

WHAT'S IN A NAME?: TRANS YOUTHS' EXPERIENCES OF RE-NAMING

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Abstract

Often, choosing a name is one of the first ways trans people begin to assume a different gender from the one they were assigned at birth. Because of their age, trans youths' relationships to and negotiation of naming is particularly complex: these young people are often still dependent on the very families who named them. In my dissertation, I turn to trans youth and their stories of re-naming themselves to explore how these narratives about the names they receive, refuse and choose can expose challenges to narrating youths' negotiation and formation of identity. Informed by narrative inquiry, post structural theory, trans studies, queer theory and feminist methodologies, this qualitative study insists that by listening to the stories trans youth tell about their naming processes we can open up space for a more complex understanding of their lives and experiences. Through two sets of interviews with ten trans youth, I explore how stories about names can expose youths' negotiation of their identity. My dissertation consists of six chapters focusing on ethical concerns in research about trans youth and the role of gender, development and family in the navigation of self-making through names and the daily lives of trans youth. Theorizing names is essential to understanding how young people explore who they are, who they want to be, and how they want others to recognize them, creating space for a deep reconsideration about both identity formation for young trans people and the social and personal importance of names. I argue that by listening to the stories trans youth tell about their naming processes, educators, policy makers and researchers can better comprehend the supports trans youth may need, while opening up space for more complex understandings of trans lives.

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Playing soccer has been an important outlet for me during this dissertation process

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Introduction

What's in a Name?: Trans Youths' Experiences of Re-Naming

As an LGBT program coordinator in Ontario, Canada, Vincent conducts trans sensitivity trainings at various organizations and workplaces. In these trainings and with co-workers, he has recently started introducing himself by saying “Hi, my name is Vincent. I have a vagina.” For Vincent, his declaration is an act of trans-visibility, activism and awareness. This statement also articulates the paradox of his embodiment; he is a man with a vagina. Vincent’s self-naming and self-definition pushes against normative sex and gender models, making room for the complexity of gender and the incoherence of bodies.

In *Sons of the Movement: FtMs Risking Incoherence on a Post-queer Cultural Landscape*, Bobby Noble (2006) argues that gender is an ongoing and socially constructed process. Working with Denise Riley’s theories of developing a self and subjectivity, he explores how:

Articulating one’s self as a subject (engendered, racialized, sexed, nationed, classed, etc.) is the process through which we learn to identify our “I” relative to bodies, power grids, as well as culturally available categories like pronouns, and then attempt to become that configuration. (p. 23)

As a trans man with a “long lesbian history,” Noble struggles to describe who he is and settles on the paradoxical identity that he is “a guy who is half lesbian” (p. 80). For Noble, this identity “comes closest to bringing a number of historical moments together to form *something like an identity*” (p. 80). The simile “something like” expresses how this identity is comparable to how he identifies and yet also fails to capture the tension

between being a guy and being a lesbian:

To say “I am a lesbian man” or “I am a guy who is half lesbian” both materializes or externalizes a body that is not always immediately visible yet is still absolutely necessary for the performative paradox to work. It means to answer “yes” to “Am I that name?” and to amend the question so that it reads multiply instead of singularly: “Am I this and that at the same time?” (p. 84)

Similar to Vincent’s challenges in naming himself, the complexity of Noble’s embodiment and identity resists language. Noble addresses the language used to describe trans people and contends that “the relation between the ‘trans’ and either ‘gender’ or ‘sexual’ is misread to mean that one transcends the other or that trans people, in essence, are surgically and hormonally given ‘new’ bodies” (p. 83). Although Vincent’s body may signal a gender, it also holds different meanings and experiences because embodiment has a past and a future that is not always legible or known.

Vincent’s intelligibility contests the alignment of bodies, sexuality and gender and language fails to capture the multiplicity of his identity, pointing to the messiness and fluidity of gender and embodiment. Drawing on his experiences as a trans person, Noble conceptualizes embodiment through the term grafting to describe the relationship between his “old” and “new” body:

My *gender* now looks different from the one I grew up with but my body is, paradoxically, almost still the same. I have the same scars, the same stretch marks, the same bumps, bruises, and birthmarks that I have always had, only it is all different now. Grafting allows me to think that relation. Not only does this trope allow me to look at the way my “new” body is grafted out of, onto, through my

“old,” but it is also a way of rethinking trans-gendered (read: differently gendered) bodies as effects of the sex/gender system in crisis and transition. It means my newish-looking gender is the effect of a productive failure of that manufacturing system, not its success. In those failings, trans men can become “men” in some contexts; some, but not all. (p. 83)

The reshaping of the body allows some trans people to feel complete or whole, but Noble warns that the body should be thought of “not as foundation but as archive” (p. 84).

Noble’s analysis of the body offers a framework for understanding how Vincent’s body and multiple aspects of one complicated identity point to stories and histories that come together to form an archive. Noble insists that the body is not a foundation, and yet the process of grafting relies on an existing body (or foundation) to support the grafts.

Although these new grafts construct the body into something different, some form of the “old” body remains. Vincent’s statement that he has a vagina offers a way to think about how trans youth relate to their “old” body. His vagina is part of his “new” and “old” body and yet in his transitioning process he may have redefined how his vagina reflects his identity.

Vincent’s vagina is not who he is, but is a part of how he understands his identity and challenges the sex/gender system. Noble’s analysis of trans embodiment offers a way to think about how Vincent describes the changes he has made to his body to feel whole, and as an explanation for how his name relates to his body:

My body is mine. My body is what I make of it. I have piercings. I have tattoos.

And you know I think our bodies are to do, you know our bodies are ours to do what we wish with them and to really make our own and I’ve gone through a lot

of difficult transformation with hormones, I've had top surgery, I've had a hysterectomy. And just all these changes to my body to make it complete and feel at one with who I am. And so I think it fits in that wholeness because if I have this body that doesn't have a name that fits in my mind, the very essence of who I am or near it wouldn't be the same.

Vincent expresses ownership over his body and his right to manipulate his body as he wishes. The force in his assertions might be in response to the ways the medical establishment has historically made it difficult for trans people to change their body through hormones and surgeries. For Vincent, the alignment of his name and body is crucial to the “very essence” of who he is and his embodiment depends on a name that captures and reflects his body and self. The changes Vincent has made to his body make it feel complete even while he retains his vagina, which may hint at the ways his embodiment—and the embodiment of trans people more generally—may not only be fluid but can also be thought of as fixed.

Vincent's anecdote offers a productive site to explore the lives of trans youth and the tensions trans youth face in narrating their identities. For Vincent, his name brings coherence to the complexity of his identity and embodiment, highlighting the importance of names for young trans people. Names are an important aspect of how trans youth narrate who they are.

Locating Names in the Lives of Trans Youth

Before a child is born, parents choose a name, negotiating among many things—family, origins, and the assumed sex and gender of their child. Names contain a story of

the relationships among the parents and their childhoods, and the future those parents imagine for their child. The child is born into these relationships and inherits both their name and the stories that populate it. Even before a child can talk, they are called into language through their identification with and internalization of this name. Our names come to feel a part of ourselves and it is through our names that we introduce ourselves to others. Our name, then, exists at the threshold—arriving from histories that precede us but coming to designate an interior sense of self. Names also exist as a kind of currency for our engagements with others and the world at large. Paradoxically, names have the power to represent and make us intelligible, and to render us strange and alienated both from our families and from social conventions. This meditation on names takes on significant urgency for trans¹ people.

Often, choosing a name is one of the first ways trans people begin to assume a different gender from the one they were assigned at birth. Because of their age, trans youths' relationships to and negotiation of naming is particularly complex: these young people are often still dependent on the very families who named them.² The act of selecting a name separate from the one their parents assigned them, then, is central to identity formation, enacting simultaneously the pull back into the home and the push out

¹ I use the term “trans” through my project as a way to acknowledge, describe, and “encompass all manifestations of transness” (Cromwell, 2001, p. 263; Noble, 2006), including, but not limited to: transgender, transsexual, gender queer and “diverse gender variant practices” (Aizura, 2006, p. 291). I also want to recognize that although I am attempting to be inclusive, gender expressions and identities are culturally specific and that some of the people I reference or discuss in this project do not use the term trans and in fact disavow it (Namaste, 2000; Valentine, 2007).

² I use the terms youth and young people to describe people between 15-25 years old. This age range captures the experiences of people living with their parents and those who are now living outside of their family home. My use of these terms and the corresponding age range also draws on common practices within social service agencies in Ontario that work with trans youth, including the 519 and Sherbourne Health Centre.

into the world. Trans youth's negotiation of naming is particularly complex as they juggle family affinities and independence, as well as unpredictable changes to their adolescent body.

As trans people start to transition at younger ages, their experience of changing their name and transitioning is in closer contact with those who are tied to their given name (Staley, 2011). In a 2011 Maclean's article about the increasing number of trans youth, journalist Roberta Staley explores the ways trans youth in addition to their families are called to narrate their gender in order to get access to medical services, like hormone blockers and surgery, to transition in the ways they want to. Families may have a range of unpredictable reactions to their child's trans expression and identity, and often feel a sense of loss when their child identifies differently from the gender they were assigned at birth (Ryan, 2009). Trans youths' processes of re-naming can come in conflict with their family's desires for them. In addition to pressures from home and family, trans youth are tasked with choosing a name that reflects their identity and renders them intelligible in the various communities they are a part of. These tensions reflect some of the complex issues trans youth negotiate and narrate in their process of re-naming. In my research, I spoke to trans youth in order to analyze the complicated relationship trans people may have to their names and explore how trans people construct narratives about their process of choosing a name.

Choosing a new name is a critical step in the process by which transitioning bodies become intelligible to the self and in the social world. Looking closely at names offers a way into exploring the complexity of trans youths' identity development and the ways they tell stories about themselves. I turn to stories of re-naming to explore how narratives

about the names one receives, refuses and chooses can expose the challenges trans youth face in their negotiation and formation of an identity. For trans youth, choosing a name creates an opportunity to imagine their future self and to explore identities quite separate from those their parents dreamed for them. And yet in this projection into the future, trans youth must grapple with the names their parents gave them and the story of who they were before they changed their name. Young trans people struggle to develop a coherent narrative of the self because of the complexity of their gender and identity. In my dissertation, I ask: what does the re-naming process reveal about trans youths' relationships with their gender, family, and emerging sense of identity? And, what can we learn about the work of names from the way trans youth narrate this process? To take up these questions, I conducted a qualitative study about naming and narrative constructions of the self through interviews with young trans people living in Canada.

In my study, I ask trans youth to describe their process of re-naming, offering an exploration of names and naming as both a renegotiation of the meaning of family and home and a critical step in the process by which transitioning bodies become intelligible in the social world. I take these narratives and read them alongside theories of subject formation and language to consider how the stories one tells about the self are constructed and influenced by the social world. I ask: How is the subject formed? How does one enter into language? How does one narrate the self? What can we learn from the stories people tell about themselves? What might those stories tell us about one's relationship to language? I turn to trans youth and their process of choosing a name to explore theories of language, subject formation and narratives of the self.

Current research about trans youth relies on discourses that position them as

always at risk (Rasmussen, 2006). And indeed, young trans people tell stories about their mental health issues; their lack of parental and family support, which is often correlated with their psychosocial issues and which can be a contributing factor to homelessness; and their experiences of violence and discrimination at school result in a high dropout rate (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Kosciw & Cullen, 2001; O'Shaughnessy et al., 2004; Sausa, 2003; Sember et al., 2000). The needs of trans youth are different from their gay, lesbian, and bisexual peers—and more complex than trans adults (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006). They include but go beyond the issues of sexual orientation and homophobia in a heterosexist society; they extend past experiences of severe discrimination in employment, housing, and health-care faced by trans adults. Although trans youth are often linked to the lesbian, gay, bisexual community, many identify as heterosexual. It is their non-conforming gender expression and identity that exposes them to acts of transphobia, as opposed to their assumed sexual attraction to people of the same gender.

While it is important to recognize the challenges trans youth face, discourses that position them as always at risk present a limited framework for understanding their lives and the stories they can tell about their experiences (Rasmussen, 2006). Research about young trans people needs to explore the ways trans youth are using language to render themselves intelligible and how they are resisting victim narratives through the naming and un-naming of who they are or want to become. A new direction within research about trans youth attempts to think differently about trans youth by positioning them not as either at risk or resilient, but rather, to focus on understanding the ways in which trans youth negotiate their identity and development within various social contexts (Driver, 2008). I include my research in this new paradigm that explores the complex ways young

people construct an understanding of their identities and experiences, and the social spaces and communities in which they are engaged, as well as the varied ways that context matters in the development of trans youth. In order to contextualize the themes I found in my research, I investigate research about trans youth to consider the stories told about young trans people and the ways research describes the lives and experiences of trans youth. I place my project in conversation with this literature and consider how methodology influences the ways researchers understand and discuss trans youth.

Research about Trans Youth

Research about trans people began in the 1800s, when early psychiatrists and sexologists including Karl Ulrichs (1994), Richard von Krafft-Ebing (2006), Magnus Hirschfeld (1991), Sigmund Freud (1962), David Cauldwell (2006), and Harry Benjamin (1954) developed the initial theories defining and describing the bodies, experiences, and identities of gender variant people. These theories produced the invention of the transsexual, constructing a language to describe the transsexual, a framework for diagnosing the transsexual, and subsequently creating a cure to rid them of their perceived sexual perversion (Stryker, 2006). Furthermore, this research has influenced the questions researchers ask about trans people and the ways researchers encounter, recognize and explore the lives of trans people.

Empirical research about trans people has moved away from research about trans adults towards a focus on the experience of being a young trans person. The increasing number of suicides among trans youth and the concerns related to the needs of trans youth in schools has created urgency in the field. Current research about trans youth is often

located within research about LGB youth, rather than work within the field of trans studies (Mallon, 1998; Savin-Williams & Cohen, 1996). In contrast, the experiences and lives of trans adults are most commonly found in personal narratives and memoirs written by trans adults. Adult trans theorists often use their subject position to analyze and theorize trans experience, centering their transition process in their autobiographies (see Aizura, 2006; Boylan, 2004; Cromwell, 1999; Green, 2004; Serano, 2007; Valerio, 2006). Just as trans adults are narrating their lives, trans youth are using online social media sites like Facebook, Tumblr and Youtube to document and communicate to others about their experiences as a trans youth. These various sites from which stories are told about trans youth speak to the tensions and frameworks within trans studies and communities.

