still derives from somewhere within the body:

(20) To me it means to just express what I feel inside. If one day I feel female, [I] dress
and act female. If it's a male day, [I] dress [as a male], wear my packer if I can,
and act as male as [much as] I can. If it is a nothing day, [I] usually [wear] clothes
that just shows no shape, and just act [...] as a mixture of both [male and female].
For days [when my genders] are a mix I might wear some men cloths and some
women, and act in a mixture [of both].

Similar to Alex, Blythe and Nil, for Ursula these expressed feelings come from within the body,
rather than a part of the chemically infused body. That is, while the feelings of gender for Ursula is her capacity to express herself, it is also related to how she feels with her internal self. Again, Ursula illustrates that these distinct ontologies of gender are not necessarily separated from each other – as Stephan (15) has already demonstrated. Thus, to have a better grasp how these two perceptions of gender are interrelated with each other, I asked Ursula how the internal self relates to the body's presentation:

(21) It's really hard to describe the feeling inside. It's kind of like if you dress one way and [if] you don't like it, it just feels wrong. Then once you find the right outfit you feel better. It's like a part if you is saying something isn't right.

In contrast to Rin, whose capacity of expressing his body is limited to what fashion is available, Ursula's capacity is restricted to the internal self. That is, despite what fashion may be available, it must be coherent with whom Ursula internally identifies. Doxa, again, influences people's presumption of agency over their feelings of gender. While Rin's sense of agency only derives from the ontology that gender is the body's externalized expressions, Ursula's sense of agency comes from the assumptions that gender is the body's externalized expressions that is related to but separated from the body (i.e. Cartesian Dualism). This additional assumption of gender ultimately influences Ursula to believe that her agency over her feelings of gender is confined to her inner self, which seems more limiting compared to Rin's presumption that agency over the feelings of gender is only confined to what fashion is available to adorn the body.

Finally, like Rin and Ursula, Iphis also recognizes that their gender is related to the body's presentation. In the beginning of our interview, Iphis, who was assigned female at birth yet identifies with third-person pronouns, established that they are gender queer. Because of this, I asked Iphis if they could describe what the term means:
I think for me it means that I wanted to present myself in a different way, and that I wanted to be able to present myself in multiple ways. And I felt that, for myself, gender wasn't something solid for me. Gender was something I wanted to be able to move about and something that was very fluid, and that's [when] the term gender fluid is very appropriate. [...] I didn't feel comfortable, necessarily, saying that “Oh, yes. I am that” or “Yes. I am that,” but being able to present and feel however I felt in the moment. It was, for me, tied a lot with presentation, and being like, “Oh, I want to be able to present [myself] as more masculine some days or more feminine some days.” And that doesn't me that I am male or female on those specific days. I am me, but I felt that identifying myself as gender queer or gender fluid was the way to realize this.

Iphis shares a similar understanding of the feelings of gender with Rin (16) – that is, the capability to present or express their feelings through the body. Furthermore, like Rin (18), Iphis has a strong sense of agency over their gender, as they indicate that their gender is not only fluid, but can also be self-consciously moved. However, unlike Rin, it does not seem as if the change of presentation influences how Iphis somatically attends and carries their body. For Iphis, the change of presentation is merely replicating however they feel in the moment. Furthermore, in contrast to Rin, Iphis views that the expressive nature of the body is not limited to the male-female binary – that is, even if Iphis acts – or is perceived as – more masculine or feminine, those actions or perceptions do not necessarily indicate that Iphis is either male or female. That is, Iphis' gender – though Iphis would simply call it “non-binary” – is fundamentally Iphis' feelings about themselves. Ultimately, Iphis challenges Western interpretation of les techniques du corps, as they describe that the manner how they carry and perceive themselves is beyond male-female binary.

Although it seems as if Iphis has just as much agency over their gender like Rin, Iphis nevertheless comments that the feelings of gender vary “day-to-day.” Thus, what can we apprehend regarding Iphis' inconsistent flux of gender presentation? Here, Iphis mentions:
(23) [...] I think it's a very day-to-day thing, and it's something I'm still working with because of this flux presentation. [...] Some days I want to conform to social standards of femininity, and because of that I'm like, “Well, am I leaning more towards femininity? What does that mean? What does that mean for my gender identity?” But then realizing that some days I still want to present masculine, and that [...] I can still identify as [whatever] I want and it doesn't matter how I conform to societal standards and how I present myself. That doesn't change that I am comfortable in this identity.

In addition, Iphis also mentions the following during our interview:

(24) I think society has a very rigid sense of how people are supposed to present and how people are supposed to identify. And so, being fluid is sort of going through with understanding that just because you dress a certain way doesn't mean that that's your societal role; and that gender roles are just construct of society and gender, in a sense, is a construct that is not binary and you can live your life feeling fluid or you can live your life in a certain gender. And just because it's a construct doesn't dismiss the gender that people feel. It's just, this is how we [are] constructed in our society today.

Even though Iphis views their gender as non-binary, they at least acknowledge that their perception on gender is affected by society (similar to Cody's [8] and Jay's [14] awareness that culture influences how they interpret gender). In this aspect, how Iphis interprets their feelings of gender is thus influenced and confined by society's rigid rules that are inculcated within them – a sense of habitus that perpetuates and instills what it means to be either male or female.

In addition, Iphis reiterates that regardless how they erratically present their feelings of gender, they, no matter what, remain the same individual. Even though Iphis' expressed feelings derive from rigid rule instilled within them, there is still a disjunction between who Iphis is and how Iphis feels in regards to how they carry and perceive their body. This becomes clear in the following:

(25) I guess I feel like me most of the time. And there isn't like “Ah, yes. This is the masculine me” and “Ah, yes. This is the feminine me.” It's more like, “I am me, and me wants to present in a certain way today.” There are definitely days where, like I think have said before, where it's, “Ah yes, I want to put on some makeup
today and wear heels, [because] that's what makes me feel comfortable today.”
And then some days it's, “Ah, yes. I want to wear jeans, and tennis shoes, and
wear a binder and, you know, present more masculine and...” I'm still going to act
like me during those days, and I'm going to act like me when I'm in a dress. So
that doesn't really change. It's more just what I feel comfortable presenting as.
And so, I'm me no matter what clothes I wear, but the me that is presenting feels
comfortable in those clothes. It's a very day-to-day thing and it's a very personal
thing. But it's not something like my attitude changes based on what I'm wearing.

Rather than the feelings of gender defining their character, Iphis emphasizes that those are just
feelings – as they separate the “this is the feminine or masculine me” with “this is what makes
me feel comfortable today.” While gender for Iphis (22) is the ability to express the body in
multiple ways, the liberty of expressing the body seems more connected to the individual's
feelings than the characteristics of the individual. This is not to necessarily separate these
feelings from persona – as we have seen that there is an overlap between the two (Rin [18]).
Rather, it is important to establish that the feelings of gender do not necessarily holistically
define the individual's character.

In fact, we see a similar idea from Stephan as he mentions:

(26) People would ask me, “Well how do you know you're or a girl,” or “How do you
know you're a boy.” Well, how do you? How do you know you're a boy? I mean, I
would be willing to bet that to a certain extent there's some anatomical evidence
for either one. But stripping all of that away, looking just at your identity and
yourself of sense, not your body at all, how do you know you're a boy? I've been
willing to bet that your answer is, “I don't know, it's just this innate feeling.” You
just know, right? I know. I can't really put words to it. I just know. As far as like
my sense of what it is to be male or female: is there a difference? To me, there
really isn't. Every time people ask me, “Well, so are you a different person?” No!
I'm not a different person. I'm the exact same person. I like all the same things. I
like Assassins Creed. I'm addicted to Star Wars and know way too much about it.
I love rock music. I'm getting into dubstep. Doesn't matter if I'm boy or girl, I like
dubstep. But you know, [I'm the] same person.

Stephan also emphasizes that the feelings of gender do not define his character, but rather it is an
innate feeling of simply knowing who he is. It is a characteristic of himself that he simply
knows. He relates this feeling back to the anatomy, which reiterates that the feelings of gender is how one feels according to their body and not necessarily who they are as a person. As Stephan emphasizes, despite his fluid gender, he will always remain that person who enjoys Star Wars, rock music, Assassin Creed, and dubstep.

Alexvina also recognizes this distinction, as he explains:

(27) With things like transgender it makes more sense to me. It's like, “Oh you identify as a girl. You like feminine things. You are girly all the time.” It makes sense. That is your gender. It is what you like you do. It is how you express yourself. [...] But when it comes to gender fluidity it's always been so hard to describe to other people. I think some people think it's a multiple personality identity disorder, or indecision, or internal crisis, or something like that. [...] If you think of gender as one through ten – one being masculine and ten being feminine – there's days where I am a total one. [...] It almost feels like a trance that I was at any other spot because I am so not in the mood for anything feminine whatsoever. [...] But then there's some days with the idea of putting on guys' clothing is just like, 'Why would I want to do anything like that. That's baggy as shit and I don't like.' There's days in the middle where [...] I don't care where I am. And it's hard to describe it when it's changing all the time.

I think the hardest thing for people to understand is that gender is not necessarily your personality. It's not who you are, it's just a part of who you are. I feel that's what people have a tough time understanding with gender fluidity. It's like a mood, almost. It's strange. And, I don't know, I can be enticed into certain things. Like unless if I'm a pure one or a pure ten right now, I can usually flow slowly back into another dimension.

Like Iphis (25) and Stephan (26), Alexvina is aware that the feelings of gender do not necessarily define one’s character, but rather how one feels and carries their body. Hence, the concept of gender fluidity is not the inconsistent changes between various gendered personae, rather it is the constant flux concerning how one feels about their body and thus an understanding how they ought to carry the body. In fact, Alexvina still makes this acknowledgment without having a complete grasp on the concept of gender fluid – an identity with which he associates himself but is still unable to fully conceptualize it. Perhaps this is why Alexvina (10) explains that gender is
like a mood.

Collin also makes this distinction during his interview. During my attempt to ask more about Collin's conscious understanding how the feelings of gender are irregular for him, Collin mentions:

(28) Something I realized is that it [my gender] can be [changed within] seconds, minutes, days, weeks. I can feel one way for an entire week, and I can feel one way for a month. It can fluctuate pretty much at when and at different spurs for different lengths of time. There's no really a pattern to it. It's, like I said, I'm just one person. One specially... I just like things, or I feel a certain way and it's just my expression can come in either way.

In addition, Collin also describes the following:

(29) It's not like there's a male me and there's a female me. It's just me. Like I'm just expressing myself. I'm just a person. It's not such a conflicting thing, like going back and forth. It used to be how I felt – going between two different things.

Collin definitely acknowledges that his gender fluctuates on an irregular basis. Regardless of these irregular swings between masculinity and femininity, Collin does not view himself moving between Ms. Collin and Mr. Collin (i.e. two different personae), but rather he is somebody who feels either more feminine or masculine. In short, these inconsistent changes affect how he feels and how he interprets his expressions.

Finally, Blythe also makes explains this disjunction between the feeling of gender and persona:

(30) When I'm female, it's not so much of a feeling. It's more like a feeling of “I feel comfortable.” […] Like, when you look at yourself there's things that you don't like because that's just the nature of people, like “God I don't like how my hair looks today.” But I don't look at my body and think something wrong. I look and I'm just, “Okay, I feel comfortable. Nothing feels different.” But on days that I feel male, I just feel... it just feels different. My body feels different. I do a lot of trying to bind because I don't like that I have breasts […] and] parts of my body just feel incorrect. […] So when I bind or when I like present myself in a way that's male or that helps me feel more male, I feel better. I look [at myself] and I'm
like, “Okay I feel better.” When I look at myself, I just feel more relax. It's, once again, more comfortable. And when I feel like more gender neutral, it's pretty much the same way. I don't always feel like I need to bind or anything. [...] I just feel... I don't know how that one is. I guess it's comfortable, again, but I'm just less aware of my gender.

Blythe initially describes that these fluctuating feelings do not necessarily correlate with being male or female, but how comfortable they are with their own body. For Blythe, this does not mean simply achieving the desirable, aesthetic body, but whether the body appropriately correlates with the feelings of gender. That is, whether Blythe's presented body is aligned with their gendered feelings affects how they feel about their own body. I describe the presentation of the body and the feelings of gender in greater details in the following sub-section.

To step back and reexamine the feelings of gender, my informants conceptualize these feelings as an internalized (i.e. Alex, Blythe, and Nil), ingrained (i.e. Alexvina, Collin, and Jay) or expressed (i.e. Iphis, Rin, Ursula) characteristics of body. Although I have noted these three distinct classifications of these feelings of gender, it is important to keep in mind that these classifications are not always separate (e.g. Stephan [15] and Ursula [19-21]). Finally, these feelings of gender do not necessarily define the individual's persona (e.g. Iphis [25] Stephan [26], Alexvina [27] and Collin [29]), rather they are ascribed to how one feels and carries their body. Hence, gender fluidity is not the inconsistent alterations between masculine and feminine personae, but instead, it is a flux concerning how one feels and expresses their own body.