In my review of recent literature about trans youth, I find that this research can be organized into four themes: a medicalized discourse about trans youth, the health factors associated with being a young trans person, the resilience of trans youth in the face of their struggles, and the social contexts influencing the experiences and lives of trans youth. Over the past decade, there has been an increasing number of studies about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth, and yet these studies rarely report on the experiences of those who are gender non-conforming or do not include a representative sample size of transgender youth (D'Augelli & Patterson, 2001). This might be the case because LGB youth are more intelligible to researchers than trans youth, and so their stories get included in LGB experiences. Dean Spade (2004) critiques the consolidation of identities in the term LGBT, calling it instead “LGB-fake-T” (p. 53) to draw attention to the absence of trans issues and trans people in the use of the category LGBT. The small number of trans youth in these studies may also reflect the fact that it is only recently that

young people have identified as trans. The lack of research about trans youth pushes researchers, including myself, to look outside of trans studies for narratives about youth experiences of sexuality and gender.

Interestingly, I have noticed that some researchers and youth led community projects are beginning to use the term queer to describe the diverse sexual and gender identities and experiences of the populations they are working with. Queer comes to stand in for those who identify as LGB and the sexual and gender diversity of those who do not identify as LGB. In some cases, trans youth are included in the umbrella term queer. For example, in an edited collection about queer youth cultures, Susan Driver (2008) uses the term “queer youth” to “signify young people who identify in ways that exceed the boundaries of straight gender and/or sexual categories” (p. 2). In *Imagining Transgender*, David Valentine (2007) discusses how the term queer is often used in place of the category LGBT in order to “stress the commonalities of experience across particular identity formations” (note 17). However, as Valentine notes, some trans people argue that the term queer does not describe their heterosexual identity and that the use of the term queer to describe some LGBT people “undermines the notion of fixed subjectivities and identity which are so central to many transgender (as well as lesbian and gay) identities” (note 17). Susan Stryker (2008) also troubles the term, drawing attention to the ways that by listing “T” with “LGB” transgender becomes an orientation and that the inclusion of trans in LGBT privileges the expression of sexual identity over gender identity (p. 148). Although LGB, queer and trans youth bodies of literature overlap and explore similar issues, the experiences of LGB, queer and trans youth can differ quite drastically and yet young people often have multiple gender and sexuality identities. In this dissertation I use the

term queer to describe the complex, interrelated and shifting relationships people have with their gender and sexuality and I include LGBT identities within my definition of queer. Based on my interviews with participants, I find that some trans youth identify as queer and some do not, and that the term or identity of queer is used to describe an individual's gender, sexual orientation, and/or the complex relationship between gender and sexuality. Throughout my project I discuss research about queer youth in order to think about the ways trans youths' sexual and gender experiences bump up against their identity, intelligibility and narratives of the self. In my analysis of this research, I recognize that the relationship and meanings of sexuality and gender identities and experiences vary across different communities, geographic spaces, and are constantly changing and being redefined.

Research about trans people is often limited in a number of ways. First, the majority of representations and research about trans people are from transsexuals who have sought counseling or services from gender identity clinics (Lewins, 1995). Second, most medical literature about trans people is about Anglo, white, and European-American transsexuals who were born male-bodied (see Bailey & Zucker, 1995; Tsoi, 1990; Winter, 2002). These demographics influence what is considered the typical narrative of trans youth. This narrative rests on a linear story of identity development, in which the youth describes having always been gender non-conforming and always knowing they were trans. Lastly, the majority of research about trans people has been conducted by non-trans people in the social sciences (Green, 1999; Prieur, 1998), where, historically, trans people have been oppressed and pathologized.

Medical discourses about trans youth. Medico-psychological discourses about

trans people concentrate on theorizing the origins of transsexualism (Cohen-Pfafflin, 2003; Zucker et al., 1997)³, developing techniques and treatments for “fading” trans people of their gender variant behavior (Meyer-Bahlburg, 2002; Zucker, 2004)⁴, and exploring the relationship between sexual orientation to various gender related characteristics (Bailey & Zucker, 1995; Doorn et al., 1994; Tsoi, 1990). There has been a recent growth in the number of people who identify as trans, inciting more researchers to explore the formation of the trans subject and the existence of trans people. Some researchers attribute the increase in the number of people who identify as trans to the feminist and lesbian/gay liberation movements (Coogan, 2006; Heyes, 2000); alternatively, some feminists believe that trans people are the cultural product of the medicalization of gender and argue that the normalization of approaches to surgical transitioning reinforces gender stereotypes and violence against women (Hausman, 1995; Raymond, 1979). There has also been research about the diversity among trans identities (Ekins & King, 1999/2006; Valentine, 2007) and the historical presence and representation of gender variance throughout different cultures (Bullough & Bullough, 1993; Feinberg, 1996; Herdt, 1996). Recent work in the field of trans studies also explores the increasing accessibility of medical transitioning for trans people and the greater number of options gender variant people have in figuring out their gender, opening up different ways for trans people to transition and consider the complexity of their gender (Castañeda, 2014).

³ For a review of studies about theories of trans people done over the past thirty years by Green, Zucker, and Cohen-Kettins, see Cohen-Kettins and Pfafflin (2003).

⁴ In the past twenty years, there have been studies offering therapies that are characterized as more affirming and adaptive for families with transgender children, designed to prevent gender variant youth from developing a damaged self-esteem and building a positive identity no matter what gender and sexual identity they are (Pleak, 1999; Tuerk & Menvielle, 2002).

Medical discourses about trans youth offer debates about the ways young trans people are diagnosed and treated by the medical system. Psychologist Kenneth Zucker, who previously headed Toronto's Gender Identity Service in the Child, Youth, and Family Program at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, has written numerous articles on research about Gender Identity Disorder (GID) among children and the possible social and biological factors associated with people becoming transsexual. At the heart of Zucker's research is the belief that children and adults should avoid becoming transsexual and that GID is a psychological disorder. Based on his research and clinical practice with trans and gender variant youth and adults, Zucker created a treatment therapy in which he assists gender variant children in the process of accepting the sex they were assigned at birth. This socialization technique begins with the family and rewards the gender variant child for particular gendered behaviors that he regards as appropriate gendered behaviours. Zucker argues that most gender variant children will change their mind or grow out of their GID and so they should not be allowed to get sexual re-assignment surgery (SRS) or take non-reversible estrogen or hormone replacement therapy. Critiques of his research from within the medical community express concerns about his treatment therapy practices and the effects they have on children and their understanding of their gender (Spack, 2005). Inherent in Zucker's understanding of gender variant youth, is that young people can not be trusted to make decisions for themselves and that without medical approval and parental assistance, gender variant youth are at risk. Furthermore, Zucker's treatment therapies made clients feel ashamed of their gender identities and some describe their experience at CAMH as traumatic. Numerous accounts report that Zucker ignored and rejected the identities of his gender variant and trans clients, insisting on a biological

framework of sex and gender and assuming that gender is innate. In 2015, after an external review of the practices at CAMH, Zucker's practices were discredited and the gender identity services for children and youth at CAMH were shut down.

Despite the ways medical discourses have pathologized and oppressed trans people, they have also lent legitimacy to the experiences of trans people and are always in the process of rewriting how the medical community describes and labels trans people. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) is the most common classification system of mental disorders used by mental health professionals in the United States. In the most recent version of the DSM, the DSM-5, the diagnostic name "gender identity disorder" is replaced with the term "gender dysphoria." Gender dysphoria is one of the key markers associated with a diagnosis of GID in conjunction with the DSM (Cole & Meyer, 1998). The DSM-5 was met with backlash in both the US and internationally because of the way some common behaviours and emotions are categorized as mental health disorders (Pearson, 2013). The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) prefers the term gender dysphoria "to reflect that a diagnosis is only needed for those transgender individuals who at some point in their lives experience clinically significant distress associated with their gender variance" (WPATH, 2011, p. 6). Although this diagnosis allows some trans people to access greater health care and resources it also contributes to an unequal relationship between the mental health field and trans people because it maintains the gatekeeper status of the medical institution.⁵

There is still much debate over whether GID and gender dysphoria should be

⁵ In 2016, an external review of CAMH Gender Identity Clinic of the Child, Youth & Family Services in Ontario, Canada was conducted and one of the key recommendations was that "gender variance versus gender dysphoria should be distinguished and explained" (p. 3).

categorized as a mental disorder and how services for trans people would be affected by this change. Currently, many services for trans people are only accessible to those who have been diagnosed with gender dysphoria, limiting who is classified as trans and how the medical community understands the experiences of trans people. Ari Lev (2005) argues that the criteria for a diagnosis of a GID does not allow for the existence of “healthy, functional transsexuals and transgender people who are able to seek medical and surgical treatments for their own actualization without being labeled mentally ill” (p. x). Trans theorists also address the ways diagnostic criteria for GID and gender experiences by the medical institution assumes that trans embodiment and transitioning pathways are the same for all trans people (Halberstam, 2005; Prosser, 1998).

Trans youth at-risk and resilient. Similar to the more adult-oriented research detailed above, research about trans youth also focuses on their mental health and well-being. Studies often point to experiences of discrimination, marginalization, and a lack of resources and support that lead to trans youths’ risk and susceptibility to life threatening behaviors like suicide and drug and alcohol abuse. Following their work with LGB youth, Grossman and D’Augelli (2006) began research about transgender youth, investigating factors that affect the experiences of transgender youth. In “Transgender Youth: Invisible and Vulnerable,” they explore transgender youth’s experiences of vulnerability in the areas of health and mental health. The article begins by acknowledging the ways the gender binary in Western society makes the lives and experiences of trans youth invisible and notes that because these “individuals violate conventional gender expectations, they become targeted for discrimination and victimization” (p. 112). They argue that this position makes trans youth part of a marginalized and vulnerable population, that in-turn,

“experiences more psychosocial and health problems than other social groups” (Lombardi, 2001).

Grossman and D’Augelli draw on previous research to describe the sites in which trans youth experience vulnerability and discrimination, noting “prejudice and discrimination in school, employment opportunities, housing, and access to health care” (p. 113). In the face of this discrimination, Grossman and D’Augelli argue that trans youth are at risk of a number of bad situations, all of which may lead to becoming at risk of contracting HIV or other sexually transmitted infections. What is left out of this story is that all youth, whether or not they are trans, may face discrimination, a lack of family support, and the risk of contracting HIV. Furthermore, although it may be true that trans youth are discriminated against and victimized, beginning from this premise sets up a limited framework for understanding the lives of trans youth and the stories they can tell about their experiences. While it is important to recognize the challenges trans youth face, researchers need to leave room for different stories about how trans youth think about their gender and how they experience their gender as they move through the world. The stories we tell limit the stories we *can* tell and as researchers we need to consider the stories we tell to trans youth and the stories we tell about trans youth (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004; Hemmings, 2011). The unique context and complexity of the experiences of each trans youth is lost in the push to frame all trans youth as at risk, marginalized and vulnerable.

In another article, Grossman, D’Augelli, and Salter (2006) discuss the gender identity and expression of thirty-one male-to-female transgender youth. In a section of the paper titled “Becoming Transgender,” the authors describe adolescence as a time when all youth, including trans youth, negotiate a sexual and gender identity. I draw attention to

this section to consider what it might mean to become transgender. Is there a unique process for becoming transgender and what does that look like? How might the ways one becomes an adult relate to the process of becoming transgender? The word ‘become’ signifies development or growth, indicating a temporality associated with being transgender. If becoming transgender is part of a linear development narrative, what must come before one is transgender and what happens after? How does one know they are trans and what might this tell us about what it means to be a trans person? Grossman, D’Augelli, and Salter (2006) reference a 1995 study conducted by Lewins, in which he explored the retrospective narratives of trans adults and their family members. Lewins finds four themes with in these accounts:

- (1) A long history of tension between the person’s birth sex and his or her preferred gender;
- (2) an awareness and experience of being different as a child (i.e., feeling like an outsider) accompanied by bullying and teasing at school;
- (3) an internal struggle to reconcile the conflict between psychosexual identity and birth sex;
- and (4) the need for continued coping with the negative social responses to the disclosure of these feelings. (pp. 74-75)

These themes offer a story about how one becomes a trans adult and the construction of the trans subject.⁶

As noted in both of Grossman and D’Augelli’s studies and in many others (D’Augelli et al., 2002; Pleak, 2009; Ryan, 2003), family acceptance plays an important role in the mental health and well-being of trans youth. The Family Acceptance Project, led by Caitlin Ryan, considers the strength of families as support systems for LGBT youth

⁶ Savin-Williams (1998) has identified developmental milestones of GLB youth, however there are no comparable studies of trans youth.

and the possible developmental benefits of family acceptance, arguing for the importance of understanding and embracing gender variance among children (Ryan, 2003). By insisting on the important role of the family in the mental health and well-being of LGBT youth, Ryan explores the complex ways LGBT youth negotiate their gender in relation to their family.

Branching out of Grossman and D'Augelli's research, there has been a focus on the experiences of trans youth in school (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Sausa, 2005). Children's gender-variant behavior often first arises as a problem when they enter school (Pleak, 2009). In response to LGBT bullying at schools and the suicide prevalence among trans youth, there has been a push to document the campus climate for LGBT students through surveys. In a national study of high school age LGBT experiences, 65 percent of trans youth reported feeling unsafe, 87 percent had been verbally harassed or threatened, and 53 percent had been physically harassed in school due to their gender expression (Greytak et al., 2007). In a national study of the campus climate for LGBT students, faculty, and staff, Rankin (2003) reported that nearly three-fourths of the respondents believed that transgender people were more likely than other population groups to be harassed at their colleges and universities. Although these studies offer an important survey of students from various backgrounds and locations across the United States, individual experiences and contextual analysis are lost in these large quantitative studies.

Lydia Sausa (2003) began working with trans youth in a doctoral program at University of Pennsylvania, exploring the HIV prevention and educational needs of trans youth. Building on his previous work with trans youth, Sausa used focus groups to explore the school experiences of 24 trans youth in Philadelphia and presented his

recommendations for school administrators and educators (Sausa, 2005). Sausa argues that to effectively provide a safe learning environment for all students, it is imperative that the voices and experiences of trans youth are heard by education professionals and reflected in their policies and practices.

Despite the proliferation of research, investigations of LGBT youth still remain largely oriented toward studying deficits such as the role of victimization on mental and physical health, academic achievement, and identity development (Espelage & Swearer, 2008). In recent years, researchers have begun to critique research paradigms that characterize LGBT youth as “at-risk” and suggest that these paradigms contribute to a social context that views these youth as deficient (Russell, 2005; Savin-Williams, 2005). In response to the numerous studies on trans youths’ victimization and mental health issues, some studies have looked at the resilience of trans youth and the ways they navigate challenges. Research exploring the resilience of trans youth is often framed within “at risk” discourses and approaches trans youth as already resilient, to question how youth respond to challenging experiences.

In a qualitative study exploring the resilience of 13 transgender youth of color in the southeastern region of the U.S, Singh (2012) explores how transgender youth of color negotiate trans and race-based discrimination and oppression. In semi-structured interviews, trans youth discuss how their identities and self-definitions of gender, race and ethnicity are an important part of their resilience. These youth also spoke of being advocates for themselves among adults and in the educational system. In the face of discrimination and oppression, stories of resilience offer hope and suggest that trans youth, despite being at risk of mental health issues, can overcome challenges and advocate for

themselves. These stories of resilience bump up against the ways trans youth are often characterized and offer them a chance to tell a different story. Although Singh's research offers a unique perspective on how to better work with trans youth of color from a strength based approach, the trans youth who participated in this project had to identify as resilient which also limited the kinds of stories possible. Research like Singh's, which explores the resilience of trans youth, is critiqued for characterizing sexual minority youth as a monolithic or homogeneous group. Furthermore, this research often fails to examine the ways in which the social contexts that shape the lives of LGBT youth influence the persistent inequalities in health, risk behavior, mental health, and long-term psychosocial adjustment of LGBT youth and adults.

Emphasizing the social context. A new direction within research about trans youth attempts to think differently about trans youth, to consider them not as either at-risk or resilient, but rather, focuses on understanding the ways in which trans youth negotiate their development within various social contexts and the ways that individual characteristics influence how they engage with and experience their social world. This new paradigm in trans youth literature recognizes the importance of continuing to examine the risks and challenges faced by trans youth in addition to the ways these youth are resilient and thriving. I include my research in this new paradigm that explores the complex ways young people construct an understanding of their identities and experiences, and the social contexts in which they are engaged, as well as the varied ways that context matters in the health and development of trans youth.

In his work with two trans adolescents, Rosario (2009) explores the fluid and complex ways trans youth describe their gender identities, gender expression, and

sexuality. Rosario is a child and adolescent psychiatrist at a social services organization and presents two case studies from his work. Rosario finds that the lives of these trans youth come in contrast to the “normative” trans narrative and offer a more complicated story of trans youths’ lives and experiences. Rosario explores the role of family in trans youths’ identity development and interprets the effects of their familial support as being more complicated than mere acceptance or rejection. Both of the trans youth discussed describe having difficult childhoods and had spent time in the foster care system.

Rosario’s study points to the complex ways trans youth are exploring their gender and the social contexts influencing their lives. This complexity is exposed in the changing ways trans youth want to be addressed, the various spaces and situations trans youth find themselves in everyday, and the desire trans youth have to belong and feel in relation to others. For the young trans people in the study, becoming intelligible to others and avoiding abuse, often meant changing their appearance, body and name. In this sense, trans youths’ gender identities and expressions are negotiated in multiple contexts and in relation to others, complicating the story that gender is felt internally, and is not a fixed a priori category. The stories of trans youth discussed in Rosario’s study point to the ways trans youth narrate and express tensions about the authenticity of their gender. For example, Starr, one of the trans youth Rosario discusses, describes her experience in the drag ball scene⁷ as a site in which the authentic presentation and expression of gender are

⁷ The drag ball scene, also known as ball culture, is explored in Jennie Livingston’s 1990 documentary, *Paris is Burning*. Within ball culture there are “houses” often made up of queer and trans youth (who are often homeless) and are led by a “mother” (an older transgender woman or queer man who has won a lot of competitions), that compete against other “houses.” Rosario describes the drag balls as places where youth can find support and explore expressions of race, gender, sexuality, and class through dance competitions and “walk” to “compete for ‘realness’ in a variety of categories, not only

judged by other trans people and she is awarded for the “realness” of her gender expression. The approval, respect, and power offered in these awards travels beyond the site of the ballroom and suggests to Starr that she is intelligible as a real woman, a marker of her mobility in public spaces and her desirability to heterosexual men. Starr’s narrative pushes against the typical story researchers tell about trans youth and Rosario’s analysis offers a more complex understanding of the everyday lives of trans youth.

In an edited collection of essays about queer youth cultures (including trans youth), Susan Driver (2008) and contributors explore and critique how queer youth are positioned in research and schools. Driver finds that queer youth cultures challenge researchers to “rethink the very status of gender, generation, sexuality, and culture, and they push us to become nuanced in the ways we read, watch, and listen to young people telling their own stories and envisioning their futures” (p. 1). Driver insists that research about queer youth “must work against totalizing concepts and generalizing depictions, eliciting the partial and layered ways in which queer differences becomes refracted through the dialogical movements of young people” (p. 2). Driver argues that research about trans youth fixates on their wounded status, silencing stories of ambivalence, pleasure and curiosity. Driver cites the work of Mary Lou Rasmussen (2006) to argue that the consistent framing of trans youth as in crisis and needing to be rescued, allows adults to act as the savior of the “at risk” youth. Victim narratives limit who is recognized as a trans youth and work to “desexualize and depoliticize youth once again, creating safe, sanitized images that conform with white middle-class standards of visibility and value” (p. 5). My research disrupts this framework and explores the ambivalent, desiring, relational, and emotional

female drag but also male drag—usually mimicking and subtly mocking white, upper-class styles (e.g., tennis club, suburban male, Wall Street banker)” (Rosario, 2009, p. 301).

dimensions of trans youth experiences. In this next section, I provide a discussion of the theoretical frameworks and themes that shape my dissertation.

Structure and Chapter Breakdown

In my project I insist that by listening to the stories trans youth tell about their naming process we can better understand the supports trans youth need and open up space for a more complex understanding of their lives and experiences. One of the ways trans youth dictate and express their sense of self is through their process of choosing a name. I explore names and the naming process for trans youth to consider the complex ways all youth negotiate desires to be intelligible, reevaluate their relationship to family, experience their changing body and construct narratives about the self.

Across the substantive chapters of this dissertation, I explore how the trans youth I interviewed chose new names and how their re-naming process spoke to their narrative constructions of the self. Throughout the interviews, young trans people kept returning to three themes: gender, development and family. Although every participant experienced these issues differently, it became clear that they shape how trans youth understand and negotiate their identities. Throughout my analysis I attend to the conflicts of identity and the challenges trans youth face in narrating who they are. Although I focus on the lives and experiences of trans youth, these issues are not necessarily unique to them. All youth experiment and explore their identity through the issues of gender, family and development. In this dissertation, I draw on trans studies, queer theory and post structural theories of subject formation to explore how trans youth conceptualize gender, development and family in their narratives of choosing a name.

Following this introduction, I discuss the framework and methods of my project, including some of the methodological and ethical considerations I encountered in the development and process of conducting this research. I begin with a description of the methodological frameworks that influenced my research design and methods, including a short description of each participant. Working with Judith Butler (2001/2005) and Avery Gordon (2008), I question how researchers might do justice to the personal narratives of research participants and I argue that researchers must consider the unique ways people negotiate social situations and strive to represent the complexity of daily life experiences. Next, I turn to tensions in language in trans studies and trans communities. For example, the category “transgender” has become an umbrella term to represent a variety of identities in the trans spectrum and yet many gender non-conforming people reject this identity label. Drawing on feminist methodologies and trans studies, I conclude by exploring the research practice of pseudonyms in a project about names and naming. This methods chapter provides an introduction to the project and it is from here that I jump into my three substantive chapters, structured by the themes outlined above: gender, development and family.

Gender is a site of conflict for trans youth. In their process of choosing a name, trans youth are met with the ways gender identity is dependent on others. Just like their new name, trans youth must rely on others to recognize and respect their gender identity. In this chapter, I work with narratives about naming to argue that gender is social, relational, and exists outside and within language. These three conceptualizations of gender, structure the foundational and recent debates in trans studies. I draw from trans studies, queer theory, and post structuralism to explore these tensions and bring these

theoretical conversations to the stories trans youth told me about their gender. Judith Butler influences many of the debates about gender in trans studies and I draw on her throughout this chapter to argue that gender is part of the process of becoming a subject and gender influences how the subject understands themselves. Butler famously offers the theory that gender is socially constructed and our gender becomes intelligible through repetition (Butler, 1990). In my analysis, I complicate Butler's analysis by also drawing on trans theorists who argue that gender is something that can be felt and comes from inside the body. At stake in these debates is the question of where gender comes from. Building on the notion that gender is social, I return to Butler and others to theorize gender as relational, since the gender recognition we offer to others influences the construction of gender. For Butler, this recognition is like a gift and relies on norms that structure legibility. Sara Ahmed (2006) presents a theory of relationality through her use of the concept of orientation; gender directs us toward some objects and away from others. In the last section of the chapter, I argue that gender exists inside and beyond language. Drawing on trans theorists, I explore the conflicts of narrating gender and the reliance trans youth have on language as a way to make sense of who they are. These three conceptualizations of gender provide a framework for thinking about the ways trans youth narrate their intelligibility and discuss their development and relationship to their family.

In the second substantive chapter, I explore how developmental narratives shape the ways trans youth make sense of their identities. Throughout their stories, trans youth resist, align, and complicate their narratives of growing up with the linear progress narratives that often structure how we think about the process of development. Many trans youth desire the intelligibility and social acceptance of telling a coherent linear story of

who they are and who they will become, and yet the complexity of their lives pulls them sideways. Drawing on Kathryn Bond Stockton's (2009) theory of growing sideways, I begin this chapter considering how theories of development shape how trans youth construct stories about their transitioning and trans identity. In the second section, I explore queer theories attention to temporality and draw on critiques of progress narratives to think about how LGBT histories effect how trans youth position themselves in narratives. Furthermore, queering temporality offers a way to explore the complexity of time and development in stories about trans youth to consider how the past, present and future are interrelated. For trans youth, narrating identity is influenced by how research, politics and literature describe what it is like to be a young trans person. In the final section, I draw on Avery Gordon's (2008) concept of haunting to analyze the co-presence of old names and birth names in trans youth narratives of development. For some trans youth, the existence of their birth name challenges their identity and complicates the stories they tell about who they are. Stories about development and time are often first told to young trans people by their family, influencing how trans youth conceptualize their role and relationship to their family.

In the last chapter, I focus on the issue of family and culture in the lives of trans youth. These concepts, family and culture, offer a way to think about origins and how the stories we are given from our families and culture shape how trans youth understand who they are. I begin this chapter, drawing on Adriana Cavarero's (2000) theory of the formation of the self and insist on the role of family in how trans youth narrate who they are and where they came from. Next, I turn to how research about trans youth has focused on the reactions family members have to learning about their child's trans identity and

how these reactions affect the mental health and well-being of trans youth. I argue that trans youth desire belonging and acceptance by their family; despite the ways their family rejects their trans identity. Lastly, I look to the ways culture and race influence how trans youth narrate their identity. Drawing on Aren Aizura (2006) critiques of narratives of transsexual citizenship and Andil Gosine's (2008) analysis of the impossible identities of queer youth, I explore how trans youth negotiate their cultural background in their naming process.

In the conclusion, I turn my discussion back to the field of education, which has struggled to welcome trans youth into schools and to attend to their complex lives. I consider how trans youth have been conceptualized in policy and what work needs to be done to support trans youth in schools. Theorizing names is essential to understanding how young people explore who they are, who they want to be, and how they want others to recognize them, creating space for a deep reconsideration about both identity formation for young trans people and the social and personal importance of names and naming.

Chapter 2

Methodological and Ethical Considerations in Research about Trans Youth

Research about trans youth is a new and growing field, shaped by a history of research about trans adults and young lesbian, gay and bisexual youth. As with many new fields and research about populations deemed at-risk and marginalized, there are many methodological and ethical considerations in research about trans youth. In the introduction to this dissertation I presented a literature review of current research about trans youth and positioned my project within a growing field that explores the daily lives of trans youth. This new paradigm restructures how researchers think about what it might mean to be a young trans person while recognizing the complexity of the social experience of being both young and trans. With trans youth coming out at younger ages, researchers, parents, and medical providers will face questions about the agency and rights that should be afforded to trans youth. For example, when should trans youth be allowed to begin taking hormones? And, how should we understand their ability to consent to taking hormones or getting surgeries? Although I do not attempt to answer any of these questions in this chapter, I am interested in how these ethical questions influence how we understand who trans youth are and how these concerns shape the ways trans youth narrate and negotiate their identities.

In this chapter I explore three methodological and ethical considerations I encountered in my research. First, I explore how the use of personal narratives and storytelling in research about trans youth influence how researchers learn about the lives of young trans people, and consider what it might mean to do justice to a narrative influenced by social norms and a desire to be intelligible. Because trans youth have a

history of being silenced or spoken for by adults in research (Regales, 2008), in the design of my project I was attentive to the ways I respected and represented my participants. To do justice to the narratives of my participants meant that I would present the stories trans youth told me and bring them to the literature about subject formation, trans studies and queer theory. In the second section, I analyze the language used to describe trans people and some of the common tensions within the trans community about inclusion and representation. I also discuss how the emergence of the field of trans studies has brought with it debates about the naming of the field and greater representation of trans voices. In the final section, I explore anonymity in research and question the practice of pseudonyms in a project about names. First, I begin with a discussion of my project and the methodological frameworks that influenced my research design and methods, and a short description of each participant.

My Project

The purpose of my study was to solicit rich, nuanced stories about naming from trans youth to get a sense of how trans identity is negotiated and shifts over time. I interviewed ten young trans people on two separate occasions, using an in-depth semi-structured life history framework. The first and second interviews typically took place a month apart. Interviewing participants twice allowed for a detailed investigation into the narrative practices and complexities trans youth face when choosing a name and offered participants a chance to tell multiple and contradicting stories about themselves (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000).