**Presentation of the self**

At the end of the previous sub-section, I noted that the feelings of gender correlate with how people perceive and carry their bodies. Hence, gender fluidity is not the fluctuation between
simply being male or female, but the inconsistent feelings that influence how people interpret and interact with their bodies. It thus becomes clear that the body's presentation is a critical factor in defining the feelings of gender, and thus how my informants conceptualize gender fluidity.

But what do my informants mean when they “present” gender? During our interview, Ursula describes that “gender presentation” is how one “dresses, acts, or tries to pass as.” What is interesting in Ursula's definition of gender is the phrase “to pass as,” which implies that one must meet particular external expectations. This subtle requirement that entails “gender presentation” is further emphasized in Nil's definition of gender, which is how one “interacts with the world” through “social cues” and the “way how one dresses.” Nil's definition further suggests that presentation involves some form of “interacting,” which requires the presence of at least one other person. Hence, the act of passing requires meeting the expectations of an audience of at least one other person. However, “to pass as” involves being keen to particular “social cues.”

But what are these social cues of which my informants are conscious? Ursula, while sharing a brief history regarding moments when her gender identity had fluctuated, hints at what some of these social cues that are critical for “passing as” a particular gender are:

(31) Growing up, I had a phase where I wanted nothing to do with female things, clothes, toys. I wanted to be like my brother and the neighborhood boys, [as] I was the only girl. From the time I was about six till around nine, I tried so much to be like them; [I] tried to buy boys clothes [and I] always played with boys' toys. Then from [age] nine to eleven, I felt like [I had] no gender. I had clothes that didn't show my shape and just didn't feel much of a mixture of both. Then from eleven to fourteen, during middle school, I was in a boy phase again. I had a very short haircut, due to gum [being] stuck in it, but I liked [my short hair]; [and I] wore clothes that my brother didn't fit into anymore. [...] Then from [age] fifteen till twenty, [was] when I started to get into [...] boys, or rather they liked me, I felt that I had to be female, and I hated my body for not looking female. I didn't fit the female image. Then from twenty up till now, it's been a [mixture] of [feeling
female and male] and nothing, and started to explore of what was going on, what I was feeling.

There are two implications that we can draw from Ursula's excerpt: one, the “passing as” a particular gender entails the activities that one performs – for Ursula, this entails associating oneself with particular objects such as toys and clothes. This implication, however, contrasts with Blythe's (4) conceptualization of gender, which does not necessarily include one's association with such objects. I do not wish to dismiss either the implication drawn from Ursula or Blythe's conceptualization of gender; rather, I hope this may iterate the intricacies regarding how gender is perceived amongst my informants. The other implication from Ursula's excerpt notes that “passing as” entails “stylizing” the body (to use Butler's [{1990} 1999] word) in a fashion that seems coherent to a particular gender for both the individual and others. This becomes clear as Ursula describes moments in her life when she felt as a female, but was dissatisfied with her body “for not looking female” – even though she identifies her prescribed sex as female. In other words, though Ursula is physically female, her inability to stylize the body to a more feminine figure undermines her ability to pass as feminine for herself.

Similar to Ursula's former implication, Collin is also aware that for a body to appear as more feminine or masculine, one must do more than simply dress as either a man or a woman. Here, Collin describes how he feels when his gender changes:

(32) That change mostly just comes with a more of a sharper steering towards what is socially, typically accepted as those two different genders. So, if I feel like more masculine, [then I would] feel like dressing like this [men's clothing] and doing things that are more masculine. But if I feel more feminine, then I'll stretch more towards washing or dressing or doing things that are more feminine. I've even noticed some changes in the way I carry myself or, you know express with myself with my articulation or anything like that. I do kind of feel like a slight change in that too. So, that can also change
While dressing the body may be one venue to appropriately address the *feelings of gender*, Collin points out that the body ought to engage in activities that relate to the *feelings of gender* as well. That is, for the body to address a more feminine feeling, Collin not only dresses in feminine clothing, but he also femininely carries his body and engages in gendered activities – in this case, “washing.” Notice how *habitus* is being enacted: the body not only partakes in supposed feminine activities, but also internalizes and perpetuates such notions of gender.

Yet these activities in which the body engages are not necessarily done merely by desire – that is, one does not necessarily present or carry oneself with the intention to be seen as either more feminine or masculine. Instead, some of these gendered activities are subconsciously carried by the body itself. Notice how Collin describes the manner in which he carries his body while feeling feminine or masculine:

(33) [I] kind of just [carry myself in a] more feminine posture [or] more [in a] masculine posture, like how I sit. And it can be subconscious, like I don't even realize it until I notice it. So [the change of gender] does change my posture, or the way I use my hands or carry my body. [...] People see feminine more like crossing your legs or carrying yourself in a [...] smaller way, or a more delicate way. And then masculine is more like you're taking up more room and you're boxier or you're more structure.

Similar to Jay (11), Collin is not always completely conscious how he is presenting his body. When he dose become conscious, he interprets his body postures as either feminine or masculine. Collin's description suggests a collective awareness that certain genders are evoked under particular 'techniques of the body' – as he notes that to be “feminine” one must carry the body in a “smaller” way while to be masculine is to make the body “take up more room.” This assumed collective awareness about what techniques of the body associate with different types of genders suggest other “social cues” that are critical to have the body “pass as” a particular gender.
Jay (11) also recognizes the subtleties concerning how the stylization of body can evoke particular genders. After I asked Jay to elaborate what she means when she talks about “carrying herself” differently when feeling a certain gender, Jay explains:

(34) Sometimes, that might be the way that I dress. The way I want myself to appear, so I might wear more masculine or more feminine clothing. I might find that I'm walking in a more masculine, or aggressive kind of way. It's sort of a confidence versus passivity, is sometimes the way I notice changes. Or, again, the way I dress myself. For example, sometimes I have a neither day, where I wanna be perceived as neutral, so I'll wear clothes that are neither masculine nor feminine, and I find myself acting a little more passive way on those days. Versus a both day, where I feel very androgynous, like masculine and feminine as opposed to neutral, where I might go off and feel very confident. I will put on makeup and put on some masculine face contouring but also some color and some feminine feature, and clothes like masculine clothes with lots of jewelry, and kind of changing it and, again, carrying myself more confidently and things like that.

Here, Jay describes subtle social cues that correlate with how she presents herself and how she feels. For instance, when Jay feels masculine, she not only dresses herself in a more masculine manner, but she also carries herself in a more “masculine” way. On the other hand, when Jay feels feminine, she carries herself in a more “passive” way. In addition to these binary categories of gender, Jay also acknowledges how she tends to present her body when feeling either gender neutral or androgynous. That is, when Jay feels gender neutral she not only wears clothes that are gender ambiguous, but she acts more in a passive manner – similar to her feminine feelings. On the other hand, when Jay feels androgynous, she not only wears clothes that evoke both masculinity and femininity, but she also carries herself “more confidently.” Whether these subtle cues are shared amongst all my informants, how Jay recognizes how she presents the body in a certain gender implies what social cues correlate with what gender is for her.

Nevertheless, some of these bodily conducted social cues that represent a specific gender for my informants can mislead them from realizing the genders of others. As Collin explains:
I think people who identify as male can carry themselves in more feminine ways or vice versa. It doesn't always have to matter what your gender is. Like people carry themselves and act in different ways. I met a lot of straight CIS gender male people that are feminine. It's not that they're gay, it's not they identify as female. They're more feminine. And vice versa. Like, I've met women that identify themselves as women and stuff, but they're more masculine. So like masculinity and femininity fluctuates with people as well, I think. Just because masculinity goes with male and femininity goes with female, that doesn't mean that you have to carry yourself or act a certain way. You know, even if your gender is the same too. You don't have to prescribe to any sort of masculinity or femininity or anything like that.

While my informants recognize that there are cues that indicate specific genders, Collin describes that presentation of the body does not always represent one's identified gender. This returns us to Iphis' (24) comment regarding how society's rigid rules (with which we are inculcated) influences people to adhere to and perceive the various stylization of the body to resemble specific genders.

Furthermore, although I have shown that the manner in which the body carries itself is important for gender presentation, its importance is not comparable to how the body is ornamented. As Nil illustrates:

[Gender presentation] can also be like with what you do. But the most common ways of gender presentation [is not always] about what you do – [though] I'm just basing it off of people that I know slash my own experiences. [...] The cases that I know [are] mainly what you wear. Sometimes it's the way you act, but ninety-nine percent of the time it's what you wear. A lot of time if we're walking down the street, like that first glance, in that five second you look at somebody you sometimes, unconsciously, you're already deciding like their gender and the pronouns you're mentally referring to them as.

Nil is not denying the fact that part of gender presentation entails the manner how one acts, but it mostly depends on how the body is portrayed with clothes. Although actions carry important symbolic weight within gender presentation, social cues for gender heavily rely on the body's appearance rather than what the body is doing. This fact will be prominent throughout the rest of
While my informants have a firm understanding what it means to present as a particular gender, the idea of an inconsistent gender complicates the idea of gender presentation. Throughout my interviews I eventually became familiar with gender dysphoria. In a detailed manner, Cody distinguishes two types of dysphorias:

(37) Social dysphoria, relating how people see you. So, if I go out in the world people are generally seeing a woman, and that bothers me because I don't feel like what they're seeing matches who I am. I obviously can do things to tamper that, like wear different clothes or cut my hair. [...] That's why I'm going on testosterone, so my voice can drop and I'll be able to pass as a guy if I want to. [...] Then there's physical dysphoria, which is kind of how I relate to my body and the gendered parts of my body, like obviously my chest, my hips. For me, I'm really short. I'm 5'3”. So my height... my hands are way smaller than a guy's would be, I mean they're smaller than for a woman's hand. I got small feet. That sort of thing. Those are all gendered things. [...] So the ways in which I am female bother me. It can be kind of a mild, and it could be like crying, depending on the day. There's different measures I can take for that. I've been trying to lose some weight, because that's the only way to lose curve. I bind my chest, most of the time, when I'm not at work. I put lifts in my shoes so I can look taller.

To relate back to Ursula's definition of gender is “to pass as” a particular gender in front of audience, Cody's distinct forms of dysphoria implies two different types of audience members. First, social dysphoria, which relates to the uneasy feeling caused by people misgendering the individual, suggests that the people around the individual are an audience whose standards in gender presentation the individual must meet. This accentuates Nil's (7) definition of gender about interacting with the world and being aware of the various social cues. Here, Cody wants to interact with the world in ways that are coherent to her feelings. Nevertheless, the same issue that Collin (35) and Nil (36) raise becomes coherent; Cody's body signals that she is supposedly always female. Thus, while Cody wants to interact with the world in a manner that is coherent with her gender, her feminine-looking body influences the others to interact with her as if Cody
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is always female. To help influence how people predicate on her gender, Cody makes an effort to
fashion her body (i.e. wearing different clothes, cutting her hair, and taking enough testosterone
to drop her voice's register) that would allow her to “pass as a guy” whenever she feels
masculine.

Physical dysphoria, on the other hand, addresses a different audience – the ego. While
Cody can influence the people around her by stylizing her body in various fashions, she is aware
that she cannot deceive the ego. Her height, chest and size of hands that neglect the rules of what
defines a masculine body prevents her from passing as male for ego, the one audience member
that will always be spectating at Cody's presentation.

Cody is not the only person who faces this difficulty. Stephan, in the introduction, briefly
shared his views (stating that it is probably the worse emotion anyone can experience). Stephan
eventually provides a deeper understanding of what gender dysphoria is:

(38) Gender dysphoria is, right now, for instance, in my head I know I'm a girl. I feel
like a girl. But when I look at the mirror, when I look at the tiny picture that my
camera is showing, there's not a girl there. I don't have, like, my long brown hair
that I normally have. I don't have any makeup on. [...] I expect things to be there,
when they're not. And I expect things to be gone, when they're there. And it causes
a problem. I mean, there are periods like this when I try to avoid the mirrors as
much as possible. I try not to look at it. When I do have to look at the mirror, I try
to get very close to the mirror, so that I can only see the part of my face that I'm
trying to look at. [...] You just try to avoid it, because you have this mental image
that is there [...], and as long as the mental image is unbroken, I can ignore things.
If I don't look down and see a lack of boobs, I can ignore the fact that they're not
there [...]. But it's when I look down or look in the mirror and then don't see things
that I expect to see. It breaks that mental image, and that's where it gets really
painful, because I just want to be myself. I want to be comfortable. Just like any
other girl, I want to be pretty. I want to feel pretty.