I recruited trans youth in Ontario, Canada through existing contacts in LGBT

centers and used snowball sampling to find more participants (Bertaux, 1981) (see Appendix A: Call for Participants). I began recruiting participants at community centers like the 519 Community Centre⁸ and trans youth groups like Super Trans Powers.⁹ I also used existing contacts in the Greater Toronto Area that work directly with trans youth in various contexts. In addition to speaking directly with youth, I handed out a small flyer describing my project and contact information (see Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer). I interviewed trans youth in private rooms at a large university, in public spaces in the GTA and two participants were interviewed through Skype. Interviews were between 1 to 2 hours and were audio recorded and then transcribed. I conducted interviews between March 2014 and December 2014. Each participant chose a pseudonym in the first interview or agreed to let me use their name in my data analysis and writing.

I began the first interview (see Appendix C: Interview Guide #1) by asking participants to tell me about their name. This open-ended question invited personal stories and encouraged participants to discuss their own associations and relationship to their naming process; I wanted to hear what was important to young trans people about their name and how they chose it. Following this first question, I asked participants to talk about the experience of choosing a name, the qualities they wanted in a new name, and the feelings they have about their name. In hopes of encouraging storytelling and acknowledging the way trans youth navigate different social spaces and communities, I

⁸ The 519 Community Centre is a community space in downtown Toronto addressing the needs of the local neighbourhood and the broader LGBT communities by providing resources, programming and services.

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Super-Trans-Powers/145175488918168?sk=info>. Super Trans Powers is a workshop series offered by Supporting Our Youth and ArtReach Toronto at the Sherbourne Health Centre, for trans, two spirit, genderqueer, gender variant and questioning youth (up to 29 yrs).

also asked participants about how they introduce themselves to others. I concluded the first interview by inquiring whether they wanted to use a pseudonym or their name in the project. I offered participants the choice of a pseudonym to give them more control over their representation in the project (boyd, 2009; Grinyer, 2002). If participants chose to use a pseudonym for the project, I utilized the activity of selecting a pseudonym as another opportunity for participants to tell me about their naming practice.

In the second interview (see Appendix D: Interview Guide #2), I began by inviting participants to tell me about an experience they had with their name since the first interview. Like the first interview, this question provided a similar framework of storytelling and because of the month gap between the first and second interview, participants often had new stories to tell about their name. A large part of the second interview focused on how trans youth narrate who they are to others. I explored this topic through questions about how participants told family, friends, and authority figures about their name and name changing process. These questions allowed participants to discuss their relationships with these figures in their lives which influenced the focus of each interview. I ended both the first and the second interview asking participants about what it was like to talk about their name and naming practice and if there was anything that surprised them or if there was anything they wanted to add. It was through the conversations I had with participants during the interview that I learned about their demographic information. In contrast to the direction of much of the research about trans people, I did not ask participants about their medical transition (including information about their medical provider or how they access medical services) unless it seemed relevant to the conversation we were having. This framework encouraged stories about

daily life experiences, rather than defining trans youth by their medical transitions.

Throughout the interviews I tried to focus on what was important to my participants name, naming practice, and how they narrate the self.

As with most researchers, it was important to me to gain the trust of my participants. I felt nervous to be asking people about their personal lives and the intimate details of how they chose their name. In an attempt to make the interviews more personal, I took a more unconventional route in my interview process. At the first interview I bought lunch for the participant. This often meant going to a restaurant of their choice and eating lunch together. A few of the first interviews took place in a private room in a university and in these situations I brought the participants lunch from a nearby restaurant of their choice. I found that unlike traditional interviews, sharing a meal offered pauses and side conversations that were important to building rapport. At times, conversation was in some ways more public and yet eating together allowed for a different kind of intimacy and relationship than what is possible in most interview spaces. Participants seemed to feel more comfortable because we were in a public space together. Sharing a meal in public provided the opportunity for me to see among many things, how others recognized participants, how participants wanted to be recognized and how participants negotiated public spaces. My experience of the interview process is part of the data I collected and analyzed, informing how I understand the lives of trans youth and how they move through the public sphere.

While conducting interviews, I engaged in a process of “listening otherwise,” practicing a strategy for listening with a commitment to receiving otherness and welcoming the unknown and unintelligible (Gilbert, 2006; Lipari, 2009; Spivak, 1988). I

followed the advice of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) who recommend that the narrative inquirer “be sensitive to the temporal shifts that take place in all sorts of ways at any point in time” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 91). Similarly, Sara Ahmed (2006) explores how time and space in trans narratives might be thought of differently, arguing that moments of (dis)orientation offer a productive way of thinking about how space is dependent on bodily inhabitation. In my research, I recognize that interviews must be understood within a particular context and time and are only a piece of a larger narrative that trans youth have about themselves. I resist linear ways of constructing and conducting an interview and encouraged my participants to determine the framing of their story about their naming process.

In-depth interviews invite participants to select details of their life and to reflect, bring order to, and develop a narrative about their lived experience and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 2006). Similarly, life history interviews provide greater context to explore how past and present experiences contribute to narratives and the ways they make meaning of their experiences (Atkinson, 1998). Life history research invites participants to “take chances” in their re-telling and renegotiation of the past, offering participants a different understanding, new memories, and the potential for a productive revisiting of a traumatic or unresolved past (Rosen, 1988, p. 74). Luisa Passerini (1979) suggests that oral testimony plays an important part in life history research because it has the potential to reveal not only an individual's reconstruction of his/her subjectivity but also a reconstruction of the social and ideological world in which those memories were formed (Norquay, 1990).

My research design is informed by feminist methodology in oral history that

argues for the importance of developing techniques to encourage women to “say the unsaid,” focusing on the meaning and affect in women’s daily experiences and perspectives (Anderson et al., 2004, p. 224; Smith, 1979). I bring this methodology to my work with trans people, recognizing the silence, erasure and lack of authority trans people often face in narrating their experiences and identities. In my interviews with trans youth I consider the historical constraints trans people have faced when telling stories about their gender (for example, as evidence of pathology) and I also consider the absence of trans people’s daily life experiences and perspectives in academia and medical-psychological discourses. My research is also informed by feminist methodologies that recognize the ways patriarchal narratives influence how women talk about their lives and identity. Patriarchal ideologies have a similar effect on trans narratives, influencing how trans people conceptualize and represent their lives. My project insists on the importance of examining the daily lives and experiences of trans people (Namaste, 2000; Smith, 1979).

The methodology I draw on in this project and my engagement with trans youth is shaped by my own situational use of my names, and provides me with a way to think about the relationships trans youth have to their multiple and shifting names. At times I feel both on the inside and the outside of the trans community, a reflection of the many tensions inherent in identity politics and communities, and the struggle to narrate one’s identity and be recognized by others. One of the ways I experience these conflicts is through my name and the various ways I am addressed by and intelligible to friends, teachers, lovers and strangers. The name Julia represents a more feminine and adult aspect of my identity, reflecting a gender and developmental narrative at work in the navigation of my names. Whereas in queer communities I use the name Jules, a nickname my mom

has endearingly called me since I was little. When I am addressed by the name Jules my gender feels more messy and ambivalent, and I get the sense that there is more room for the complexity of my gender. Simultaneously, I am reminded of my relationship to my family and their limited understanding of my gender. My names have offered me a way to think about the experiences of trans youth and the social and relational dynamics involved in choosing a name.

Drawing on my relationship to names and the trans community, in addition to the frameworks I have discussed, I consider how research about young trans people often involves storytelling and explore how researchers analyze narrative constructions of the self. I work with participant narratives to discuss tensions in research about young trans people, analyzing the relationship participants have to the category trans and addressing how participants negotiated their relationship to anonymity in the project. Before discussing the methodological and ethical tensions in research about trans youth, I describe the demographics of the participants in my project and provide a summary about each person.

Descriptions of Participants

I interviewed participants between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five¹⁰ in 2014, beginning in March 2014 and ending in December 2014. All participants were living in Canada at the time of the interviews. Four participants were twenty-five years old and the

¹⁰ This age range allowed to me capture some of the diverse relationships youth have to their sense of home and family. I use this age range to define youth because it is a time of transition, in between childhood and adulthood, when young people are gaining a sense of self and constructing narratives about themselves that both tie them to the family and separate them from their family.

other six participants were twenty years of age or younger, spread equally across the age range of twenty to fifteen years of age. Five participants were biracial or mixed race, two participants identified as Caucasian, one identified as Italian, one participant identified as Lebanese and one participant identified as Albanian. Five participants were assigned female at birth and five participants were assigned male at birth. Participants self-identified as falling along a spectrum of trans experiences, including two people who identified as genderqueer and one person who identified as agender. I did not ask specifically about participants class backgrounds, but many of the participants who were no longer living at home were students and/or were unemployed. Most of the participants had completed high school and were in the process or had already completed an undergraduate degree. All participants contacted me by email to express their interest in the project and to arrange interviews. For each of the ten participants I have provided a description that includes their age, racial identity, gender identity and their employment status.

Beryl. Beryl, a 25-year-old trans person, is half Chinese and half Irish. Beryl did not use the term genderqueer or trans woman to describe their identity and prefers the pronoun they but does not care if they are referred to by the pronoun she. They did their undergraduate degree in women and gender studies and are now in graduate school studying trans youth. Their hair is shoulder length—shaping their round face and glasses—and partially dyed pink. Both of the interviews I conducted with Beryl took place in a private room at a university campus. At the time of the first interview, they were being kicked out of their master's program and expressed great frustration with the constraints they faced in their program and the ableism within academia. They did not discuss their

living arrangements and were unemployed, but were volunteering at a local LGBT center. They spoke of crushes they had on genderqueer friends but were not dating anyone at the time of the interviews. They chose their name a year before I interviewed them and had been “deciding on what kind of name [they] could call [themselves] for quite a while but never stuck to anything or even said anything out loud because [they] wanted to get it right the first time.” They described themselves as having outgrown their birth name and said that choosing the “right” new name was an important part of their transitioning process.

Jürgen. Jürgen has dark brown hair, glasses, some facial hair and a stocky build. He is twenty-five years old and is from Albania. He is an undergraduate student but did not discuss what he was studying. Jürgen had only dated women and at the time of the second interview he had started dating a woman he had met through friends. He was unemployed and lived with his parents. Jürgen is bipolar, and was on Ontario Disability Support Program and a wait list for subsidized housing. He stopped taking testosterone at the end of 2013 because he felt disconnected from his masculine name and wondered if that meant he was not male. This confusion was further complicated by the way testosterone interacts with his manic episodes. He brought a passion and intensity to his storytelling and he was enthusiastic about sharing stories about himself, and became nostalgic in memories about his childhood and expressed sadness about missing the past. Both of the interviews I conducted with Jürgen took place in a private room at a university campus. When Jürgen first emailed me about his interest in the project, he worried that he did not meet the criteria to participate because he had “tried a few names” and was currently “between names” but had not chosen a name and signed off on his email using only his last name. He thought that by participating in the project he might be able to

“clarify a few things by talking about it.” When he arrived at the first interview I asked him if he was still without a name and he said, “I have progressed past that. My name is Jürgen.”

Vincent. Vincent has had his name for a lot longer than any of the other participants. He is twenty-five years old and changed his name when he was sixteen years old. He is Caucasian, wears glasses and has a round face with a dark brown beard that is groomed close to his face. He has a septum piercing, plugs in his ears and his left eyebrow is pierced. His hair is short on the sides and long on top and the tips of his hair are bright pink. He is taking testosterone and has had some body affirming surgeries. Vincent has completed an undergraduate degree and works as an LGBT program coordinator in Ontario, Canada. When he first came out, Vincent felt like his survival as a trans person depended on him changing “a lot of issues” and so he began doing activist work in order to “conquer that adversity.” When we spoke, he had just moved out of his parents’ house for the second time and was now living with his bunny and without roommates. Vincent has a boyfriend of two years and prior to this relationship he had been with a woman for a couple of years. I spoke with Vincent through Skype and the interviews were shorter and less intimate than many of my other interviews.

Chris. Chris has short brown hair and warm brown eyes. His face is round and soft, with full cheeks that show the signs of his young age. He has small plugs in his ears and his skin is olive brown. Chris is not on testosterone and has had no surgeries. Between the first and second interview he broke up with his boyfriend whom he had met at an LGBT family picnic when he identified as a lesbian. His family is British and he has a close relationship with his twin sister and his mom and told me about how when he turns

sixteen they are all going to get the same tattoo. Chris is a high school student and sometimes helps out his mom's business on the weekends. In his first email to me about his interest in the project, Chris described himself as "fifteen years old and a female-to-male transgender." He urged me to respond and included in his email that he has "a decent story to tell and plenty of sleepless nights put into figuring out who [he is]." Both interviews took place at a café and he came with his mom to the first interview. He first started using the name Chris when he began grade nine and had memorized this exact date. Chris faced a lot of bullying at the large public high school he first attended and now goes to a small public high school focused on addressing issues related to sexuality and gender.

Tye. Tye came to the first interview with a lot of excitement and positive energy. He wore glasses with square silver frames that looked a little big on his boyish face and had a small mustache and no side burns. His hair stood straight up on his head and as he spoke he combed his hand through it. He is half Trinidadian and half French Canadian and is eighteen years old. He technically lives with his dad, but said that he spends a lot of time with his mom and at his mom's house where his grandparents live half of the year. He is close with his mom and reflected on how growing up he was always "mommy and daddy's little girl." Tye legally changed his name in his last year of high school. He is unemployed and is getting an undergraduate degree in women and gender studies. At the time of the second interview he was starting to date a girl he met at school. Both interviews took place in a private room at the university he attends. Between the first and second interviews he had his first testosterone shot.

Siobhan. Siobhan is twenty years old and lives with her girlfriend of two years in a

small town. Her relationship with her girlfriend began when Siobhan identified and presented as a man. She is an undergraduate student in a university in Ontario and came out as trans during her first year of university. Both of the interviews were conducted in a café in the small town she lives in. She has glasses, olive skin and long brown hair that she wears down. Siobhan chose a feminine Irish pseudonym, although her birth name and chosen name are Italian. I choose to respect her chosen pseudonym despite the ways this name sometimes causes confusion in this dissertation. Her family is “very Italian” and she was born with an “old world Italian name” and wanted a name that would “match” the names of her family. She has two younger sisters and the youngest is the only one in the family who is supportive and addresses Siobhan by her new name. She seemed comfortable and confident in her body and yet mentioned that she still has “a lot of body issues.” At the end of the second interview Siobhan invited me over to her place “for a cider” and when I declined she asked to walk me to the bus station.

Zoe. Zoe is twenty years old and is half Chinese and half Caucasian. They have a lanky pale body and their long brown hair is parted and falls down past their shoulders. They are not wearing make-up and their nails are painted pink. Zoe has stubble on their face and sat with their legs crossed on the desk chair as we talked. Both of the interviews I conducted with Zoe took place in a private room at the university campus they attend. In the interviews, they seemed shy and soft-spoken. Zoe is unemployed and lives in a house with a few students who are cisgender men and do not know that Zoe identifies as genderqueer. They looked androgynous in their jeans, t-shirt and hoodie, however the absence of anything feminine in their clothing made them appear more masculine. Zoe identifies as genderqueer and prefers to be addressed by “gender neutral or female”

pronouns depending on “if [they are] not passing or if [they are] not even trying to” but explained that for a while they identified as a transwoman. Zoe described that they present as femme and have a personality that is more masculine. It has only been since Zoe started dating a genderqueer identified person that they thought more about their gender identity. Between the first and second interview Zoe broke up with the person they were dating. Zoe hugged me at the end of the second interview.

Fox. Fox is sixteen and lives in Quebec with their mom and older brother. They are part Japanese and part Québécois. The interviews were conducted through Skype but their video was not working for both of the interviews and so I never saw them. Throughout the interviews their brother or mom could be heard in the background and once or twice Fox’s mom clarified or offered information Fox could not remember. In their Skype photo Fox had purple hair and when I questioned them about the current color of their hair they said that they change their hair “on a very regular basis” and that they “love having blonde hair” because “it’s a very nice highlight to your face and your expression and all that.” Fox also likes to paint their nails and wear make up. Fox identifies as gender neutral or agender and prefers the pronoun they, but feels more comfortable with the pronoun he than she. Fox first changed their name with their parents when they first transitioned to identifying as a girl at seven years old. Later on, when they were fourteen or fifteen year old they decided they “wanted to be gender neutral” and so they changed their name again because their name had been too “feminine.” Fox has attended five different high schools and left most of them because of the bullying they were experiencing. They now attend a small public school with their older brother.

Alex. Alex is twenty-five years old and Lebanese. They identify as genderqueer

and use the pronouns they and them. They grew up in Alberta and moved with their mom and sister to Ontario in their last year of high school. Currently, they live with their queer identified partner of two years in an apartment in a large city. Alex has two degrees in English and had been doing communications related work, but was between jobs when we had the first interview. Alex had begun working at a new job when we met for the second interview and had been doing some volunteer work in social services. Both interviews took place in restaurants. They were shy at the beginning of the interviews but opened up toward the end of each interview. Alex and I shared a similar relationship to gender and the trans community and frequent the same community spaces. Alex is a friend of my housemate on Facebook and they found out about the project through a Facebook post about my project with a call for participants. They were the only participant to send me a friend request on Facebook.

Areana. Areana has long brown hair, a thin tall body and wears glasses. She is nineteen, Caucasian and prefers the pronouns she or vea [vay]. Areana wore a skirt to the first interview and had her head wrapped in a scarf that she would take off and then put back on throughout the interview. We met at a park on a hot day and ended up doing the interview while sitting on the cement floor of a community building. The second interview was conducted in a café. Areana struggles with mental health issues and this had an impact on the interviews. Her stories were choppy and disconnected and during the interviews she would often pause to collect her thoughts or hit her head with her hand. Areana is unemployed and struggling to find work. She lives in a queer friendly house with four other people and is the first stable living arrangements she has had since leaving her parents house when she dropped out of high school at seventeen years old. She described

how she “only really date[s] consistently queer identified femmes cis women and this very specific female assigned at birth soft butch gender queer because [she’s] hunting for people [she] view[s] as the optimum, optimal of [her] identity to validate [her] identities.” At the time of the interviews she was not dating anyone.

These descriptions offer a brief introduction of the ten participants involved in the project and provide an introductory narrative of the ways each of these young trans people lead unique and complex lives. In this next section, I explore how research about trans youth might do justice to their life stories and draw on Avery Gordon’s (2008) concept of “complex personhood” to argue that researchers must be careful not to flatten the discourse about trans youth into one of being at-risk, but that we should instead hold space for the ambivalence, messiness, and unknown of trans youth lives and experiences.

Doing Justice to Personal Narratives

In her book *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon (2008) begins with the simple and yet “perhaps the most important theoretical statement of our time,” which is that “life is complicated” (p. 3). Gordon argues that social analysis has been weakened by generalizations and that we have to take more seriously the idea that “life is complicated” (p. 3), reflecting trans theorist Namaste’s (2000) call for research and attention to the everyday lives of trans people. Trans youth are entitled to what Gordon calls “a complex personhood”: “complex personhood is about conferring the respect on others that comes from presuming that life and people’s lives are simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning” (p. 5). Gordon critiques the tendency in social science

research to equate persons with social markers and in research about trans youth this means not defining them only by their gender transition, youthfulness or high rates of discrimination and suicide ideation. Gordon demands that we notice, in our reading and research practices, the complicated relationship that individuals have both to the particularities of their lives and to the social categories we use to make sense of the world. Doing justice to a narrative involves recognizing the complexity of each individual life and the unique ways people navigate social situations.

Research about trans youth is often conducted through qualitative studies, using interviews and focus groups. Many of these studies trace the construction of trans identity development through questions about the age at which the participant knew they were trans, encouraging both the story that the trans subject has always been trans and depicting a linear narrative of their trans identity development. This research attempts to draw a connection between the gender variance of children and youth and their adult gender and sexual identities, influencing the ways trans people construct stories about their gender and identity development. These methods highlight the importance of personal narrative in trans youth literature and the interpretive role of the researcher. The stories and information research participants offer about themselves are influenced by the methodologies researchers use (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Furthermore, research methodologies inform the ways researchers attempt to represent and describe their research participants. Limited by our own imaginary, researchers and participants are met with their own preconceived notions about what it means to be a young trans person. These insights point to questions: How does it matter that research about trans youth is conducted through storytelling? What are trans youth able and unable to communicate

about their lives in qualitative research and what would it look like for researchers to explore the unspoken or silence in their narratives? These questions insist that the dynamic between the youth storyteller and the adult researcher is an important relation to consider in the ways research has constructed the trans youth subject.

Narrative inquiry theorists Clandinin and Connelly (1990) explore how narratives offer a way to understand experience and see experience as the starting point of inquiry: “The study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world” (p. 2). They recognize the co-constructed nature of data or “field texts” as “created, neither found nor discovered, by participants and researchers in order to represent aspects of field experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 92). My data analysis focuses on the ways we understand human experience through the use of language (Heron, 1981), acknowledging how language can be and has been used to pathologize and oppress trans people (Namaste, 2000; Prosser, 1998), to understand current and historical tensions in trans studies and trans communities (Davidson, 2007), and to speak the ways gender norms dictate how trans people think and speak about their gender (Butler, 2001).

Even as I focus on how trans youth use language to represent and construct experience, I heed Jackie Regales’s (2008) caution. She reminds researchers working with trans youth that trans youth worry they may be “misrepresented or ‘cut’ into smaller ‘pieces’ to prove an academic point, since forcible fragmentation and invisibility in mainstream society confronts and frustrates them” (p. 88). Ethical representations of participants must recognize the limitation of narratives, the storytelling role of the researcher and the struggle to describe *who* someone is. In her discussion of data analysis, sociologist Catherine Riessman (1993) argues that

Traditional approaches to qualitative analysis often fracture these texts in the service of interpretation and generalization by taking bits and pieces, snippets of a response edited out of context. They eliminate the sequential and structural features that characterize narrative accounts. (p. 3)

Narrative analysis works against the fragmentation Regales critiques, and “keep[s] a story ‘intact’ by theorizing from the case rather than from component (categories) across cases” (Riessman, 2008, p. 53). In doing justice to a narrative, the researcher must be curious about how participants make sense of their lives and the ways they impose structure on the events in their lives. Judith Butler (2001) highlights this tension in her discussion of the legal and psychiatric case of David Reimer (also known as the John/Joan case) to discuss the intelligibility of the human. Prior to Butler’s analysis, John Colapinto (1997) conducted interviews with David Reimer, his family and the medical providers throughout his life and wrote an article in *The Rolling Stone*, along with a book about the intricacies of this case. Colapinto provides a detailed history of David Reimer’s life and Dr. John Money’s background and career as a leading researcher about gender identity and intersex people. I work with Colapinto and Butler to consider what it might mean to represent the names and personal narratives of trans youth in research.

As an infant, David had a routine surgical operation to rectify phimosis¹¹ and had a major portion of his penis accidentally burned and severed. His parents were told that his penis would not be fully a functioning organ. One psychiatrist stated that he would be “incomplete” and “must live apart” (Colapinto, 1997). Out of fear and desperation, Reimer’s parents brought David and his twin brother to Dr. John Money at the Johns

¹¹ Phimosis is a condition in which “the prepuce cannot be retracted over the glans penis” and can prevent full retraction of a foreskin (McGregor et al., 2007).

Hopkins medical center where David had a sex-change operation performed on him. David was renamed Brenda and raised as a girl and his brother Brian was raised as a boy. Upon Money's request, David and Brian would visit Money's Gender Identity Institute to be questioned about their sexual psyches and behaviors, in an attempt to develop a theory about gender schemes and the relationship between sex and gender. These visits were often traumatic for both Brian and David, who were asked invasive questions and underwent numerous experiments by Money. Money had been waiting years for a case like the Reimers' so that he could prove his theory that babies are psychosexually neutral and that chromosomes and hormones do not determine one's gender or sexual behaviour. Through Colapinto's interviews with David's parents, we learn that his mother wrote to Money about David's childhood expressions of femininity and successful transition into girlhood, despite the fact that David was struggling in school and behaved socially and emotionally like a boy. David's mother felt pressure from Money to ensure that David became a girl and reported emphasizing David's femininity "so that the psychologist would know that she and Frank were doing everything they could to implement his plans" (Colapinto, 1997).

Money first published his research about the case in *Man Woman, Boy Girl*, co-authored with his colleague Dr. Anke Ehrhardt, and used the case to support his theories about the role of biology and the social in gender identity. This book was the first of numerous reports about the case and Money's research and theories about gender became widely known.¹² After years of resisting femininity, at the age of 14, David demanded that he did not want to be a girl and his father told him what had happened to him. Soon after,

¹² Mickey (Milton) Diamond and David's psychiatrist Keith Sigmundson, with the support of David, were the first to challenge and dispute Money's claims.

David began taking male hormone shots, had his breasts removed and a phallus was constructed for him. He went on to get a well paying factory job and married a woman and adopted her three children. Despite David's ability to construct a normative story of masculinity, he struggled with depression and trauma from his childhood. David's brother and parents also struggled to recover from the past and suffered from depression and drug abuse. In 2002, Brian died from a drug overdose and in 2004 David committed suicide.

In interviews with Colapinto and Diamond, David struggled to narrate his childhood and his emotional experience. It was a challenge for David to discuss his gender after years of being told he was a girl and receiving instruction on how to perform femininity. David's voice is absent from much of Colapinto and Diamond's work, except for David's later advocacy for intersex babies. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler (2001) takes up this case and argues that stories are shaped by the other and explores the ways social norms influence how people understand themselves and the stories people tell about themselves. In this text, Butler explores how one tells a story about their gender and knowledge about the self. She argues that the context of David Reimer's self-reporting must be considered: "the act of self-reporting and the act of self-observation take place in relation to a certain audience, with a certain audience as the imagined recipient, before a certain audience for whom a verbal and visual picture of selfhood is produced" (Butler, 2001, p. 629). Butler points to how David's desire to be intelligible influences how he narrates his gender to both himself and people like Money. Recognition from others may be important to a livable life and yet "the terms by which [one is] recognized make life unlivable" (Butler, 2004, p. 4). Social norms regulate human bodies, determining "who is human and who is not, which lives are livable, and which are

not” (Butler, 2004, p. 4). For David, this tension becomes animated in the stories he tells about his gender and the possibility of a livable life in the face of his intelligibility. Butler explores the limitations and the complexity of identity, to consider the ways David pushes against sexual and gender norms. Butler references social theories of recognition to argue that the formation of the subject is dependent on the Other and an ethical relation that influences how one tells a story of the self. Through Butler’s discussion of ethicality and recognition, she questions what it means to do justice to someone’s narrative.

I draw on these theoretical frameworks in my engagement with trans youths’ stories, recognizing the complexity of the construction of their personal narratives and the crucial work of researchers as interpreters and storytellers of trans youths’ lives. As a queer masculine-of-center researcher, I consider how the stories the trans youth in this study told me are influenced by how they recognize and engage with me and how I imagine them. For example, in a few of the interviews I conducted, participants asked me about my gender identity and relationship to the trans community. My response to these questions shaped the stories they told me and the relationship I had with each participant. Narrative analysis informs my understanding of interviews as co-created by the participant and researcher and influenced how I analyzed the interviews and my role in their narrative constructions of who they are (Riessman, 2008).

The purpose of narrative analysis is to “see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives” (Riessman, 1993, p. 2). Throughout my analysis I looked for how participants told stories about who they are because the way individuals construct past events and actions in their personal narratives is a way they claim identities and make meaning of experience in their

lives (p. 2). I began my data analysis by transcribing each audio-recorded interview and taking notes about topics that were discussed and what moments surprised or sparked my interest in each interview. It was important for my analysis of the data that I transcribe each interview personally because close attention to the audio files allowed for an analysis of interruptions, pauses, and other features of the interview that may not have come across in the transcribed text (p. 57). Through the practice of analytic induction (Katz, 1983), I read through the transcripts a second time while listening to the audio recording to look for more themes and to compare the themes I had found across the interviews. Working with these themes, I conducted a focused coding of the themes, gathering quotes based on the themes. In contrast to some narrative scholars, and in some ways more in line with grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), my data analysis involved looking at themes across the interviews and building theory through my interpretation of the data. Drawing on the literature about trans youth and theories about gender, family and development, I looked for tensions, similarities and questions that arose across the themes and interviews. Furthermore, I was attentive to the moments of both incoherence and coherence in their narratives and in participants' desire for recognition. I was interested in understanding and theorizing from the narratives of each participant and exploring themes throughout the interviews. In this next section I explore the role of names and labels in the trans community and consider how tensions in the trans community presented conflicts for how participants narrate their gender identity and their relationship to their birth name.