In this excerpt, Stephan describes that he must meet the expectations of his ego, who is the only
audience member who can validate physical dysphoria. However, Stephan is conscious that his
congenital male body is unable to pass as female, which is problematic for Stephan when he feels female. Because of this consciousness, Stephan describes his effort of avoiding anything that will break his “mental image” of what his body ought to be in contrast to what his body inevitably is. I would like to briefly note here the assumption that *seeing* authenticates reality, as in the Western proverb: “Seeing is believing.” In cases when Stephan feels female, his awareness that he is physically male and not actually female – the “reality” rather than who he really is – derives from *seeing* a body that has long brown hair, breasts, and other physical features that define female for Stephan. This insight from Stephan thus suggests why my informants presume that the body authenticates gender.

Perhaps at this point one might suggest that my informants ought to physically transition to a body that reflects their gender. The issue, however, is that gender fluidity deals with a non-consistent feeling. As Stephan states in the introduction, “it would be trading one hell for another.” Jay also acknowledges this conundrum of living with an inconsistent gender:

(39) I’ve had physical dysphoria occasionally. Sometimes if I were showering or anything that makes me really focus on my body parts [I would experience physical dysphoria] if I'm already in a frame of mind away from that. I've had a couple of real dysphoria episodes where I [felt] like I might have [had] a panic attack. But most of the time I'm pretty okay with things as is. I do sometimes wish that I could be sort of more neutral, and I thought about having top surgery, or maybe just a reduction that would allow me to pass as more androgynous. And I've noticed... I'm starting to get a little more hip dysphoria where every time I feel, “This is good [how I feel about my body].” I look in the mirror and it's like, “Those are my hips. Oh [in a disgust tone].”

I think sometimes I find ways to offset that for myself, and I think I like the idea of having more options for femininity. I did this so I can dial this up or down, and say, “Well if I want to look more feminine, I can put on more makeup and stuff. And if I want to look more masculine, then I don't.” But that means that the default is more neutral or masculine than I wanted at first. I'm more comfortable with it now, but still, I sometimes get dysphoria [when] I can't be as feminine as I want. Because even though I look very feminine to other people, I see my own
face and it looks very neutral to me. On neutral days, that's great, but on feminine
days, I think my hair is too short [and] I look like a man.

So, for me, I don't know if I'm ever going to want to any physical transitions or
not just because I'm concerned that however my body is, I will experience
dysphoria, because I'll think [...] “I'm happy to have a feminine body” And on a
neutral or masculine day it's too feminine. And I don't like the other if I transition
to male, then on a feminine day, I will be, “This is all wrong. I don't like this.” If
I'm going to be unhappy sometimes, why spend the money?

Like Stephan, Jay is another individual who has experienced physical dysphoria. Again, she
separates her audience members between ego and others. Jay also notes that although her face
obviously appears as feminine to everyone around her, it is too neutral for her on days when she
feels feminine. Although Jay wants to have her body be the way she feels, she acknowledges that
she is unable to achieve that goal. Jay has even contemplating physical transition, but she knows
that such actions require money and will ultimately be idle. Jay also knows that if she chooses to
masculinize her body, she will ultimately be confronted with days where she feels feminine but
her body portrays her as masculine. Like Stephan, although transitioning is desirable, for Jay it
would ultimately be like “trading one hell for another.” However, Jay does present a possible
solution: to androgenize the body. For Jay, this entails breasts reduction and fashioning the body
to appear more ambiguous in terms of gender.

The idea behind androgenizing the body is to pass as whatever gender one feels is not
entirely novel. Stephan, for instance, describes his androgynous-appearing body while he was a
high school student and his ability to pass as female:

(40) In high school I was a lot skinnier and [I was] able to pass off as a girl a lot easier,
and I would. I would go to the mall [as a girl]. Now, it's a little bit different. It's
harder for me. I put on a lot of weight [...]. But then, just growing up, there's been
certain features of my body that has changed that are now harder to pass as
feminine, which is why I want to partially transition. You know, just to soften
some features, and sort of androgenize my appearance. That way I can pass well
either way

Stephan mentioning that at one point in his life, he had a body that was able to pass as either male or female, which is similar to Ursula (36). Unfortunately, over time Stephan's body has changed in ways that accentuates masculine characteristics and hinders his ability to pass as female whenever necessary. Like Jay (39), Stephan wants to achieve a body that is capable of passing as either male or female. It is this reason why Stephan only wants to “partially” transition, rather than “fully” transition into female. Stephan believes that this partial transitioning will androgenize his body to the degree that he can easily pass as either genders for all audience members.

On the other hand, though Rin does not reference the idea of physically transitioning, he desires to be physically androgynous so he can pass as either male or female:

(41) Ultimately I kind of want to be androgynous between both [male and female]. [...] I want to be able to do modeling for both genders and sexes [...]. So in my head I have these perceived images of what a guy should kind of look like and what a woman should kind of look like, but that's solely just for, aesthetic kind of thing. Nothing to do just with personality or anything like that.

Like Stephan (38), Rin has “these perceived images” regarding how men and women ought to appear. These “perceived images” influence how Rin goes about his gender presentation, as they serve as guidelines that Rin must meet to pass as either male or female. Because Rin wants to be able to pass as both at liberty, he recognizes that by having a more androgynous body, he can move back and forth between male and female. What differentiates Rin from Cody, Jay and Stephan is that there seems to be little to no indication that Rin also experiences physical dysphoria (whether this be the case cannot be inferred here). Despite the possible absence of physical dysphoria, Rin is aware that achieving a more androgynous body will enable him to
pass for both himself and the people around him as any gender. Furthermore, throughout the interview, Rin gave no implication that he wants to undergo surgery to appear more androgynous, which differs from Cody, Jay, and Stephan.

Similar to Rin, Nil does not feel the need to physically transition to pass as androgynous. Nevertheless, notice how Nil's “perceived images” influence how they approach androgyny:

(42) I'm not sure if it's me switching between gender queer to gender neutral or because it's been a year now that I started feeling more comfortable and confident with my gender identity [that] I'm starting to feel more comfortable with some of the clothes that I had put aside. That I said, “No. I don't want to wear these anymore.” [...] Pretty much [getting] outside of my box. Because in the very beginning I was, “If I'm going to be taken as someone who is not female, I have to dress in a not feminine way.” So I was a very, very androgynous for a really long time, [though] it was only a couple months. [...] I just I had to fit inside that box for myself.

Ironically, Nil explains that they want their body to appear as androgynous to not pass as female, unlike Stephan, Cody, Jay, and Rin. As Nil mentions, “If I'm going to be taken as someone who is 'not' female, I have to dress in a not feminine way,” which for Nil implies androgyny. Yet Nil's attempt to androgenize their body is not only their approach to avoid being labeled female, but also their way to explore their gender identity. In fact, the act of androgenizing the body seems like a common approach for my informants to explore and learn about their gender identity. Jay (34), for instance, talks about playing with her masculine and feminine appearances when she feels androgynous. Ursula (31) explains that she began exploring her gender identity after she began feeling more androgynous15. Thus, for Nil and others, an approach to get “outside the box” (using Nil's words) and understand one's gender identity is to androgenize the self.

Returning to what Collin (35) and Nil (36) noted, presentation does not always reflect

15 Though Ursula does not explicitly use “androgynous,” it is clear that her sensation can be defined as androgynous whether we frame it under J's definition – mixture of both female and male qualities – or Nil's – the absence of male or female characteristics. Ursula invokes both definitions in her excerpt.
identity. While this notion refers to how one unintentionally passes as a particular gender, some of my other informants intentionally present in a manner that does not reflect their gender identity. Alex, for instance, mentions:

(43) I like, occasionally, having people [guess] what my gender is. Because I still look and sound very feminine, and I can't help that. So wearing various fashion styles, and makeup and wigs, is sort of my way in dealing with that. I think I'm sort of glad that I look the way I am now, because I'll be very cute, and I always liked cute boys, as how I wanted to look like [...]. So people like Rin or video game characters such as Bridget from “Guild to Gears,” those are the people that I want to look like. But not all the time. I mean, my daily wear is a pair of skinny jeans and a T-shirt, and I just have long hair, so people will assume [that I'm female]. I don't wear bras or fake breast or anything, so even with my chest people will still give me “miss” or “ma'am” when I go to the grocery store [...]. But occasionally [they] would [also] refer to me as male, which is great. Fantastic. And I don't expect them to get pronouns right if I am wearing a skirt. And it's not a good feeling [when] people screw up. I buy clothes in every section of the store if it's labeled men's or women's.

In the first sentence of Alex's statement, he enjoys “having people guess what his gender is.” Because he cannot deny that his appearances allow him pass as a female than male, Alex takes that fact and plays with it. Thus, rather than forcing himself to appear as a male, Alex simultaneously fashions his body in both feminine and masculine manners. In addition, Alex accepts his feminine appearance as a way to look like a “very cute” boy – such as the video game character “Bridget” or Rin, who is an online acquaintance. Hence, while bodily presentation supposedly authenticates the feelings of gender, one may also present their body to deceive or force other to contemplate the individual's true feelings of gender. On a functional level, we can perceive this act as an attempt to challenge, as Iphis (24) mentions, “society's rigid sense” of distinctly being male or female. That is, by making the body appear ambiguous to gender, people are forced to contemplate and reevaluate what it means to be perceived as male or female.

Even Rin, who previously mentioned his interest in becoming more androgynous (43),
challenges expectations of what it means to be or present as male or female. As a side comment, it is quite possible that Alex's and Rin's relationship as online acquaintances may have influenced this notion of “exploring boundaries,” as Rin shares:

(44) I still identify with male pronouns, cause I'm comfortable with it. But I don't like the limitations or the expectations to place upon, I guess males. I like to explore the boundaries, break them, cross the lines and stuff like that.

It seems that part of Rin's goal is to understand the social facts of 'passing as' a certain gender. To understand these social facts, he is motivated to not merely “explore” those boundaries, but to “break them” as well. That is, Rin must experiment with presenting his body in a manner that adheres and challenges how feminine or masculine bodies ought to appear. Thus, similar to Ursula (31) and Jay (34), the act of “androgenizing” the body – in reference of J's definition – forces one to not only explore the self, but to challenge the guidelines of what it means to pass as a particular gender.

Most of my informants have conveyed an understanding of what those boundaries are – whether it be the “mental” (Stephan 38) or “perceived images” (Rin 41) concerning how one ought to perceive one's gender through the body. Nevertheless, it seems that the goal of “exploring” these boundaries is a method for my informants to distill these inherited beliefs concerning how gender ought to be presented by the body. Iphis emphasizes this idea when they discuss this process of unlearning these rules:

(45) I feel like something that is more problematic on my part is that I associate more masculine and more feminine with traditional ideals of masculinity and femininity, and I feel that is a process that I am continually unlearning and relearning [...]. I also want to be able to mix the two and be masculine and feminine, but in different ways at the same time. It's sort of about combining what society thinks that masculinity and femininity is and being able to be malleable with it, and being able to take it and mold it to what feels right for me. It's like some days I feel very much like I want to dress up in a pretty dress and put on
makeup, and on some days I just wanna wear more masculine clothes that are bought in the men's department, and such and such. One day I wanna wear heels and one day I wanna wear sneakers. In that sense, my gender is really tied with my presentation, because that's how I'm able to express it. It is really about, sort of breaking down societal norms of gender and being able to take it and make it my own.

Though Iphis acknowledges the manner in which they present gender is socially influenced (wanting to wear makeup on some days and masculine clothes on others), they nevertheless attempt to break this manner of presentation in their process of “unlearning and relearning.” What Iphis means by “unlearning and relearning” is the ability to take what is understood as feminine and masculine and “being able to be malleable with it,” while still feeling comfortable. Like Rin (44), Iphis' method to learn more about their gender identity involves “breaking” expectations – which for Iphis involves integrating both masculine and feminine characteristics throughout their daily presentations.

As my informants have shared, gender presentation entails how one “passes as” a particular gender for any form of audience, whether it is the ego or those around the ego. Because the feelings of gender are coherent to the body, the body's appearance validates which gender one passes. For gender fluidity, the issue is being able to make the body appear according to one's inconsistent feelings, and failure to achieve this leads to dysphoria. Thus, androgenizing the body is one approach that allows my informants to easily pass the body as any gender for all audience members, including the ego. While presenting the body in an androgynous manner enables my informants to pass as a particular gender, it is also a technique that allows them to explore their gender identity. Regardless, there seems to be an attempt to redefine the boundaries of masculinity and femininity by presenting the body in a fashion that utilizes what is learned through society and – as Iphis mentioned – being malleable with it. Hence, the manner in which
how my informants present gender is not only an approach to pass as a particular ephemeral gender, but it also allows for exploration and it challenges assumptions of what gender means for all audience members, including the ego.