Names and Labels in the Trans Community

Participants self-identified along a spectrum of trans experiences. Recent

discussions in the field of trans studies argue for the use of the term trans as an all encompassing term to describe people who have a gender identity that does not align with the gender they were assigned at birth (Cromwell, 1999; Noble, 2006; Stryker, 2006). I use the term trans in this project in hopes of including the diverse ways trans people identify while acknowledging the trans movement and community is not without “ideological differences, internal contestations, and deep ambiguities about inclusion, exclusion, and the processes of creating social change” (Davidson, 2007, p. 78). Since the 1990s, the field of transgender studies and the term transgender have emerged as sites of political mobilization and intellectual movement (Feinberg, 1992). The term transgender was originally used in the 1970s “by people who resisted categorization as either transvestites or transsexuals, and who used the term to describe their own identity” (Stryker, 2006, note 2). Trans theorists and communities debate the use of various terms like transsexual, transgender, trans and trans* (see Namaste, 2000; Stryker, 2006; Valentine, 2007), reflecting a desire to represent and name the wide range of gendered bodies and experiences, while simultaneously defining gender identities and expressions in ways that can be exclusionary and limiting for some. Tensions about terminology in trans studies point to the complexity of and the stakes involved in naming the trans subject, and the importance of respecting and understanding the language trans people use to describe themselves.

Through the development of this project I have encountered a number of methodological and ethical issues to consider. For example, the use of identity labels, while useful for some, can also restrict and generalize experience in a way that limits one’s identity. In *Imagining Transgender*, David Valentine’s (2007) discusses the politics

of naming research subjects and the danger of enforcing absolute distinctions or identities, particularly when subjects do not abide by them. Valentine explores the ways categorizations are made and the effects these have in the world. In his fieldwork, Valentine attends a semi-monthly support group for transgender-identified people with HIV in Manhattan. At the group he meets Fiona, a male-bodied person who identifies as a woman and gay. Valentine brings attention to the category of transgender by pointing to the ways some people, like Fiona, who access services for transgender-identified people, do not always identify as transgender.

For many of the social service providers and activists who were [Valentine's] colleagues, however, Fiona's view of gendered and sexual identity was not merely an alternative categorization but a false one. In their view, Fiona was using an outmoded view of gendered and sexual identity which conflates or confuses her transgender identity with homosexual desire. This is a result, they argue, of class, racial, or cultural inequalities which have left Fiona and her peers outside the conversations and historical developments which have made this distinction possible. (p. 4)

In his notes, Valentine describes his use of the term "transgender-identified" as a way for him to bring attention to the category of transgender and the ways we are often identified by others as belonging to a category, "even if it is not used by the people so identified" (notes). How does it matter that Fiona does not use the term transgender to describe herself? What stories are enabled by her self-definition as gay? Valentine's concern is that "people like Fiona- poor, black, disenfranchised- may be left out of an imagined future of justice and freedom frequently understood and enabled by this category" (p. 6). Valentine

points to the limits of the category transgender and how one's intelligibility as a trans person and identification with the category complicates stories about what it means to be trans.

In his study on trans youth, Sousa (2005) finds that trans youth use a wide spectrum of terms to describe their gender identity including: "femme queen, butch, butch queen, trans, drag queen, drag king, freak, girl, boy, gender bender, androgynous, trannyboy, MTF, genderqueer, FTM, and a male with female qualities" (p. 18). This range of gender identities points to possible identities included in the term trans and the ways trans youth have "constructed a language about their trans identities and experiences that is critical for educators to understand in order to provide effective outreach, education, and resources" (p. 18). Sousa recommends that researchers and educators pay attention to the diverse ways trans youth identify and how language is always changing and influenced by one's social context including factors such as age, culture, socioeconomic status, and location or region.¹³

In my interviews, some participants spoke about their relationship to the trans community and the complexity of their gender identity in various contexts. For example, Alex worries about the assumptions people make about them because of their name and gender presentation and feel like their gender is always in question. Like many people who identify as genderqueer, Alex is uncertain about whether they fit into the category trans and their ambivalence points to the development of the category and the complex history

¹³ Sousa (2005) uses the example of "femme queen" and "genderqueer" to describe how race, age and location influence the language youth use to describe themselves, noting how "femme queen" and "butch queen" are terms most often used among African American youth in Philadelphia, while terms such as "genderqueer" and "gender bender" may be more common among local White adolescents.

of the term:

Sometimes people will call me trans because I'm genderqueer and I just go with it, but it doesn't really, like it's not, like I wouldn't introduce myself as trans. I mean I also wouldn't introduce myself as genderqueer. But like you know, if someone asked me what I am, I wouldn't say I'm trans because to me, I mean I don't know, maybe I have the wrong definition of trans or something but like you know, I have no issues with my body. My real problem is how society views my body. I like my body, well enough. I don't want to change it and I know not all trans people want to change their body or anything but I don't feel like the same as them. It's really just how people read my body and the assumptions they impose on them because of that and that's not something within me.

Alex does not contest being called trans and his passive behavior of going “with it” is followed by a hesitation and struggle to find words to describe their relationship to the category. Alex recognizes how their body and gender identity lead people to assume that they identify as trans, and yet for Alex those same markers exclude them from the category trans. Alex describes the tension between how one identifies and how one presents: “I feel like some people will accept you based on how you identify, how you personally identify and other people will accept you on the basis of how you present.” Embodiment is described as something within the self and Alex finds that the desire to change their body is “not something within [them].” Rather than challenge their exclusion from the category, Alex navigates trans spaces as someone with the privilege of entering or exiting the category of trans. The construction of the term trans is defined by the way people like Alex narrate their body.

As a genderqueer person living in a large city in Canada, Alex feels like they do not want to be a part of the trans community and “don’t feel the need to be a part of it.”

Their relationship to the trans community is complicated:

Like I’m not, you know like I want to march in the trans march for example, but I don’t necessarily want to...like if there was an event that was for like trans people, like it was a space that was for trans people I, I wouldn’t necessarily decide not to go on that basis but I definitely spend a lot of time thinking about it and then I would ask, you know the organizers if it’s a space where I would be welcome, because I feel like it wouldn’t necessarily be my space.

For Alex, the trans march¹⁴ is able to hold a space for their gender identity and presents an opportunity for them to feel part of a trans community even if they do not identify as trans. The discomfort Alex feels at the trans march might reflect their sense of exclusion from the category trans. They want to respect trans spaces and recognize that not all trans events are inclusive of genderqueer people. Similar to Valentine (2007) and Sousa’s (2005) research findings, Alex might belong to the trans community in a complicated way and is also pushing against the limits of the category.

Beryl also prefers the pronoun they but does not care if they “hear female pronouns” or is “referred to as she” and adds, “but I will politically align myself with transwomen.” For Beryl, identities are political, complex and can change in order to recognize or support other gender minorities. In our interview, I ask Beryl if their name reflects their gender pronoun and identity. They respond:

Not particularly. It’s more of a survival tactic for me. I’m okay as long as it’s not a

¹⁴ The trans march is part of the annual pride events and is a march to celebrate trans lives and advocate for trans issues.

male pronoun or male name. Like if I'm referred to as she and by, as Beryl, I'm fine with that. I'm not going to react negatively. I don't go into like dysphoria of, from having she pronouns being thrown in my direction. There are some people in the queer community who refer to me as she because they like it better and I'm okay with that. Namely some of the more politically driven transwomen.

Beryl describes how their feminine name and gender-neutral pronoun are both political and protect them from potential violence or discrimination. On the surface, their desire for a feminine name does not align with their preference that people address them using the pronoun they and yet Beryl's identity is most reflected in this tension. They struggle with the need and wish to be intelligible as feminine to some transwomen and the larger public, while simultaneously expressing their gender ambivalence. Trans youth like Beryl also expressed similar tensions in their negotiation of telling me their birth name and the ways the trans community relates to birth names.¹⁵

Within the category trans there are hierarchies that shape the construction of the category itself. Many of the trans feminine people I spoke with, including Siobhan, Areana and Beryl, described how trans women create these hierarchies. For Areana, these hierarchies are based on how well someone passes as a woman:

I think among trans women in particular, not that I can speak for everyone, but you know, we do sort of construct these hierarchies of like you've had this many years on this, you've gotten these surgeries, and you look this way. And thus you're sort

¹⁵ Beryl did not want to tell me their birth name and in my interview with Beryl I asked them what it was like for them to not tell me their birth name. They said I "passed [their] personal ethics approval" and in a strange command told me that I'm "not going to go abusing this research" or "find ways to destroy [their] names."

of here, and I'm sort of here. And either I resent you because you're making me look bad because you're below me and perpetuating the idea that trans women look terrible, or you're above me and like fuck you, how'd you get up there? And I mean again, this is part of society, but I feel like among trans women we are particular like, the pressure for women to be like that and the specific extreme pressure on trans women to look and sound and feel this particular way and if you don't you sort of failed in your, insert slurs here.

Areana addresses the role of the body in trans lives and communities, recognizing the great differences in how trans women respond to taking estrogen and how surgeries effect trans embodiment. For Areana, the bodies and gender expression of trans women are always in relation to each other and the trans community manages how trans women portray their body and gender. The tensions within the trans community addressed by Areana point to the different way theorists conceptualize the body and how trans people navigate institutions and social contexts.

In many trans communities it is taboo to discuss birth names and many of the participants I spoke with were hesitant to tell me their birth name. I was surprised that all ten participants either explicitly told me their birth name or gave me enough clues for me to figure it out on my own. In my interviews, I found that some participants both wanted me to know their birth name but did not want to tell me explicitly. Five participants I spoke with did not want to say or have me say their old name out loud. Only one of the trans women or participants on the feminine spectrum verbalized their name to me and most of them either gave me hints about what their birth name is or had me read it off a piece of identification. In contrast, Chris and Tye who both identify as transmen, told me

their birth name early in the first interview. These differences may reflect the similarities in gender expression that transmen and I share and may also be indicative of the fear and experiences of harassment and violence transwomen spoke about in their decision about whether to disclose to me their birth name. Although I have not read any research on the different experiences of violence between trans men and trans women, the narratives I heard from trans women suggest that they face a much greater level of violence and harassment because of their trans identity and the ways the performance of femininity is much more critiqued than masculinity. Trans women's expressions of femininity were highly policed both before and after they chose a new name or began transitioning, whereas the trans men I spoke with had very few stories about violence and harassment. The trans women I spoke with also experienced more resistance about their name change from family and friends. These tensions point the power of names and identities in and outside of the trans community. I bring these conflicts in naming to the next section of this chapter where I explore the concept of pseudonyms and the role of names in research.

Pseudonyms

One of the most interesting methodological and ethical dilemmas I have encountered in working on this research project is one of names and anonymity. Researchers argue that maintaining the confidentiality of research participants is an essential component of ethical research (Bresler, 1995; Ebbs, 1996), and that confidentiality is especially important when working with vulnerable participants (Coyne,

1998; Ebbs, 1996).¹⁶ Ethic review boards were created to monitor, protect, and offer guidelines for participants and researchers.¹⁷ Researchers often work to remove all identifying information about research participants in their data analysis, including the names of cities or demographic information; yet, these are all important parts to the stories offered by each participant. I had initially assumed that like most qualitative research projects working with human subjects, I would choose pseudonyms for my research participants. However, as my project is about names, I became fascinated by how not using participants' chosen names might matter to my research. What is at stake in not using participants' actual names in a project about names? How might my participants' names matter to their stories about choosing a name? In order to consider these questions, I begin with a conceptual exploration of pseudonyms and its limits and possibilities. I discuss the importance of names in research and argue that research practices, like using pseudonyms, must account for the complicated representation of the narratives and identities of research participants. I do not attempt to resolve the tensions that circulate in my discussion of pseudonyms, but think with the concept of pseudonyms and what this might offer to how researchers theorize an ethics of representation.

Efforts to offer anonymity to participants often include removing all their

¹⁶ Beaz (2002) offers an analysis of literature about confidentiality and finds that “it is overwhelmingly framed as an ethical issue, and it is deemed a personal right of privacy and of freedom from harm” (p. 41). He organizes this research into four categories: “(1) those concerns relating to protection from ‘harm’; (2) those concerns relating to ‘privacy’; (3) those concerns relating to ensuring the ‘accuracy or integrity of the research’; and (4) those concerns relating to ‘ethical standards’” (p. 41). These themes point to the ways a history of unethical research has influenced the need to protect human participants in research and what this protection might look like.

¹⁷ In Canada, the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, instituted in 2000, shifted the ways researchers consider anonymity and privacy, from one concerned with ethics, to one with legal implications. This Act was largely put in place to protect the personal data of individuals generated through online services and activity.

identifying information from the research report, including the name of research participants.¹⁸ The *OED* defines the term anonymous as one who is “nameless, having no name; of unknown name.” In a project about names, rendering someone nameless raises questions: What is at stake in the way a researcher *names* their participants? How do names represent the stories and identity of participants? What is at stake in using someone’s real name compared to using a pseudonym? What work do we ask of names? Research practices like anonymity have become a compulsory ethical practice that is rarely questioned and yet this practice raises questions about “representational practice—what it allows, what it hinders” (Nespor, 2002, p. 564). Researchers find themselves caught in the “conflict between conveying detailed, accurate accounts of the social world and protecting the identities of the individuals who participated in their research” (Kaiser, 2009, p. 1632). This tension points to the challenge researchers face in offering either too much or too little information about their participants’ lives.