**Fear of the inconsistency of the inconsistency**

Because gender fluidity is an inconsistent identity, some of my informants expressed the concern of the possibility that gender fluidity is merely a phase. That is, there is a concern that gender fluidity itself will eventually end, and their struggle with their gender identity was nothing more but a phase. For instance, when I asked Iphis why they were reluctant to tell their family, they explain:

(46) I think it's more difficult with my family because I've been around them for my whole life, and I think it's just, I guess unfounded nervousness, even though I know how they would respond. It's still a part of me is reluctant to come out to them in this way. I guess that it's still a reluctant of me still trying to find myself and being “What if this changes? What if I feel differently in a few years? How am I going to explain it to them then? How is this all going to work for me?” I guess a part of it is self-doubt, and that hinders me a lot. But I think it's all part of the process of finding out who you are in the moment, and living in the moment, and trying to accept yourself now and not thinking that someday in the future it might change, because it's very possible that it might change, but that shouldn't change how you think about yourself now, and you shouldn't worry about it. That's sort of my philosophy on life.

There is a concern regarding the authenticity how one actually feels. For Iphis, it is difficult to come out to their family and later realize that what they came out as was simply a phase. But this concern is not only related with the people with whom Iphis interacts, but also with they themselves. Because of this constant worry, they have decided to acknowledge the various changes within their life and the possible steps that they may need to take if gender fluidity turns out to be – as Iphis fears – a phase.
This idea that their gender could simply be a phase was thematic throughout Iphis' interview. For instance, in response to my question regarding when did they accept their gender identity, Iphis shares:

(47) I think it was a couple years ago when I started to accept it, but I think it's a continual process. I think it goes back to the fear “What if this is just a phase?” You know, “What if this changes.” So sometimes it's a very day-to-day process of me being like, “Yes, this is how I feel, and it's okay and I can accept this. Because what I feel this day doesn't mean that what I felt yesterday wasn't any less important, or what I'm going to feel tomorrow isn't any less important. So, I think part of it was definitely like a couple years ago I came out to myself, and I came out to more people, being like, “Yes, this is how I feel, and this is how I want to start identifying.” But like I said, it still feels like a little bit of a day-to-day process.

Once more, Iphis expresses uncertainty that their gender identity could simply be a phase. Yet while acknowledging this possibility, Iphis accepts that these feelings that they experience are authentic in their own way. Regardless if their feeling current feeling contradicts how they felt the day before, that does not invalidate the authenticity of what Iphis had felt before. Thus, regardless if Iphis is experiencing a phase, Iphis at least acknowledges that those feelings are true in their own context.

Nil also acknowledges the possibility that their gender identity too is a phase. In response to my asking how their gender identity (i.e. gender neutral) relates to gender fluidity, Nil explains:

(48) Usually if I talk about my gender, I would just say that I'm gender neutral and just leave it at that because I'm still not a hundred percent solid where I identify, so gender neutral is the easiest way to explain it to people. […] I still haven't hundred percent settled on it, that's one of the big things about gender identity and any sort of identity is that it can change over time. For some people, it's solid, and once you find it you're just solid within it and it's fantastic. [For] some people it takes a long time to figure out where they lie, what terms they want to use, how they want to interact with the world, and what personal changes they want to make. So, for some people it's a lot longer process to get to the point where
they're one hundred percent happy with how they are and how they interact with the world.

Nil acknowledges that they have yet to fully settle on a gender identity. Though gender neutral currently fits for them, there is that history where Nil once identified as gender queer, and before then female. But there is a greater implication behind Nil's acknowledgment. That is, Nil is not only necessarily as concerned about the consistencies of their feelings of gender, but whether their gender identity itself will remain the same over time. In this regard, any identity itself is fluid, and any form of identity could also be easily seen as a phase.

There is something more than the phases that identities go through; the identity one presumes influences how they interact with the world, and how the world interacts with them. Throughout this section, my informants have clearly demonstrated that how they feel about their bodies influences the manner in which they interact with the world. How the world views them, influences how it interacts with my informants. Since gender fluidity entails the inconsistent fluctuation of the feelings of gender, some of my informants have experienced phases of dysphoria, which influenced how they interact with the people around them. Whether gender fluidity is a series of phases or a phase in it of itself, it is clear that these feelings of gender are crucial to how my informants identify and therefore how they go about in their lives.
(II): Framework of Gender Fluidity

In the previous section I have analyzed what it means to be gender fluid. Here, I explore the societal and cultural forces that influence how my informants conceptualize their gender fluid identities through their narratives. Though each informant shared fascinating stories that reflect who they are as an individual and as a member of their society, I have selected six narratives that I believe highlight important aspects regarding their societal understanding. Throughout these narratives I highlight four overarching themes: binary (male and female), education, language and community. I have not included all of my informants' narratives as the selected ones allow me to thoroughly examine these themes without losing overall focus how these four themes depict the various societal and cultural forces that influence how my informants perceive gender fluidity. It is again worth mentioning, my informants have only shared to me what they view is important when answering my questions. Furthermore, although I have edited and reorganized each narrative for the sake of clarity, coherency, and confidentiality, I have also made great efforts to preserve the voice of my participants without construing the story they told.

Alex: Endurance

Alex comes from a “Roman Catholic and conservative Republic family” within a “conservative minded” community. While growing up with his father and male cousin, with whom he was close, Alex was dissatisfied that he was expected to act feminine since he always felt more masculine. As he recounted, “I've always been unhappy with my birth name because it was really feminine, and I always hated certain things, but not really minded them. I just hated that I was expected to do certain things, like wear dresses with tights on holidays and stuff.” Nevertheless, living with a family that had little tolerance for people outside the gender norms,
Alex was afraid that his father would find out his true gender identity. “I was afraid that my dad was going to kick me out or try to restrict to wearing certain things or acting in certain ways.”

Despite identifying himself as male, Alex disliked the concept that everything must be gendered. “I don't like to define things in gender terms,” he said. “I don't like the idea things being masculine or feminine, or for men or for women.” Alex recounted his experience witnessing his male cousin receive amazing toys such as “Legos and Star War toys.” However, despite having similar tastes in toys with his cousin, Alex constantly received girl toys. He recalled one Christmas when he saw a large gift under the Christmas tree that was for him.

It was almost as big as I was! And I was so excited; I couldn't think what it could be. And I was like, “What if it's a blanket? That would be very disappointing.” It ended up being worse. It was a pink, off-brand, plastic, Barbie Ferris Wheel that was electronic. I was like, “What am I going to do with this?” I cried because I was like, “Maybe this will be a big Lego set, maybe it's something. It could be anything!” And it turned out to be this useless girl’s toy, with pink and for Barbies. I used it because I had to, to show that I was grateful. I got in a lot of trouble; I almost had all my toys taken away that year because I wasn't stoke about this thing.

Although Alex knew that there was a supposed gender difference between him and his cousin, he was unable to see that difference. He said, “I didn't see what was so different about my cousins who I grew up with and myself, because we liked the same things, mostly, and we got along very well.” The only difference he noticed was “that girls my age would be into pink things, or things with flowers, or wearing makeup and doing their hair and wearing long,” while “guys would have short hair, and they would be kind of rude, and play with trucks and wear pants.” Eventually, Alex became more keenly aware of these rules during puberty. “I never really registered that I would grow breasts until it happened. I rebelled against having to wear a shirt because when I was little it didn't really matter. Then I was told I had to wear shirt because, 'Oh,
you're different now' and I didn't feel any different.”

Alex struggled with understanding his identity under all these rules that separated him from those to whom he could relate (like his cousin) that he began experiencing depression. His depression eventually elevated to the point that at age fifteen he considered suicide.

It got to the point where I had pills in my hand and I thought myself and I said, “Something has to happen. I have to take myself apart and figure out what's going on.” I sort of just sat down and sort of decided that I was male. I didn't even know there was a word for it at the time. I have done some research to try figure out, “Is this a real thing or am I just crazy? Do I have to put into an asylum?” I found resources and things of other people going through the same stuff. After a few weeks of questioning myself, is this for real, I just sort of came to the conclusion that it has to be [real]. Life has still been rough, but I haven't doubted myself since.

After Alex came to understand his gender identity, he began identifying himself with masculine pronouns and name. “I came up with my name, shortly afterward, and asked people to call me by that” he recollected. “Most of my friends did, a few of them didn't for a while. A couple of my teachers did, a couple refused to do so. Generally my favorite teachers were the ones who called me by “Alex,” and my least favorite ones were the ones, as it turned out, Republicans.” He even recounted an argument he had with his biology teacher, who forbade him from addressing himself with his masculine name. Alex said, “I remember fighting with my biology teacher over what name I put on my paper. It mattered because of 'rules' or something. That was her excuse. I mean we had a kid whose name was Emmanuel, but he put Molick on his paper because that was his middle name. There was someone whose name was Cole, and he put something else on his papers. I don't know why I couldn't put Alex on there. She knew it was me.” Angry with his teacher’s comment, Alex expressed his anger to his friend through

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16 It seems that throughout Alex's interview, “Republican” carries the connotation of someone who perceives male and female in a traditional manner.
exchanged notes. Unfortunately, Alex’s teacher found and misread one of his notes. He described, “She found the note that said 'I swear to God I could kill a bitch.' As in 'I'm so hungry I could eat an elephant.' Like a hyperbole. But she thought 'kill the bitch,' and so I was making a death threat, and that escalated to the principal, and he almost told my dad about it.”

In fear that his father would find out about his gender identity, Alex was obligated to come out to his principal to conceal his gender identity from his father.

I had to come out to the principal about my gender and explain to him that my dad didn't know. He came up with a compromise where I had to tell my dad – that was my punishment. I had to tell my dad that I used inappropriate words to describe a teacher and it could have been interpreted as a death threat, so I was getting two to three hours detentions, but I didn't have to say that it was because of a difference in name. The principal said that if he had a kid like that, that he would want to hear from the kid directly, not through a principal because of disciplinary action, because that wouldn't make it a good situation. He didn't want to risk my dad acting badly and me getting hurt, abused, or kicked out, so, I'm glad he was understanding about it. Even if he didn't understand, he didn't want me to be at risk.

Unfortunately, after the incident word eventually spread throughout the school and Alex’s classmates began stigmatizing Alex as “the girl who wanted to be a guy” and “the he/she.”

Alex constantly referred back to his depression that kept on accumulating. He eventually dropped out of college due to financial reasons. At the peak of contemplating whether he ought to commit suicide, Alex had a profound moment with his father.

I've had depression and anxiety for what feels like my whole life, I don't really remember when it started. And I was struggling with being transgender and not being accepted, and having to go through all these difficulties with gender dysphoria, for instance. I was staying with an ex's sister in a tiny apartment, with no job, no idea if I was going back to college because I didn't know if I could even afford it. I didn't feel like I had any friends, or that the friends I did have weren't really good friends, they didn't respect me. It was just a very bad place. When my dad found out about it, we had a talk over Skype – because he was in Japan at that point. I sort of let out a whole bunch of the things that I've been keeping to myself, like my experience growing up, and what has happened while I was in
college and why it culminated to that point. Before he hung up he said, “I love you Alex.” We just hung up and I just cried because I was so happy that he finally called me by my name.

While the internet enabled Alex to video chat with his father from afar, it was also a means to meet others who shared similar gender identities. Alex mentioned, “If I hadn't had the internet I would've felt very alone growing up, not knowing for sure if I was really a guy, or if I was just crazy. I wouldn't have known that there are other people out there like me.” The people whom he met and the information he read furthered his understanding of his gender identity. “I wouldn't have known that it's perfectly acceptable to be into Lolita fashion and makeup while still being transgender and male. Because a lot of people out there say, 'If you like wearing skirts, why don't you just stay [female]?' I learned that those things aren't connected; they're not cemented together. I can still identify as a certain way and dress however I want.”

Although he learned a lot about his gender identity through the people he met online, Alex recognized that there are groups that unintentionally recreate and perpetuate gender norms that have been an issue for him throughout his life.

I know there's a lot of trans people who say you have to do these things, you have to go through a full medical transition, you have to wear certain things, you have to do things a certain way, and fit into the binary categories of how females should behave and how males should behave in order to be really considered really trans or really you. I don't agree with that kind of identity policing.

While not agreeing with those online communities, Alex acknowledged that “it's very overwhelming to be transgender on your own.” Hence, Alex has been seeking out individuals with whom he can connect and share opinions in hope to gain a greater understanding of self. “I prefer to know people as individuals than to know people as communities” he said. “It's a good way to find more things and learn more things about myself than being stuck in an echo
chamber, where everybody is the same.”

Near the end of high school, Alex befriended a transfer student through the school's LGBT club who in the end identified as MTF. Because Alex's new friend had just begun identifying as MTF, Alex offered her whatever support she could give. “I gave her one of my old pieces of clothing, it was a skirt, and she wore it to an award event for some kind of gay and lesbian youth service's thing.” Ultimately, what brought the two together was not only a common identity, but the struggle that entailed of identifying as transgender. Alex’s recollected, “She would tell me about the harassment that she would face, and we kind of bonded because we understood what the other was going through.”

Alex's story encompasses the themes of binary, education, language and community. Throughout his narrative, we see Alex being forced to recognize that there is a difference between male and female. A particular locus where that distinction attempts to instill that ideology is within the education setting. Alex's anecdote about his miscommunication with his teacher and eventual detention that was partially caused by his teacher inability to accept Alex's masculine name. Furthermore, language has a critical role regarding Alex's struggle with his identity, which is seen when he becomes relieved when his father finally addressed him by his masculine name. Finally, part of Alex's connection to an online community became a means to overcome isolation that he experienced throughout most of his life for not identifying as his assigned sex.