In various contexts and communities, using pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants and other demographic information is not enough to maintain anonymity. In the 1980s, Carolyn Ellis (1986) conducted an ethnography of a small fishing village and even though she used pseudonyms for the name of the village and those individuals discussed in her research, the participants easily identified themselves. This case became a famous example of deductive disclosure and demonstrates the limitations of pseudonyms in research and the challenges involved in working with small communities in which participants may easily identify themselves. In a study about the experiences of minority

¹⁸ The Tri-Council Policy statement on the Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans offers ways for researchers “to determine whether the information or data proposed in research may reasonably be expected to identify an individual.” The name of participants is an example of direct identifying information.

faculty at a historically and predominantly white research university in the northeastern part of the United States, Baez (2002) writes about his fear that pseudonyms will not protect the identity of his participants. He argues that the narratives he collected from minority faculty could possibly reveal the identity of the research participant and put their career at stake. This dilemma points to the struggle to maintain the confidentiality of participants within small groups or communities where individuals are more easily identifiable and challenges the usefulness of anonymizing data because doing so might not be *enough*. My participants are also part of a small community of young trans people and often frequent the same services and community spaces because of the limited resources available to them. However, as far as I am aware, none of my participants in the project knew of each other.

Debates about using anonymizing practices like pseudonyms point to the ways they remove important contextual information for understanding and exploring participant narratives, render participants invisible and assume that participants need protection. Pseudonyms are often either selected by the participant or the researchers conducting the study. One of the methods researchers use to find a pseudonym similar to that of their participant, is to look at databases of common baby names in the year their participant was born. This practice assumes that a participant can be represented by what was considered the norm during that year. Some researchers insist that pseudonyms should not be considered equivalent to a participant's real name because of the way names reflect one's relationship to a specific social class, gender, age and cultural background (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). Other researchers argue that offering participants anonymity demonstrates a regard for participants as "professional colleagues who deserve as much

recognition as the traditional scholar" (Shulman, 1990, p. 29). Some researchers offer participants the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym, however Corden and Sainsbury (2006) caution that participants sometimes choose the names of real people and Grinyer (2002) notes the challenges and confusion that arise when a participant chooses the same pseudonym as another participant. Pseudonyms are used to anonymize participants but often distract from participant stories or fail to represent participants.

In a review of literature about the ethics of research practices, Tilley and Woodthorpe (2011) note a recent trend among research participants to be identified rather than anonymized. Grinyer (2002) also remarks that there is a particular trend to be identified among young people and children involved in research about their marginalized status. In his research with young trans people, Valentine (2000) used some pseudonyms to represent the research participants and also retained the real names of participants who agreed to let him use them. In 2009, danah boyd [sic] wrote about her research with youth, finding that youth are asking for their real name to be used in all research data, analysis and publications. This desire to be identified is often political because it challenges the conceptualization of youth as vulnerable, innocent, and at-risk. Debates about the ethics of choosing a pseudonym for participants point to the important meaning and use of names in research.

Drawing on this literature, I decided to give participants the choice of having me use a pseudonym of their choice or their real name to refer to them in my analysis. The opportunity to choose their pseudonym presented participants with a dilemma of representation. For example, Jürgen did not care if I used a pseudonym to refer to him and gave me the task of choosing a pseudonym because he was “not feeling too creative

particularly at the moment” but then suggested I “pick a common name like John or something.” Jürgen was okay with me using his name “because it’s not likely it’ll get traced to me, because you’re not going to use the last name anyway. And if it does get traced to me I don’t care.” Jürgen’s narrative is complicated: he does not care if I use a pseudonym to refer to him and yet he also states that he does not want to chose one because he is not feeling creative, only to then offer a potential pseudonym. His response is far from the political assertions boyd (2009) finds in her research; rather, Jürgen’s ambivalence might be read as a denial or disavowal of his participation in the project. He wants to remain anonymous but also does not care if his identity is disclosed, suggesting that there is something left unsaid in his narrative. Jürgen may feel a loss of control about whether others are able to identify him in the project or he may be expressing his uncertainty about his relationship to his chosen name. Jürgen had only recently chosen his name and these questions of representation may push against his desire to be known by his new name. Jürgen’s narrative demonstrates the ambivalent and complex relationship he has to representation and may also point to his relationship to research.

Similar to Jürgen, Alex expressed how they “just don’t necessarily want to be recognized by people in the community.” In another complicated wish for anonymity, Zoe was okay with me using their real name because their family does not know their chosen name and “if they did see it by any chance it won’t matter.” These responses were common among participants and reference the tension many of them addressed: participants were okay with me using their real name but also wanted to remain anonymous in certain communities, like with family and peers. In contrast, Tye wanted me to use his real name because he likes his name and is “proud of it.” Reflective of boyd

(2009) and Grinyer's (2002) findings with youth, Tye's narrative demonstrates how some youth express a feeling of empowerment by using their name in research. For many of the trans youth I spoke with, their involvement in my project was their first time as a research participant. When asked about whether they wanted me to use a pseudonym or their name, participants often struggled to decide how they wanted to be represented in research.

Many of the participants who chose to use their name have family support and did not express a fear of violence from being identified. My engagement with these participants' responses demonstrates the range of relationships trans youth have to being anonymous in research and their complicated desire for representation.

Conclusion

The ethical and methodological issues involved in research about trans youth offers a way to explore tensions in qualitative research and raises important theoretical and ethical questions that can be useful to all research with human subjects. In this chapter I questioned what it means to represent the lives and experiences of research participants and the ethical concerns involved in working with personal narratives. I also addressed the ways communities shape and influence the stories participants tell about themselves and how they negotiate recognition in research and in their communities. Literature about specific groups of people influences how researchers and participants discuss those identities. Researchers are tasked with creating space for the complex ways people negotiate their lives and identities and should reflect on their own relationship to their participants and research topic.

When I began this project, I was hesitant to interview trans youth because of their

status as a marginalized group and yet I found that my desire to conduct this research came from a wish to increase the number of stories trans youth can draw from in their narrative constructions of themselves. This dissertation contributes to a greater understanding of the experiences and stories we have about being a young trans person. The themes of gender, family and development shape the lives of trans youth and how they negotiate their identity. Throughout the interviews, participants consistently addressed these themes in their narratives of choosing a new name. Gender is the first theme I discuss and provides a framework for the two following chapters on developmental narratives and youths' relationship to their family.

Chapter Three

Conceptualizing Gender in Trans Youth Narratives

If someone decides to go to the women's bathroom and someone says, "oh you're not a woman at all." I would be like a house of cards, I would be like, "you're right." Part of developing a healthy sense of self is to have a coherent identity and not multi-vary. In my opinion, I'm sure many people like develop it in their own time but it seemed healthier, more whole. I didn't realize that until I chose a name.

-Siobhan

Gender is messy and hard to pin down, resisting claims that it is only influenced by biology or social norms. Gender may feel unique to each individual and yet our understanding of gender is shaped by and with others. Gender categories are shared with others and the public bathroom is one of the most common spaces people gather based on their gender. Trans and gender non-conforming people sometimes experience the public bathroom as a site of danger and potential violence (see Halberstam, 1998; Ingrey, 2012; Rasmussen, 2009).

Bathrooms offer a key site of conflict through which to consider gender. Trans and queer theorists often use the bathroom as a site to explore debates and politics about gender (see Cavanaugh, 2010, Halberstam, 2005). What is it about the bathroom that makes it such a provocative site to think about gender? I find it a helpful way to think about how gender is social, gender is relational and gender exists inside and beyond language. Siobhan was one of the trans youth I spoke with who referenced her experience of the bathroom as a way to characterize her negotiation of and relationship to gender. The fragility of gender is exposed in her discussion of a hypothetical experience in the bathroom, demonstrating the way gender is questioned, scrutinized and managed in public space. In her study of public bathrooms at schools, Ingrey (2012) draws on queer and trans

theory to explore the bathroom as “a site of unintelligibility” and argues that “by studying the bathroom as a problem, we see the mechanism of power that normalizes the binary structure of gender within this space” (p. 800). Unlike many other public spaces, the bathroom is explicitly gendered and calls on people to embody gender. The language of gender begins at the door of the bathroom; gendered symbols and/or the words “men” or “women” designate who is allowed into that space, however many individuals do not fit neatly into either of these gender categories. Is it the language of gender that fails these individuals? Or are these gendered spaces constructed and regulated in such a way that the complexity and diversity of gender is not recognized?

Once inside the washroom, gender is highly policed and monitored through social norms about gender. When individuals are thought to be in the wrong bathroom or are not recognized as a man or a woman, they push against definitions and expressions of gender (Cavanaugh, 2010). These challenges to social norms about gender expose the fluidity and stability of gender (Halberstam, 2005). Choosing which bathroom to use is a complicated decision for some individuals; influenced by both the internal and the social, people negotiate gendered spaces through how they understand their gender, how they imagine others interpret their gender, and how they want others to recognize them. There is a wish and a risk involved in entering a new bathroom; the wish is to be recognized and included in the gender category, whereas the risk is one of harassment and violence.

The example of the bathroom exposes the messiness of gender and offers a way to explore how gender is relational and social. In this chapter I draw on theories of gender and work with trans youth stories about gender to explore the question: what is gender? I discuss gender through three theoretical statements: gender is social, gender is relational,

and gender exists inside and beyond language. I bring these theoretical frameworks to my analysis of trans youth narratives to consider what we can learn about the concept of gender from the way young trans people tell stories about their gender. I begin with the notion that gender is social and work with Judith Butler.

Gender is Social

American post-structuralist philosopher Judith Butler has played a large role in the development of queer theory and continues to influence how trans theorists conceptualize gender. Working with phenomenology and feminist theory, Butler offers new ways to think about gender. Throughout Butler's numerous works, she explores the relationship between gender, the subject, and the ways one narrates their gender. For Butler, gender does not exist prior to subject formation, but is rather achieved in and through its repetition: gender is a part of becoming a subject and gender shapes the subject.

Butler's most influential and controversial book in the field of gender studies is *Gender Trouble* (1990). In *Gender Trouble*, Butler begins by addressing tensions in feminism and feminist theory about what constitutes the category of "woman." At stake in her analysis is the question of whether feminist politics can do without a "subject" in the category of women. Debates about the category of "woman" speak to the instability of the subject of women and offers new ways to think about subject formation and representation. Drawing on Foucault, Butler considers the production of subjects through juridical systems of power and argues that juridical notions of power regulate political life through "the limitation, prohibition, regulation, control and even 'protection' of individuals related to that political structure through the contingent and retractable

operation of choice” (p. 2). Subjects are relegated by political structures and “by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures” (p. 2). Gender, like the subject, is always in the process of becoming and does not have a beginning or an end (p. 33). For Butler “gender is 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” (p. 33). Butler considers the role of “agency” in the “subject” by questioning the existence of the subject and the subjects’ relationship to the cultural field.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990) and later in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997a), Butler theorizes gender and identity referencing the work of John Austin (1962) to argue that through performativity, categories of gender are brought into being. The category of women is socially constructed and yet has an agency despite its’ “cultural embeddedness” (Butler, 1990, p. 142). Butler troubles this relationship between the “subject” and “agency”, arguing that this agency is only possible through the intelligibility of the subject (p. 148). She argues that the subject can only know *who* they are through the constitutive forces (codes, laws, languages) used to render one intelligible. Thus, gender is constructed through the recitation and repetition of acts produced over time. Gender performance or the performance of gender describes when someone acts in a particular way and this acting is crucial to one’s gender identity and gender expression. For Butler, gender is neither innate nor a daily choice, but is greatly influenced by the social and the desire for recognition.

While Butler’s work is not well received in the trans community, it has been influential. Trans scholars like Kate Bronstein (1994), Jay Prosser (1998), Viviane

Namaste (2000), Jamison Green (2005) and Julia Serano (2007, 2013) have critiqued Butler's conceptualization of gender, arguing that she minimizes the everyday lived experiences of gender and the agency of trans people. Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) has been described as "the single text that yoked transgender most fully to queer theory" (Prosser, 1998, p. 24) and yet for trans theorists like Prosser, it is confounding how *Gender Trouble* became tied to trans subjects. Prosser devotes the first chapter of *Second Skins* to discussing Butler's influence on his book and to explore how Butler attends to the body in her use of the transsexual. He begins by discussing two readings of *Gender Trouble* that Butler has contested, but that have shaped how Butler is taken up in trans studies: "first, that what was meant by gender performativity was gender theatricality; and the second, that all transgender is queer is syllogistically subversive" (Prosser, 1998, p. 28). For Butler, gender performativity offers a way to think about how gender is produced through the expression of social norms associated with maleness and femaleness.

Some feminists and trans theorists have interpreted this to mean that gender is only a "performance" or that all gender is drag. Feminist theorists Janice Raymond (1979) and Shelia Jeffreys (2014) have used Butler's work to support their transphobic discourse about gender and the feminist policing of trans lives, stating that "all transsexuals rape women's bodies by reducing the real female form to an artefact" (Raymond, 1979, p.104). Butler's reference to drag suggests to some that gender is like drag; offering subjects the choice of taking off or putting on whatever clothes one wants to wear. Trans theorists take issue with Butler's belief that gender is not a fixed sense of self because they understand it as an attack on their own internal sense of gender. In contrast to critiques that Butler describes gender as voluntary, here trans theorists are accusing her of not acknowledging

the agency of the subject. Unlike many trans theorists, Butler rarely discusses her own gender and experiences in her analysis of gender. Butler's theories haunt the stories trans people are able to tell about their gender, and there seems to be a strange wish to find fault in her theories so that trans theorists are able to tell their own stories about gender. Trans theorists and trans communities may reject Butler's theories about gender because they are not based on qualitative research or the daily life experiences of trans people. Feminists and trans theorists' misreadings of Butler speak to the messiness of gender and the way theories about gender have the potential to impact the daily lives of trans people.

In *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (2000), Namaste takes issue with the way Butler describes the gay male drag scene, pointing to the importance of situating it in the larger social context and how it is regulated both on stage and in everyday life (pp. 20-21). Namaste also critiques Butler for using the bodies of transsexual and transgender women as "central objects of inquiry" (p. 11) to raise theoretical questions as to how we understand and reproduce gender.