**Blythe: Coming to Understand**

Blythe recalled recognizing their gender identity since early childhood. “I've just always knew, I just never knew the word before it” they said. “Especially as a kid, there were just days
when I would feel like a boy. I would make it so I have my hair very short and I dress in boy identifying clothes, and I used to like it when people refer to me as a boy. But that wasn't consistent.” While Blythe knew that their gender identity has never been consistent, they could not find the right word with which to identity. Blythe constantly examined themselves under various labels with which they were familiar. While boy felt like the correct term for Blythe on particular days, there were days that boy just did not match how Blythe really perceived themselves. “So I was like, 'I can't be transgender, but why do I feel this way?’” they explained. “Why is it some days when I hear someone calling me a boy I'm so happy and on other days I'm like, 'that's not very correct?’ It was very strange to go through, I just thought that I was, I don't know, I thought it was weird.”

Blythe struggled with conceptualizing their gender identity with the pre-given terms to which Blythe was exposed. After learning transgender and befriending others who identified as transgender, Blythe desired to know what the term encompassed. They said, “I wanted to know more because I was like 'Wow.' Like I've never known of a transgender person. I probably [have] known transgender people over the years and didn't know, but I haven't any before my friend Fay. So, I started looking up a lot more stuff.”

Blythe's personal exploration into transgender led them to understanding various aspects of gender that they had never envisioned. That exploration, in fact, eventually introduced Blythe to non-binary. “When I was at the 'N stuff,'17 that's when I saw the inclusion of non-binary” they recalled. “At first I was confused because how can you not be one or the other? I was even confused about it, until I started reading more. I was, 'Oh, that makes sense.' That's how I always felt.' Even though I knew how I felt, we're so stuck in the binary because that's how we're taught.

17 Blythe is referring to the “N” section of the cite's alphabetical index of gender terminologies.
You're a boy and you're a girl.”

While the term was enlightening, Blythe expressed their initial inability to actually grasp the term's meaning.

I guess it's because as a kid you're taught like that's boy thing and girl thing, which is an absolutely ludicrous concept. You're a boy or a girl. There's boy restrooms, girl restrooms. Everything is under boy or girl. Even though you can grow up and like boy things, girl things, it's never considered gender neutral. So, I never had an understanding that there was a neutral ground to even be on. Growing up, you only hear things put under the scope of boy and girl. It wasn't until I was already an adult before I understood the concept that gender neutral. That was just like things under gender neutral like clothes, or gender neutral like stuff that a boy and a girl... like even then, gender neutral was referred to something that boy or a girl could wear. It was still referred to in a binary setting.

The concept of non-binary was quite an uncommon term for many that Blythe even described that “even some people are more understanding of transgender than they are being non-binary.”

Entailing Blythe's discovery of non-binary was the discovery of gender fluidity. Excitedly, they said, “I looked up, and there were different ones, and I saw gender fluid and I was 'That's it! That's exactly what that is! That's exactly what I've been going through since I was a kid! That's exactly it!' It was... I didn't like cry or anything, but it was like a moment of 'I'm not weird!'” Blythe's learning of gender fluidity was not simply a discovery of an appropriate way to label their identity, but, more important, an opening to discovering the self.

Shortly after discovering gender fluidity, Blythe began seeking out others who could did not identify with their assigned sex to further understand how they ought to refer to and present themselves. Blythe approached their roommate first because they recognized that others would not understand and, therefore, would be less accepting to Blythe's gender identity. Blythe described:

Since my friend is transgender, I figured they'll be much more understanding of
me saying that I'm gender fluid, because they're transgender. So when I told him first, him and his girlfriend, they were “We totally understand, and you know, we're glad.” I've even asked them, “What pronouns... what do I do about them?”. A lot of it was me understanding what I needed to do by talking to them and knowing how to go about it. I just knew the things I read. I knew what it was and what I felt. I didn't know how to go about it. Since my friend is transgender, he really helped me to understand. “Well here's some things that you can do. Here's how you can approach telling people.”

Blythe's worry about people not being accepting towards their gender identity became evidential once Blythe came out to their family. They described, “My family pretty much ignored it” as they were “passively brushing myself.” Blythe pointed out that even though Blythe was articulate concerning how they wanted to be addressed, both their mother and step father continued addressing them as their “daughter” – rather than a non-gender specific reference such as child. For instance, Blythe described how her mother often refers to Blythe as her daughter: “My mom texts me a lot, and so it's like 'I love you my beautiful daughter.' I get so irritated. When I see her, I try and be like, 'If you're going to refer to me, just say you love me. Don't add the daughter or anything. Just say you love me. Unless you're trying to add a point, at which case don't say anything.'”

Despite the lack of acceptance from their parents, Blythe acknowledged their siblings being open to their gender identity.

My brother and sister are very accepting of it [my gender identity]. They're very adamant about it, especially with like family and friends. My brother would go out of his way and say 'It's they!' The rest of my family would get mad. “Look what you're doing to your brother.” “I'm not doing anything to him. He's being... nice to me?” My sister does the same thing. Like her friends accidentally say she or something, she'll be like, “Hey! My sibling is they!” She is very adamant about it.

While acknowledging being accepted by their siblings and most of their friends, Blythe described a gay-identified roommate, with whom Blythe lived for a long time, as extremely
hesitant in accepting Blythe's gender identity. Blythe recalled, “My one friend, he really just
doesn't like change and he doesn't like things that he himself cannot comprehend. So when I told
them, he belatedly ignored it.”

Despite their effort to be patient with their friend's reluctance to accept their identity, it
was not until he began discriminating against Fay, a transgender friend of Blythe, when Blythe
confronted him.

When he found out that my friend was trans too, for a long time he refused to refer
to him as his proper pronouns. I don't know why. He was just like, “It's just
weird.” “No it's not weird. It's not what you're used to. How can you do that to
someone and criticize them when you're gay? You have witnessed prejudiced first
hand. How can you do that same thing to another person?” I think that's when he
started to realize, “Oh man. You're right.”

While upset with their friend's reluctance to accept those who do not identify with their assigned
sex, Blythe also recognized that their friend is not entirely to blame. “He was never presented
with that kind of information,” they pointed out.

Blythe described their awareness that there are many who, like their friend, have never
been presented with information regarding non-binary. In fact, Blythe not only recognized that
people within their community are inculcated with the assumption that everything about the
world is binary, but the fact that Blythe themselves is required to perpetuate the concept of
binary in fear of social consequences. For instance, when I met Blythe, they were working with
children who were part of this school program. While Blythe wished that everyone could
appropriately address Blythe, they are aware that being completely open with their identity could
negatively impact their job security. “I have to be careful about who I tell, what I tell, and in
what spaces I tell it,” they mentioned. “I don't want it to negatively affect my job. I have to have
that job.” Hence, Blythe is forced to allow their students to refer Blythe with feminine pronouns.
They said “When I'm with my clients and I'm in the class, they always refer to me as 'Miss' you know, whatever. That's always like uncomfortable. But they're kids, and I can't say anything.”

Blythe's personal struggle has given them the ability to sympathize and help those who are also experiencing a similar kind of struggle. For example, Blythe talked about comforting Fay, who at the time was worried that people were misgendering him. Blythe recalled:

Yesterday I saw Fay and he was laying on the bed. He said, “Oh I thought of you yesterday.” “Why?” “I was just really depressed because I was like what if people only refer to me as my preferred pronouns when I'm only around. What if they misgender me when I'm not with them.” He said he was going through some arrows of what people do, like “What would so-and-so do if someone refers to me as the wrong pronoun.” When he got to me he said, “What would Blythe do if someone refers to me as the wrong pronoun? I just imagined that you would yell at them and tell them to knock it off. And I was happy.” And I'm like, “You're right, cause that's what I do [...]”. “Yeah it was very comforting, and it helped me feel better.” And I'm like, “Well I'm glad I helped you feel better, because I want you to know that's exactly what I do every time when people refer to you as the wrong gender. I'm like “Hey! It's he!”

Blythe's narrative embodies the following themes: binary, education, language and community. Because they were raised in society that emphasizes on the differences between male and female, Blythe was inculcated that idea that world must be binary. However, their discovery of non-binary led them to a path of realizing that such dichotomy does not actually exist and, eventually, their gender identity. Blythe's transgender friends helped Blythe understand how they ought to present themselves. Ultimately, Blythe is in a predicament: while they want to help those who struggle with a society that believes that gender is dichotomized, Blythe nonetheless is forced to perpetuate that ideology with their job in the education setting.

**Cody: Not a Snowflake, Just Myself**

Despite not identifying as gender fluid since she was younger, Cody has always identified
as bisexual since being a teenager. Because she was unaware of gender fluidity as a term with which to identify herself, Cody initially conceptualized her gender identity in correlation with her sexual identity. She explained:

> When I was in my teens, because I am bisexual, I conceptualized it [my gender identity] was 'I'm kind of a butch lesbian.' So I kind of thought of it as bisexual. The heterosexual side is feminine and the lesbian side was very butch – which is totally not how bisexuality works, but I was young. That's how I conceptualized the polarity of masculinity to femininity was, “Oh well I'm half gay so I guess I'm half masculine.” That was how my teenage mind kind of wrapped my head around it.

It was not until Cody had completed their undergraduate education when they began exploring their gender identity. In addition, Cody was involved with the LGBT community since she identified as bisexual. However, it was not until the summer before I met Cody when she began exploring non-binary identities to really understand who she is. “I was already involved with the LGBT community, but I didn't seek out additional community around being non-binary” she explained. “And then, this past summer I had a lot of free time, and I started really thinking about this gender stuff. I realized that I wasn't happy presenting as a woman all the time, so I sought out some other people similar to their instances online and that's when I came across the term gender fluid and that's when I started kind of figuring out how to go about presenting differently in the world, and kind of living differently in the world.”

It was through her research into non-binary that Cody learned about gender fluidity. What was interesting, unlike most of my informants who discovered the term and become relief that they have finally achieved a sense of self understanding, Cody's reaction was a little different. She mentioned, “Once I realized that there was a word for it, it was pretty terrifying because I already was a sexual minority, and now I was going to become a gender minority too. And, of
course I was already had been, but I just didn't know it yet. So I was like, ‘Crap, like another thing I have to deal with.” Despite this negative side with coming to understand her identity, it was nonetheless relieving for her to finally have a lens to understand her feelings. She described:

    It's kind of freeing in a way because it gives me a lens to kind of explain some of the things that didn't make sense to me as I a kid. It [the term] allows me to explain in a better way how I felt as a teenager. It gives me a word to explain to people how I feel now, and it kind of gives me a path. If I was just kind of a weird girl, there's not really a way to fix that. But identifying as gender fluid or gender queer, any of those, there's steps that I can take to make things better. And I have been feeling better. It kind of given me a way out of an awkwardness and discomfort with my body that I have since I was a kid.

After finally recognizing her gender identity, Cody recognized that, once again, she had to come out. “I wasn't new to the idea of coming out, and I really didn't want to have to go through with that again” she explained. “It wasn't pleasant the first time, it wasn't pleasant the second time, hopefully there won't be a third time.”

Since then, Cody has came out to a variety of individuals. The first person she told was her girlfriend who identified as MTF. “I figured that would be a safe conversation to have at the time, because she was a trans woman, so I figured she would understand” Cody explained. Despite the fact that Cody's girlfriend was transgender, she could not grasp Cody's gender identity. Cody continued, “She was not understanding. She basically... She called me a 'special snowflake.' She said I was just trying to do it to be special that I needed to be something more than a woman, and then she thought that I was doing it just so she would like me more. Neither of those were the case, but that's pretty typical of what binary trans people think and say, from my experience.”

While the two initially connected due to their gender identities, ultimately it was their difference in perceiving gender that separated them. Ultimately, Cody's relationship became
Although in some ways our relationship was really good, in other ways, she misgendered me all the time. She called me 'her girlfriend.' She didn't understand how I could possibly be born with a female body, the body she always wanted, and not want that. Because, in her mind, she would kill to be biologically female and I was moving away from that, and she kind of thought I was throwing it away. She obviously understood, intellectually, that it's the same thing with her. Some of her feature that she perceived as masculine I would have killed to have. So we both kind of upped each other's dysphoria, in some ways. She wasn't particularly respectful to the non-binary, or gender neutral, gender fluid identity.

Later, Cody was upfront with their parents about her gender identity. As she described it, “My parents... it's been a bit of a rocky road. I told them right before Christmas on the phone, so they have some time to process. They were on one hand supportive and they wanted me to be happy, and I was unhappy, so they wanted me to be happier. But on the other hand, they didn't see why I wouldn't have to make any changes in my life. When I decided to take testosterone neither of my parents were really happy about that.” Although Cody was upset that their parents frowned upon her chance of achieving a more androgynous body that would allow her to pass as either male or female, she nonetheless understood why her parents were worried.

I think they don't understand, and they're kind of afraid of what they don't know. They kind of understand it in concept, but it's different when it's their kid. They're also afraid that my life will be harder, and I'm sure it will, because now I'm in an additional minority group, and they're worried about that. They're having a hard time switching language. I don't want to be called a woman. I'm okay with female pronouns, but I don't want them to call me a woman or a girl. Even the word daughter is kind of iffy for me, so they're having a hard time around language. And when it came to testosterone, they were worried that I was irreversibly mess with my body and then change my mind later. A lot of the effects are permanent, so if I go off it later some of [the effects] will stay. They were [also] afraid of any side effects that I didn't want, or increased health risks, or that sort of thing.

While Cody's parents were uneasy about her gender identity, and despite her ex-girlfriend questioning about her identity, Cody's boyfriend accepted Cody's gender identity. To offer some
context, Cody explained that the boyfriend to whom she was referring had already dated Cody beforehand. “When he left in March, I was his girlfriend, even though I preferred the word partner then” she explained. While the two were together, Cody barely talked about her gender identity. However, it was not until the two got back together and after having that relationship with that transwoman that Cody became more open about their gender identity. “He came back in August, and my gender identity had changed – from his perspective my gender identity had change – yet he hasn't misgendered me once” she explained. “He's a hundred percent behind me taking testosterone, even though he knows obviously that's going to change how I look and sound. So he's just been a hundred percent behind me and he just wants me to be happy, and that's really good for him. He gets it, and he's behind it, and that's just kind of amazing.”

Cody's story resembles the themes of binary, language, community, and living with an inchoate identity. Cody's initial description of trying to identify herself shows a series of predications that is done with the language available to her. Her bisexual identity was a lens that she initially used to understand her identity. However, it was not until she came across *gender fluid* when Cody came to understand not only her identity, but the fact that she is a gender minority. The binary structure in which Cody resides becomes highlighted with her girlfriend. Although Cody's ex-girlfriend is transgender, the concept of non-binary was too difficult for her to either grasp or appreciate. Cody's ex-girlfriend inability to grasp this concept ultimately led to the separation of Cody and her ex-girlfriend. In the end, however, it seems as if Cody's supportive boyfriend has given Cody, despite what her ex-girlfriend or parents have opinionated, the confidence to transition her body to appear more masculine, whether she will transition.

*Collin: Is It a Sin to Be Myself*
Despite feeling gender fluid since childhood, Collin had only started identifying as gender fluid months before I met him. Collin was raised as a Seventh Day Adventist. “I was kind of forced to be religious,” he clarified.

As a child, at a time when his “young mind didn't really grasp what that concept [gender] was,” he would allow his step sisters to dress him up in feminine clothing. However, as he grew, Collin came to believe that what he was doing was “cross-dressing.” “For most of my life, I thought it was wrong, so I didn't really think of it as my gender, self-identify,” he said. “I thought it was just kind of a thing that I did.” Although dressing in feminine clothing felt right, he nevertheless could not help but feel guilty about what he was doing. “I felt guilty, like I was doing something wrong or that I was different, and it's kind of mentally damaging.”

Collin recognized that dressing how he felt was “not something that's socially accepted.” His understanding of what constitutes as socially accepted comes from a religious standpoint. He explained, “From a religious standpoint, if you steer from your natural, born, whatever you're given when you're born, that's seen as either sinful or evil, or just different, and there's something mentally wrong with you.” This understanding for Collin, however, was legitimized by a preconceived history. “People used to be tortured for being mentally challenged in America,” he pointed out. “Like they used to have an asylum for mental people where they used to torture them. And usually for religious reason. It's never a good idea from a religious standpoint to deviate from what the norm is.”

Collin's understanding of himself, however, shifted when he transferred from Christian private schools to public schools. “I was running into more liberal people like my friend Matty who kind of helped me understand my gender identity” he said. “It's [public school education]
not as religion heavy, so I had more freedom to kind of understand that I didn't agree with
everything I was raised on.” Collin described this transition not as “a drift from religion,” but as
becoming “educated.”

Collin's education, however, was not limited within the school. Around the time Collin
started attending public school, his older brother began studying at a community college. Collin's
interaction with his brother was significant. “He was sharing all that with me and kind of causing
me to question everything, so it kind of reached the point where I was questioning everything
and that it just didn't make sense anymore. It just felt best to open my mind and go to different
things.”

In addition, the internet became a space in which Collin was able to explore and learn
more about his gender identity. It was an area to learn and try on the various terminologies
associated with gender.

Unlike regular social interactions, there's more people on Tumblr that express
themselves in a way that's comfortable for them, because it's a safe environment
for people to express themselves and it being relatively private and away from
people that they wouldn't want to find out. So most people are very expressive. I
can see people who also express themselves the same way and it kind of helped
me see different examples of different terms and how those translates to actual
people.

Furthermore, Collin's college education exposed him to a greater understanding of
gender. He mentioned, “Now going into college, I've ran into a few things. I went into this
lecture about gender and sexuality, which was very informative, where it kind of also touched on
a lot of different things like that about gender and sexuality and expression and gender fluidity
and stuff like that.”

Finally, having a term with which to identify and everything it entails, Collin finally had a
better understanding of his gender identity. “Now that I know more about what gender fluidity is I would say I feel comfortable” he mentioned. “More understanding of myself. So when I do express myself that way, it's not a guilty thing. I don't feel bad about it. I don't feel wrong. It feels more natural. I feel like I'm expressing myself, not somebody else.”

The term *gender fluidity* not only provided Collin a new understanding of himself, but a way to explain his gender identity with others. For example, before learning *gender fluidity*, Collin could not articulate who he was when he finally told his girlfriend about his gender identity. “I like to dress up femininely.' She didn't know what that was, and at that point neither did I” he explained. “Like she's been a big factor in like helping me discover what it means and how to express myself and stuff. At the time it was scary and different and unknown for the both of us, but now we're a lot more solid about it.”

Collin's girlfriend, though first hesitant about his gender identity, eventually became his “greatest supporter.” Despite his gender being inchoate to her, she remained “very protective” of Collin. “The way she's described it is, it's not like she's uncomfortable about it” he said. “It's not fear of me, but fear for me because of the way how society treats people who are gender fluid, or trans. She's more scared how people will treat me. She's just protective. If people are mean to me, or rude to me, or whatever. So it's a good kind of uncomfortable.”

The more Collin knew about his gender identity, the more he told others and expanded his “support system.” For example, Collin once went swing dancing with a group of friends and, without being completely self-conscious, told a friend who did not really know about him identifying as gender fluid.

We all went swing dancing, and one of Matty's longtime friends was in the car, and I was just talking about, like my gender fluidity and stuff. She seemed fine, so
I kind of just talked about it without really saying to her, “Hey.” It just came more natural to talk about it. And that's kind of the place I'm getting to. Just kind of saying offhandedly. I don't really care if somebody figures out. It's becoming easier for me. But with my family, it'll probably has to be more of a set coming out thing.

In college, Collin has been more open about being gender fluid. Near the end of our interview, Collin explained to me that he had recently met a gender queer identifying individual with whom he wished to connect.

I actually have met another gender queer person there – it's a woman that identifies more masculine – and we've gotten closer. And so that's nice that I've met an actual other gender fluid person, or gender queer person. I recently actually told her that I'm gender queer. We'll probably spend more time talking about that. […] I plan on reaching out to her more and talking and spending time together. So that I have a person that I can express with and stuff. And feel comfortable around talking about that kind of stuff and having another person who I know is the same as me, in a way.

Throughout Collin's narrative, the themes of binary, education, language and community are apparent. Collin's upbringing has instilled a sense of understanding of what it means when someone “cross-dresses” or fails to follow the rules that are inscribed within their genital body. Nevertheless, his realization that wearing feminine clothing does mean not being morally or mentally incorrect happened when he transferred from a private, religious education to a public, and thus more liberal, education. Learning the term gender fluid allowed Collin to not only have a firmer understanding of who he is, but it also enabled him to convey his gender identity to others around him. Finally, Collin's “support system” helped him in becoming more comfortable regarding who he is.

Iphis: Welcome to the Club

When I met Iphis, their understanding of gender and their identity came from the queer
groups from their undergraduate university. “I would join in their groups, and that's where I learned most of what I know now about today's modern queer culture and the history of it, and what terms are more acceptable, what terms aren't” they stated. “And how to perceive queer, sexuality and gender.”

Iphis' initiation to these groups was because of their roommate. At the end of freshman year, Iphis came out to their “openly queer” roommate as possibly bisexual. “I was lost and confused in the world” they explained. “I was talking to my roommate, who was very much openly queer. I was very much like 'I don't know what to do, I feel this way, I think I might be bisexual. I'm taking this one step at a time. My leg is slightly out of the closet, not fully out yet, but... I'm taking it day by day.” Already a member, Iphis' roommate offered Iphis to join one of the queer clubs on campus. Iphis recalled, “My roommate at the time was a part of this club came up to me and was just like, 'Come on. Come join us. See what it's like. See if you enjoy it. See if it fits you.' And I did, and it sort of stuck. I felt very much comfortable in these clubs.”

Iphis remembered the queer groups as a place where they could be themselves while learning about who they are and how to present themselves within the world. Iphis explained, “It was a place where I could be myself. The private club, also, was very much a way for me to help come out. And it was a process that I could learn about myself and present myself to the world.”

There were two groups with which Iphis was involved. “There was one that was more like the open face of the queer community at the school that I went to. It was the one that was very much into allies are included, and it was promoting knowledge and gender and sexuality and promoting teaching these things on campus,” they described. “The other club that I was mostly involved in was a more private club and it was queer and questioning students only. It was a very
private space and it was very much that you sort of had to go through a process to become involved it. But it was very much a safe place, it felt.” Iphis became highly involved with the private club; and by senior year, they served as co-representative. “It was definitely something that meant a lot to me,” they commented.

It was through these clubs that Iphis not only learned about their gender queer identity and pronouns by which to be referred, but taken for granted truths.

A big part of that was unlearning social constructs that have been deemed as truths. It's unlearning what a lot of modern culture teaches that is harmful. It's unlearning biases. It's unlearning privilege, or it's learning about your privilege and recognizing it, and realizing how that's affecting your own thoughts. So, in that way it's unlearning problematic thinking.

Iphis perceived that these “truths,” or “problematic thinking,” are grounded within the binary. Furthermore, they indicated education as a venue for perpetuating this “problematic thinking.” Referring back to their high school experience, Iphis stated:

I think high school was definitely a period of not learning. High school was a period of being in the closet. High school was a period of trying to enforce that “Yes I am straight, even if I think I'm not, but I'm going to pretend that I am and pretend that this isn't an issue.” I think that a lot of high school was being taught that it's just a phase, that it will be over and you'll to be “normal” again. High school was learning that bisexual roles are only bisexual because they only want the attention, which is something I heard many times in high school. So, I think coming out of that, it's learning that, no, it's not all about the attention, or learning that it's not just a phase, or learning that maybe it is just a phase but that doesn't negate what you're feeling at the moment, and it doesn't negate what you will eventually become in the future. That “just a phase” doesn't mean that you will become normal at the end. “Just a phase” can mean that this is your life right now, and that your phase might be different, but that doesn't mean any more or less about who you are at the moment.

Although Iphis viewed education as a source of this “problematic thinking,” they also acknowledged it as a means to fix this issue. Hence, the resources these queer clubs provided enabled Iphis to relearn their taken for granted beliefs. They said, “I definitely think it was the
change of thinking from what I learned in high school and what I learned in college. And I think a lot of that came from distinguishing the fact that the binary is a social construct.”

While these clubs provided Iphis the resources to understand their gender queer identity, the clubs also provided them the courage to open up to their parents. They recalled:

I have sort of been out to my mother beforehand, but not really too much extent. But because of this, I was able to come out to my parents. But I sort of came out to my dad on accident because we were talking about a queer retreat that I was going into. I had mentioned it and he was like very much like, “It doesn't matter how you identify. I love you no matter what.” And that's sort of how I came out to my dad. It was because of these processes that I was doing, and it was because of the interaction that I was doing with the queer community on campus that I was able to feel somewhat comfortable coming out to other people.

Iphis' narrative epitomizes the themes of binary, community, and education. Iphis describes that the binary is perpetuated through education. Nevertheless, their current understanding of non-binary gender also came from the education and resources that were presented to Iphis through the queer clubs throughout campus. The support and knowledge these clubs have offered Iphis has not only allowed Iphis to think outside the binary, but to have a firmer conceptualization of their gender identity.

**Jay: Becoming an Adult**

Jay grew up in a “conservative religious family” while not completely identifying with her assigned sex. She mentioned, “As a kid, I didn't feel I was particularly good at being a girl, and I kind of felt like I couldn't be bothered with it [being a girl] except that I had to.” It was critical for Jay's family that Jay follow feminine roles. She recalled, “It was important that I embody some sort of female values about being a passive follower.” Thus, despite not feeling completely female, Jay had to follow these values because of her family. “I didn't like the gender
roles at the time, but they were enforced [...] as things like you have to dress in a particular way, dress very modestly, very conservatively, in a way that was very frustrating for me as a teenager” she commented.

Due to Jay's upbringing, Jay did not have the chance to explore her gender identity. She pointed out, “I grew up in a very conservative religious family, so I didn't have a lot of time for gender exploration because it was very important to my family that I'd be feminine.” Hence, it was not until Jay began going into college when she realized how unsatisfied she was about abiding feminine roles that she embodied while growing up and finally being able to explore her gender identity. “It took a couple years of college for me to realize that I was not part of that religious background; that I didn't want to be a part of that anymore” Jay explained. “I think part of my adult formation was climbing out from under that rock before I could get the rest of it and figure myself out. It took me a couple years of college to realize that.”

Jay described becoming more cognizant of her gender identity as she became older. For example, about a year and a half ago Jay described recognizing feeling more masculine. “I just kind of had a day where I felt like, 'Oh, I'm just a man today.' I didn't really attach the same kind of significance to it, but looking back on it I remember having that day and thinking, ‘Well even if nobody else can see it, maybe just today, I can be a man.”’ She attributed this masculine feeling that blends in with her feminine identity with being androgynous. For instance, Jay explained a couple of moments of feeling androgynous:

It happened one day that I sort of managed to put together a pretty, sort of androgynous outfit for myself, although at the time I had very long, long hair. I sort of realized that something was up because I looked at my hands while I was wearing this very androgynous outfit and I thought to myself, “I have men's hands, and I look so nice with men's hands.” It was a really great feeling that I felt I figured something out. Having moments like that. Another moment where even
though I was wearing very feminine clothing on a particular day, I looked in a mirror and I saw myself as a man and I said, “I'm a man today,” and it just kind of happened. I was like, “Well, I think something is pretty much up. I can't really just ignore that.” I just felt on the inside like I was having days of, “Oh I wish I was gender neutral today so no one would call me 'she',” and this was before I was really researching stuff, I just had feelings like that some days and so I decided to look into it a little more. I kind of heard the term gender queer, and that's where I jumped in, researching things.

Eventually Jay found gender fluidity through personally researching “gender non-conforming people” on a social media website in order to investigate what she was feeling.

Despite finding the term, Jay had a difficulties grasping its concept. She recalled:

When I first found it, I don't think that I related to it right away, because for a while I was just sort of floundering around, being confused and I think that the fluidity itself would make it hard to attach a label to it because every day that I'm trying to parse my feelings, I'm having very different feelings. One day, I would think, “I just want to be neutral, I just feel really genderless. Can I not have a gender?” Another day I would be like, “Today I feel masculine,” and another I would be like, “I don't know what I'm talking about. I just need to go back to being a woman like normal.” I would just confuse the heck out of myself. After a little bit of thinking, on different days I am having a different experience of it. I sort of temporarily tried the label, and after a few months I found that it's probably the best one for now.

Eventually, Jay came to understand more about her gender identity through this term.

Thus, with this better understanding of these embodied feelings, Jay felt that it was necessary to briefly explained to her family the possibility that she may need to transition. She explained:

I just kind of gave them a heads up that I was questioning. I didn't really asked them to do anything, they would ask if there is anything they could do. I was “Don't aggressively lump me into female categories or stereotypes,” and that's about it because I didn't have anything in particular. But I have sort of read that it was easier to get people's acceptance if you bring them along with you, rather than just sort of dumping it on them and saying, “Well, for now on, I want to be addressed by this name, these pronouns, and I'm going to start hormones” or something. I'm pretty close to my family and if I did that to them, I'm pretty sure they would be hurt that I haven't told them anything. So... I did.

While Jay identified as gender fluid, she also identified as a mother and wife. Because her
gender identity fluctuates, Jay experienced moments of feeling masculine yet suddenly feeling more feminine when attending her children. She explained, “Sometimes when I'm by myself, I'll feel very masculine and as soon as I get into something communal or family setting I just change into something that I'm more used to, which is more feminine. I've had that happen when I'm having a very male day and I walk into the door from work and I come home, and it's 'Mommy! Mommy!'”

As a mother and gender fluid, Jay acknowledged the importance to teach her children about gender while they are young and can easily change their perception. For instance, Jay told me about her attempt to deconstruct the binary for her oldest daughter:

I tell my older daughter that I don't always feel like a woman, and I made sure she's age appropriately educated about what it means to be transgender. That not every boy has a penis and not every girl has a vagina. Sometimes I'm not a man and sometimes I'm not a woman. She's pretty okay with that. I don't really worry about that, to be honest because I know my kids don't really see gender as that at this point, or they're learning, but they're still malleable, so I figured if I tell them what's going on with me in a pretty honest way they'll be alright with it. My older daughter is kind of starting to learn that, where she'll say “Mommy, you look like a man today.” And I'm like “Thank you!” We're working on that because she just started school and she's starting to learn the idea that this is for boys, and this is for girls, which I just hate. I try to be pretty honest and straight forward with my kids, and my older daughter is old enough to understand it all and she's pretty much okay with whatever. It's not really on her radar that much, but if I tell her she'll learn.

Jay's discovery of her gender identity is recent. She said, “I never really figured it [my gender identity] until after we were married.” However, Jay described her husband being “very supportive,” which Jay described as evidential since he bought her a binder the Christmas before I met her. While he Jay's husband is supportive, the two are concerned whether Jay will ever transition. “Down the line we both have concerns what that [physically transitioning] could mean
for us personally in our physical relationship, if I were to make any changes to my body,” she explained. “But again, that's a very big if.” What Jay's identity really means and how it will influence their overall marriage has been confusing for her husband. “But, you know, he's been sort of confused, but not necessarily surprised, that I can tell. Just more about trying to help me piece it together, and, again, he's not like super excited or interested. But he's there and he's supportive.”

Jay's narrative resemble the themes of binary, education, language and community. The values her family instilled within Jay and what she grew up believing resemble a rigid idea of what it means to be either male or female. Her discovery of gender fluidity has provided Jay, like my other informants, a new scope to view these feelings she had about her body. Despite days she identifies as masculine, her understanding of self is influenced by her daughter's call “Mommy!” Furthermore, Jay described the perpetuation of the binary through education, as she described her daughter's education reinforcing what ought to be associated for girls and for boys. Finally, Jay described her husband, while being confused and concerned, as “very supportive.”

Solidifying What is Fluid

Each narrative serves as a window into an informant's worldview, a view into their understanding of the social world. By placing all of these narratives together, we not only see individual perspectives of the world, but a larger and more coherent image of a structured society that has influenced how my informants view themselves today. Ultimately, these narratives allow us to examine the various social and cultural factors that influence how my informants perceive gender fluidity in addition to how they internalize and interact with their social environment as gender fluid.
To begin, these stories frame a common societal ontology of binary – that is the distinct categorizations of masculinity and femininity. In the previous analysis section, I note that my informants often described gender as a binary (e.g. Jay [3], Blythe [5], Nil [7], Cody [8], Rin [16], etc.). This binary structure, however, hinders my informants from expressing themselves in the manner that relates to their feelings of gender since they are aware that expressing themselves as the gender that contradicts their sex would lead to their stigma. Perhaps this is why most of my informants categorize their gender identity as non-binary – Blythe, Cody and Iphis have expressed this gender identity in their narratives. Thus, it seems that some of my informants' attempt to frame their gender identity as non-binary is their approach to overcome this “problematic thinking” (to quote Iphis).

However, there are signs that this “problematic thinking” is instilled within my informants. Iphis, Jay, Alex and Blythe all expressed that their education reinforces this binary understanding of gender. My informants' narratives reflect a sense of hegemony: that education enforces the ideology that the world is categorized in binaries – in the case of gender, male and female. While Jay is teaching her children that gender is not necessarily binary, she knows that they are learning in school that it is. Iphis emphasizes high school as a period where people are enforced to distinctly categorize themselves within these two categories and not deviate. Alex illustrates this difficulty in high school as he tried to have his teacher allow him to use his masculine name in class. Even Blythe, who works with children in a classroom setting, must not only adhere to the binary structure, but also perpetuate it within the educational setting in fear of losing job security. We not only see a structure influencing how people perceive the world, but how it forces the people to appropriately engage with it in order for it to be maintained.
While educational systems uphold the binary structure of gender, they are also an institution that rejects the binary – hence educational systems represent a paradoxical function. Collin, for instance, came to realize that his desire to dress according to his gender identity is not a sin by transferring from a private Christian school to a public school. Even Iphis talks about their college's LGBTA clubs reeducating them to perceive gender as characteristics that do not necessarily need to be under the categories of male and female – categories that had been ingrained within Iphis during high school.

Education, however, is not the only nexus that upholds the structure of binary for my informants. Community and family upbringing are also other important factors that perpetuate the binary structure. The majority of my informants came from conservative, religious backgrounds. Because of this upbringing, many of my informants had assumed that gender is directly connected to sex and, thus, they must follow a set of social rules that are defined by the body (e.g. how to dress, act, etc.). Not abiding by these rules carries various consequences. Alex, for instance, whose body was perceived as female, was cast aside by his fellow classmates after they discovered that Alex recognized himself as masculine rather than feminine. Collin, due to his religious upbringing, felt guilty whenever he dressed according to the gender he identified with even if it did not match his body. He even alludes to a history of religion legitimizing people as mentally ill when they failed to conform to the religion's definition of 'normal.' His allusion is an acknowledgment that he, too, was once influenced by this legitimizing force; that he perceived himself as possibly crazy. In a similar manner, Alex mentioned that he perceived himself as possibly crazy when he was unable to distinctly categorize his gender identity.

While most of my informants implied that the concept of the gender binary is
“problematic thinking,” many of them were unintentionally conforming to it. To return to the previous section, Jay described that when she feels feminine she feels passive, and when she feels masculine she feels aggressive (33). This manner of describing the feelings of gender is binary. However, the question remains why these particular feelings are interpreted in a particular manner. Notice from Jay's narrative that she describes the values she had embodied from her upbringing as the “passive follower type,” hence there is an implication that the manner in which my informants were raised influenced how they embody gender.

There is an assumption throughout my informants' narratives that those who do not identify themselves according to the rigid categories of male and female (e.g. transgender, gender queer, etc.) are more accepting of individuals of various genders. Though this remains true for some of my informants (e.g. Blythe coming out to their transgender friend, Collin creating a relationship with a gender queer individual at his college, and Iphis being welcomed by their roommate initially as bisexual and later as gender queer), this was not always the case. Cody shares her relationship with her previous MTF ex-girlfriend and the lack of support she received. Rather than providing the necessary support, Cody's ex-girlfriend called Cody a “snowflake” in the end as an attempt to mock Cody for deviating from the binary norms. Alex also talks about why he cannot reach out to everyone within the transgender community online due to their own rigid rules of what it means to be transgender. Blythe shares how their friend who identifies as homosexual is reluctant to accept people of different gender identities. What is similar in all these cases is these people, regardless of their gender and sexual identities, are not open to other gender variations since they cannot conceptualize anything beyond the binary. In fact, even Blythe makes the remark, “Even some people are more understanding of transgender than they
are being non-binary.” In other words, because transgender suggests the change from one end of
the spectrum to the other, the term embodies this dualistic trait of gender. While the actual reason
for their inability to accept gender fluidity as another gender identity ought to be considered, this
explanation nevertheless is shared amongst the three.

Despite living in a society that emphasizes the binary, my informants have recognized
their gender identity since they were young. Alex describes himself as always being dissatisfied
with his birth name and knew he felt more comfortable taking on a more masculine one. Collin
struggled with presenting how he truly felt growing up and how he ought to act according to his
community. Cody associated her gender identity with her sexual orientation since she had no
framework to utilize to conceptualize her gender identity. Of course, not all my informants
necessarily viewed their gender as fluid as a child: Iphis did not realize their gender identity until
they came out as bisexual in college, and although Jay believes that she might have thought of
herself as gender fluid as a child, it was not until she began investing more in her curiosity in
androgyne as an adult that she realized her gender identity. Nevertheless, the fact that a vast
majority of my informants had realized their identity when they were young and associated their
gender identity with concepts that were familiar (e.g. Collin viewing his gender identity as a sin,
Cody viewing hers as a part of her sexual orientation) enforces the idea that the inculcation of
gender fluidity since early childhood can happen in various, complicated ways that reflect one's
social environment.

While my informants recognized their gender identity either as a child or a teenager, they
never identified as gender fluid as the term was uncommon in the discourse of gender at that
time. In fact, many of my informants have only recently began identifying as gender fluid.
Because my informants did not have access to this discourse as children, and therefore could not figure out their gender identity, many of them were confused about their fluid gender identity while they were growing up. Again, Collin could not identify his actual identity, thus he perceived himself as a sinful person. Blythe initially viewed themselves as weird. Alex, at one point, thought that he was crazy to the point that he began wondering whether he should be in an asylum. Hence, while my informants had realized their non-fixed gender identity, the idea that it was not really circulating the discourse hindered their understanding of themselves.

Just as my informants struggled with understanding their fluid gender identities, some of the people with whom my informants shared their gender identity also struggled with accepting them. Collin, for instance, describes his coming-out experience with his girlfriend. His girlfriend was initially uneasy about Collin's gender identity – which, at that time, was only considered as cross-dressing – because she could not understand what it implied. In addition, she was also worried how others would perceive Collin. As Collin describes it, it was not a fear of him, rather it was a fear for him. Cody mentions a very similar experience with her parents. Although her parents were open to her gender identity, they were also unsure how to comprehend it. Because they live within a society that demands distinctions, they were uneasy about the difficulties Cody's gender identity would bring to her.

Despite their struggle working with an inchoate gender, at one point my informants were exposed to the discourse of gender fluidity. For the majority, the internet was the key instrument to their exposure. For Blythe, it was a location where they were able to research and understand more about their own identity. For Alex and Collin, it was a location where they could initiate themselves into a community of people who identified similarly. The internet, however, was not
merely a source of exposing my informants to the discourse of gender fluidity, but it ultimately allowed them to recognize that they were not necessarily the only people who identified themselves as gender fluid. Furthermore, it brought clarification regarding how my informants understand their gender identity. Alex, for instance, did not realize that he could identify as FTM while still associating himself feminine qualities until accessing the internet.

In addition to the internet, my informants also sought support from the people around them. Often, this support system contains people outside families. Iphis, reached out to their roommate, who eventually helped them connect with the LGBTA centers on their college campus. Iphis' goal, however, was not only to understand how to *identify* their self, but to *act* as their newly discovered self (e.g. finding the right pronouns). Blythe initially came out to their transgender roommate to not only receive help, but, like Iphis, to learn how to go about the world as *gender fluid*. Thus, these communities not only served as a support group for my informants who struggled with living in a binary society, but as an informational outlet from where my informants can gain a better understanding of the self and how to proceed in the world as gender fluid.

Except for Collin, my informants have informed their families of their gender fluid identity. However, their purpose for coming out to their families seems more of a necessity rather than an attempt to network and deeply discover the self. As Iphis explains, because they love their family, Iphis feels obligated to come out to their family. Jay notes that her goal of coming out to her family is her method to assure that her family will accept her for who she is. Although this attempt of Jay seems wonderful, it does not always work. Though Blythe has attempted to convey their gender identity to their family, they have only yet received support from their
siblings. Alex also recognized not only the possibility of his father's rejection, but the possibility that his coming out to his father could jeopardize his living situation. Nevertheless, while my informants have informed their families of their gender identities, they only began doing this after they had already established some other network outside the family.

An important theme that these narratives also show is the importance of language. Again, because gender fluid was not in the common discourse of gender when my informants were younger, most of my informants struggled with understanding their gender identities. Blythe, for instance, describes trying to figure out who they are by trying on a series of gendered labels. At first, they identified as a boy, which did not feel consistently correct. Later, they attempted to view themselves under transgender, which also felt incorrect. It was not until Blythe discovered gender fluid when they finally understood who they are, and thus a clearer understanding how they must act with the world around them.

These linguistic predications are critical for my informants when they somatically attend the body. Collin struggled as a child when he perceived his fluid gender as cross-dressing. Cross-dressing, at least for Collin's community, evoked the sense of immorality, thus leading Collin to further predicate on himself as a sinner. Although transferring schools and meeting new people has helped Collin to reexamine his identity in a more positive light, it was not until he identified as gender fluid when he had a better understanding of himself.

As Collin illustrated, the discovering of the linguistic term gender fluidity has affected how Collin perceives himself. J.L. Austin (1975) described that words have the ability to shift our perceived realities in unique ways. We can see this force as my participants discover the term that they feel is most appropriate to them. For the majority, discovering and identifying as gender
fluid has a positive effect regarding how they ought to view their gendered selves, while Cody, on the other hand, unfortunately came to realize that she is both a sexual and gender minority. Nevertheless, the discovery of gender fluid has influenced how most of my informants now recognize who they are and how they ought to engage with the world around them.

Yet self-identifying with the term is not the only way words can influence people. Jay, for instance, notes that even in moments when she identifies as masculine her feelings of gender are femininely influenced when her children address her by “Mommy.” On a more dramatic level, Alex describes a moment when he was on the verge of committing suicide until his father addressed him by his masculine name. As Austin points out (1975), words can only influence our perception of ourselves in particular ways only when they are spoken by the right speaker to correct addressee. I am certain that Jay would not have that shift of somatic attention if it were someone else addressing her with “Mommy.”

Finally, it seems that all my informants have followed a similar rites of passage: the simple identifying of oneself, the rise of conflict that comes from one's identity, the separation from one's community, the finding and integrating within supportive communities, and finally, the becoming of a mentor. Alex realized he identified as a male since early childhood, but due to their social environment he was forced to hide his gender identity until connecting with LGBT groups during high school. In the end of his story, Alex, knowledgeable from his past struggles, was able to help his MTF friend become more comfortable with her gender identity. Iphis initially identified as just bisexual but understood their gender fluid identity to a greater extent because of the LGBT communities on campus. By the end of their senior year, Iphis became co-representative of one of their college's queer clubs. Collin initially recognized his gender identify
as a child, but because he could only describe his identity as cross-dressing, he associated his
gender as a sin until he attended public school. His interaction with his new friend from college
can be seen not only as a way to continue engage himself with others who are, in terms of
gender, similar, but his way to reach out to those individuals as well. Jay came from a religious
background and subconsciously realized her gender was a tad different until she moved to
college. Her access to online communities exposed her to understanding her feelings of gender,
and with this knowledge, she has started teaching her children that gender is far more
complicated than simply boy and girl. Blythe has always felt that their identity is non-binary, but
could not conceptualize their identity until accessing the internet and finding the right term.
Despite their family's and friends' reluctance to accept them, Blythe's siblings and other friends
have been supportive. With their accumulative wisdom and confidence, Blythe has been
supporting friends, like Fay, who struggle with being accepted. Cody has already subconsciously
understood her identity. It was not until her curiosity led her to explore her identity away from
the LGBT community and into non-binary via online where she came across gender fluidity.
Despite her relationship with her ex-girlfriend, her boyfriend has been supporting Cody's gender
identity. Though Cody did not mention whether she has become a mentor, it is possible that she
will eventually follow a similar path that everyone else has taken or she may possibly end her
journey with being accepted by her boyfriend. This rite of passage not only presents how my
informants come to understand their gender identity, but a process how people come to realize
themselves in the world they reside and a perpetuation of that coming to self.

As I have shown, these narratives ultimately provide us a better understanding of what it
means to be gender fluid and why the feelings of gender are conceptualized in a particular
manner by gender fluid individuals. On a macro scale, we also see these structures that are perpetuated and maintained throughout the society in which my informants live.
Conclusion

To return to my main inquiry, what is gender fluidity? Gender fluidity is a constant but inconsistent fluctuation of the feelings of gender. The feelings of gender accentuate the idea that gender fluidity derives from the Western ontology of gender – that is, gender is related to the body (Bolin 1996; Butler [1990] 1999; 1993; Finkler 1994; Herdt 1996a; Karkazis 2008; Lacqueur 1990; Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987; Valentine 2007). My informants conceptualized these feelings in three distinctive yet overlapping categories: the sense of self within the body, the biological component that is ingrained within the body, and the body's external expressions. While the first two categories relate back to the Western ontology of gender that literature addresses, the external expression of the body is an ontology that is not directly addressed by literature. Furthermore, as the feelings of gender are connected to the body, they influence how one goes about perceiving and carrying one’s body. Part of gender presentation entails individuals being attentive to social cues in order to effectively pass as a particular gender. The concept of passing encompasses an audience that includes the ego. Thus, while gender fluidity relates to the inconsistencies of the feelings of gender, a majority of my informants have experienced social and physical dysphoria. The attempt to androgenize the body was not only a way for my informants to try and overcome the body's limitation of passing as a particular gender, but it was also a mechanism that enabled them to explore and understand their gender fluid identities in greater depths. Furthermore, because gender fluidity is the constant fluctuation of the feelings of gender, some of my informants have expressed the concern that gender fluidity is possibly just a phase.

In addition, I have identified various influences that were critical for my informants to
understand their gender fluid identities. While my informants have recognized their gender identities since an early age, they struggled with recognizing who they are and interacting with others due to society's binary structure. Part of my informants' processes of discovering their identity involved them engaging in a particular discourse, which primarily came from educational settings and the internet. It would be interesting to see a comparison between how the discourses from educational settings and the internet influence individuals' sense of self – as they have influenced how my informants perceived themselves. Finally, discourse ultimately allowed my informants to find the appropriate linguistic terminology with which to identify themselves.

The linguistic component further emphasizes Butler's ([1990] 1999) idea that one cannot perform gender without a preexisting term for it. That is, language has an immense influence how gender is perceived and thus carried out. The fact that language, especially the discovery of the term *gender fluidity*, buttresses Butler's emphasis on the importance of language on gender, which others have criticized (e.g. Busby 2000). Though it is true that the body is a critical component for gender for those who are influenced by Western ontology, many of my informants have illustrated that language was a means to attend to the body. As some of my informants have described their process of trying to predicate on their gender identity, it was not until they learned gender fluidity when they finally developed a better understanding of self and how they ought to go about in the world. This became clear when they were initially attempting to predicate on their identity and eventually finding the right word. In other words, language served as a cultural filter for somatically attending the body.

As my informants have expressed, gender fluidity often entails the issue of social and
physical dysphoria. Hence, I urge for further studies on these two forms of dysphorias and possible approaches to address this reoccurring issue.

After conducting this study, it seems to me that the heart of my informants' dysphoria lies within their doxas. My informants who conceptualize gender under the assumption of Cartesian Dualism or biology view a lack of agency over the feelings of gender. On the other hand, Rin (18), who assumes that gender is the external expression of the body, views that his agency is only limited to the clothes that he wears. While Ursula (19-21) also shares this same assumption as Rin, her assumption that gender is also related to the Cartesian Dualism ultimately leads her to perceive a lack of agency over the feelings of gender. Furthermore, Rin was one of my few informants who did not express having experienced dysphoria. Thus, it seems to me that the manner in which one assumes their feelings of gender not only influence their sense of agency over these feelings, but whether they experience gender dysphoria as well. Therefore, I believe it would be worth researching whether those who, like Rin, presume gender to only be related to the external expressions of the body also experience gender dysphoria.

Finally, I am sure that some of you may be annoyed or confused with my decision to refer to my informants by their preferred pronouns, particularly they. Besides, it seems unfair to expect the reader to understand the complexities of gender fluidities while being forced to comprehend the ambiguities of pronouns that break grammatical conventions. I myself am aware with this frustration as I was forced to remind myself the antecedents to which they refers while writing this thesis. Nevertheless, it is critical when examining gender, especially when framed as non-binary, to not only be sensitive to language, as these are terms that relate to their identities, but also as a means to reevaluate what we have taken for granted – our unconscious need to
distinctly categorize people within the binary. Furthermore, early in this thesis I wrote a footnote explaining that my use of *they* for singular, ambiguous antecedents is to join the bandwagon that strives to change the sexist conventions of writing. I hope my decision to use *they* has ultimately contributed to that change.

The world of gender is indeed more complex than simply male and female. When it comes to interpreting the *feelings of gender*, we not only see a vast complex range regarding how people somatically attend to their bodies. Gender fluidity, as I have shown, is a venue to understand this constant shift of attending the body. As my informants demonstrated, this manner of attending to the body influences how one identifies themselves within their social content. I ultimately hope that this thesis has managed to convey at least four key points: the manners in which ontology influences gender, a new perspective into non-fixed identities, how language influences our perceived identities, and an understanding of gender fluidity.
Works Cited


Coney 101


Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself (e.g. what are your hobbies, what sort of music you enjoy, etc.).

2. What is your understanding of gender?

3. Do you identify yourself as 'gender fluid,' and if not, then what other term do you use to identify yourself?

4. As you identify yourself as gender fluid, I am curious what it means to you to be gender fluid.

5. Can you please tell me when you first realized that you were gender fluid.

6. Could you describe to me how it feels when your gender changes or the differences between each gender? (Possible Probe: Do you notice that you act differently when your gender changes and if so can you please describe it?)

7. Have you ever encountered a situation where someone has addressed you by the incorrect gender? If so, could you share your thoughts on it?

8. Do you have anything else that you would like to share?

9. Would it be alright if I could spend some time with you in order to see how you interact with others? It would just be perhaps a few hours, at your discretion.

10. If you know anyone who is also gender fluid, could you please inform them about this study and my contact information just in case they wish to participate.

(Probing may be involved throughout the interview.)