Kate Bornstein is an influential theorist in trans studies and although she does not directly address Butler's work, her theorization of gender speaks to these debates. In *Gender Outlaw* (1994), Bornstein explores how one comes to understand their gender, defining gender identity and framing it as a natural feeling: "Gender identity answers the question, 'who am I?' Am I a man or a woman or a what? ... Gender identity is assumed by many to be 'natural'; that is someone can feel 'like a man,' or 'like a woman'" (p. 24). Bornstein conceptualizes gender identity in a way that allows trans people to determine their own gender identity. Similarly, trans theorist Jason Cromwell (1999) insists on gender as natural, explaining how "transpeople... are not like other people. Rather than

allowing society to dictate who and what they are, they define themselves” (p. 43). Here gender identity is described as a choice, suggesting that the authenticity of gender identity cannot be questioned because it is self-determined and “natural.” In *Becoming a Visible Man* and in a chapter entitled “The Art and Nature of Gender,” Jamison Green (2001) also highlights the innate qualities of gender in his theory of gender, arguing that social construction renders the agency of transgendered people invisible: “I believe gender belongs to each individual, to do with as he or she pleases: it is not possible for an ‘objective’ observer to paste gender on another person” (p. 60). Green argues that by insisting on the social construction of trans identities and gender variance “we categorically deny both transindividuals and non-transindividuals agency in experiencing or freely expressing their own genders” (Green, 2005, p. 295).

Disagreeing with both social constructivists and gender essentialists, Julia Serano argues that manifestations of gender and sexuality are composed of an unconscious self-understanding of our gender or sexuality in addition to the conscious ways one makes sense of that unconscious self-understanding. In *Whipping Girl* (2007), Serano offers her concept of intrinsic inclination, locating it in the subconscious as “any persistent desire, affinity, or urge that predisposes us toward particular gender and sexual expressions and experiences” (p. 98). She builds on her theory of intrinsic inclination in her most recent book *Excluded* (2013), arguing for a “holistic” understanding of gender and sexuality that accounts for “difference rather than focusing narrowly on sameness” (p. 152) and for biological variation and the way each individual is uniquely socially situated. She describes gender as “an amalgamation of bodies, identities and life experiences, of subconscious urges, sensations and behaviors, some of which develop organically, and

others which are shaped by language and culture” (p. 107). For Serano, gender is socially exaggerated, not culturally created, and argues that people “experience natural inclinations or predispositions toward certain gendered and sexual behaviors” and

arise in a culture where gender and sexuality are heavily policed, where they are defined according to heterosexist, cis-sexist, transphobic, and misogynistic assumptions, where they intersect with racism, classism, ableism, ageism, and other forms of oppression. (p. 65)

Serano includes the social in her conceptualization of gender but worries that “gender artifactualist theories” suggest that one can and should change their gender and sexuality to conform to societal norms (p. 117). Serano’s insistence that theories of gender must account for the “natural” feeling or biological component of gender reflects much of what Prosser (1998), Green (2001), Bornstein (1994) and Cromwell (1999) have argued.

In *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (2010), Gayle Salamon discusses the objections trans writers have made about social construction and that for some trans scholars this demands a return to “real” gender. Salamon explores these theories of gender and yet insists on the social construction of gender:

What social construction offers is a way to understand *how* that felt sense arises, in all its historical and cultural variations, with all its urgency and immediacy, and to ask what it is, finally, that is delivered by that felt sense. This tension between the historicity of the body and the immediacy of its felt sense is the precise location of bodily being, and mapping this tension is the work of transgender studies and theories of social construction alike. (p. 77)

Salamon argues that by focusing exclusively on the role of agency of the gendered subject

we ignore the matrix of power at work in the construction of gender. In these debates about gender, the embodiment of gender is set up against the social construction of gender.

Salamon builds on Butler and the critiques made of Butler's theory of gender performativity to incorporate the "feeling" of gender into her understanding of gender as social. Although gender may feel natural and like something that comes from within the body, Salamon reminds us of the complex power dynamics that influence how individuals experience their bodies. In this next section I turn to stories about gender from my participants to explore how they discuss the feeling of gender and the ways gender is constructed through repetition and norms.

Navigating Gender as a Real Feeling

Trans youth are able to narrate their experience of gender through their naming process. As Butler describes, gender is produced through the repetition of behaviors, and for trans youth, choosing a new name is one of the ways they perform and express their gender. However, not all trans youth feel safe representing their gender in the name they pick. Beryl spent a long time figuring out their name and described how out of fear of violence they strategically choose a more "traditionally feminine name":

As a trans person, especially a trans feminine spectrum person, I'm probably going to experience more violence than other people and if I'm going to be taken more seriously I kind of need to have a [feminine] name.

Unlike the trans men I interviewed, Beryl and many of the other trans feminine people I spoke with chose a feminine name out of fear that their authenticity and gender would be challenged, reflecting the importance of recognition and the role of gendered social norms.

Beryl's concern's are rightly founded: A US national report of bias-motivated violence against LGBT people found that "the majority of the victims of hate violence homicides (72%) in 2013 were transgender women" (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 2014). Similarly, an Ontario-based study of trans people found that 20 percent had experienced physical or sexual assault due to their identity, and that 34 percent were subjected to verbal threats or harassment (Bauer et al., 2010). Beryl's name announces their desire to be recognized as a woman and for Beryl, a "traditionally feminine name" offers them less trans visibility and more protection from transphobia, but does not reflect their gender identity. Beryl negotiates their gender through their gender neutral nickname: "I still like playing a little bit with gender neutrality even while I dress femininely and get treated as feminine most of the time in real life." Their story demonstrates how even though they may not feel like a woman, they have to perform femininity through their name in order to avoid discrimination. While it may be important for some trans people to define themselves, social norms and the policing of gender restrict how trans youth like Beryl use language to describe themselves.

Beryl first tried using their new name at a queer camp they went to because aside from the facilitators at the camp, they knew nobody would know who they are. They experienced a mix of feelings when they first starting using their new name at the camp:

It felt actually pretty good. I was actually terrified for part of it because I was like Ah! New name! I'm trying to deal with internalized trans misogyny right now. But it felt good because just hearing it repeated made it feel a little bit more real instead of like, "what am I doing, I'm such a fake." Which is a fairly common narrative.

Speaking for the experiences of trans women, Beryl explains the conflicting experience of

using a new name:

We're still battling internalized transphobia and cis-sexism and all these things because when it comes to trans people, often we still feel that our genders are not authentic and this is something from my own research and experiences. And so hearing our names, even though they are affirming our experiences at present, it may still sound a little bit weird to us because you can still hear that voice in the back of my head saying "oh you're still a boy and this name is unnatural."

Faced with uncertainty, social norms and the work of gender transitioning, Beryl doubts the story of their name and gender. The "realness" of their gender is challenged through their relationship to their new name, raising questions: When is gender real? What is natural or authentic about gender? At camp, Beryl felt recognized by their new name and the repetition of their name invited them into feeling more comfortable in their identity as a feminine person named Beryl: "It felt really fake initially but hearing it in a positive manner was a lot more affirming, which solidified this feels okay." For Beryl, their name, and possibly their gender, became more real through repetition and when others offered them recognition. Gender is conceptualized as both a natural feeling and something that one needs to work at in order for it to feel real. Butler helps us understand Beryl's reliance on others to affirm their gender and the role of repetition in their process of becoming a gendered subject. In some ways, Beryl reflects Serano's insistence that gender is an internal feeling, and yet Salamon's analysis of the feeling of gender offers a way to make sense of how Beryl's sense of their gender is constructed over time and through their engagement with others.

Parents and friends of trans people often speak about the struggle to address trans

people by their new name (Wahlig, 2015), yet we rarely hear trans people narrate their own struggle to address themselves with a new name. Siobhan remembers how “it took a long time for [her] to take on the name” because she felt like she “wasn’t really worthy of it.” When she chose her name she was a “beefy, five foot seven dude” and her “voice wasn’t really doing the part.” She felt like a “farce” and needed to “earn” her name. Reflecting on this process, Siobhan explains how she “didn’t really know how hard it was to internalize a name for one’s self” and found that repetition helped her form an attachment to her name: “You see it more places, you use it with more people. And suddenly you get an affinity, and you start to attach to that name.” Siobhan’s need for her body to feel connected to her name and her reliance on others to identify with her name demonstrates Butler’s argument that naming the self requires the other. Siobhan felt like her body and gender presentation conflicted with her new name and needed the help of others to feel secure and confident with her name.

The tension between the feeling of gender and the social construction of gender is exposed in how Siobhan feels like a woman but simultaneously believes that she does not look like a woman. Her name symbolizes this conflict and the process of having a gender identity and presenting her gender in accordance with gender norms. Her name becomes a story about herself told to Siobhan from others and internalized through the repetition of that story. This tension raises questions about the work of names: What story do names tell about the self? What is required of the other in the process of using a new name? Siobhan doubted the authenticity of her gender when she felt her body and voice did not align with normative conceptualizations of a woman. Although she did not think she looked like a woman or deserved to be called by the name Siobhan, she needed others to agree to use

her new name in order to identify with it.

Despite the challenges Siobhan and Beryl faced in their process of taking on a new name and having their gender identity recognized (both internally and externally), they both felt certain that they wanted others to recognize them as women. In contrast to their experience and feeling of gender, Jürgen expressed ambivalence about his gender and was not always sure he wanted to transition to become a man. Trans youth often feel pressure to assert their gender as stable, despite the messiness and fluidity of gender (Rosario, 2009). Trans youth, like all youth, are at a time when they are experimenting with their identity and yet society rarely grants them the space to change, explore and express ambivalence about their identities. At the beginning of the second interview, Jürgen told me in a confessional tone: “I sometimes waver on my decision” and “sometimes I’m not one hundred percent sure on my transitioning.” This is a vulnerable statement because it challenges the script that trans people know their gender and do not doubt how they identify and understand their gender. Jürgen narrates his gender as a choice he must make and the uncertainty of his gender is further complicated by his mental health:

I have mental health issues and my bipolar seems to make me, like sometimes I disassociate or I’m not fully aware of myself and who I am. But it seems that generally when I’m stable I seem to think of myself and view myself as a male. Or at least as a not female and then it gets complicated. But sometimes I miss, sometimes I get melancholic and I miss my background, like when I use to be a, kind of like a butch lesbian you would say. Like I was very butch, I passed as a guy on a regular basis, even before the hormones and sometimes I miss being out like that. Like out of the norm, because I use to stand out a lot that way because I

was like not a guy, but not a woman and like I stood out a lot.

Jürgen describes his mental health as something that impedes his ability to understand his gender. When his mental health is stable he has insight into his gender and describes it as a process of self-recognition: how he thinks of or views himself. Jürgen also describes his gender through social norms and he misses the way his gender challenged binary categorizations of gender, noting how his gender “stood out a lot.”

Similar to Butler’s analysis that gender is a part of becoming a subject, Jürgen describes gender as a way of recognizing or making sense of the self and acknowledges the social norms that shape the construction of gender. Jürgen’s gender is in the process of becoming and yet he wants his gender to be stable and fixed. Jürgen’s struggle to name his gender raises questions about how individuals understand and identify their gender: What does gender feel like? How do we know what gender we are? If gender is sometimes unknowable or uncertain, how does this help us think about the concept of gender? Trans theorists Julia Serano and Kate Bornstein argue that gender is a feeling, but recognize that we may not always be able to articulate or feel certain about our gender. Jürgen’s ambivalence and inability to identify his gender both supports and complicates this understanding of gender. His gender identity is shaped by his mental health and how others recognize his gender and yet he is certain that he does not identify as a woman. This negotiation of gender points to the ways gender is both social and relational.

Gender as social offers a way to think about the role of others in trans youths’ relationship to their gender and names. Beryl and Siobhan both spoke about how their names felt strange at first and Butler’s analysis that gender is constructed through repeated acts provides insight into how their names came to shape their story of who they are. Beryl

and Siobhan's understanding of their gender is influenced by an internal sense of their gender and yet they also need others to affirm their gender identity. Jürgen's expresses ambivalence about his gender and is highly aware of how others recognize his gender embodiment and masculinity. Beryl, Siobhan and Jurgen narrate the role of agency in their understanding of their gender and the struggles they face because of the way social norms about gender are highly policed. Serano helps us understand how these trans youth describe the feeling of gender and the sense that they have an authentic gender. Salamon expands on Serano's analysis of gender to consider the role of agency in the development of gender and how the felt sense of gender is constructed over time and through the repetition of behaviors. Beryl, Siobhan and Jurgen have an internal sense of their gender but this feeling has been shaped by the social construction of gender. In this next section I work with Sarah Ahmed to conceptualize gender as relational and consider how gender is narrated through our relationship to others.

Gender is Relational

In *Self-made Men: Identity and Embodiment Among Transsexual Men*, Rubin (2003) interviewed 22 FTMs about "what matters to them" (p. 10). Participants found that it was their body that mattered and spoke about how their body "had betrayed them" (p. 10): When they reached puberty their body changed and they were no longer recognizable to themselves or others as a young boy or man. Rubin argues that "bodies, especially secondary sex characteristics, facilitate intra- and inter- subjective recognition of a core (gendered) self" and that "bodies are a crucial element in personal identity formation and perception" (p. 11). For the transmen in Rubin's study, their body was a part of how they

recognized themselves and made sense of who they are. When puberty changed their body, they felt disconnected from their identity and the story of themselves had to change.

Theories about gender often draw on West and Zimmerman's (1987) concept of "doing gender" and Kessler and McKenna's (1978) analysis of gender as a social process. These foundational texts in gender theory provide a framework for thinking about gender as relational; Gender is assigned to every person we meet and is produced through the interactions we have with others (Kessler & McKenna, 1978) and constructed across a vast array of social situations (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Building on these interactional theories of gender attribution, Laurel Westbrook and Kristen Schilt (2014) explore one's dependence on the other for gender recognition. They use the term "gender determination" to describe how "people can be recognized as a member of the gender category with which they identify if their identity claim is accepted as legitimate by other people determining their gender" (p. 33). They argue that gender determination does not always rely on visual and behavioral cues and look to court cases to demonstrate how the biographical and bodily knowledge of a person can influence the recognition of one's gender.

The role of the other in "gender determination" points to the importance of gender recognition and intelligibility in social interactions. In *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2001), Butler builds on the works of Cavareno, Levinas, and Hegel to explore an ethics of recognition and a theory of subject formation. Levinas argues that the singularity of the subject is dependent upon the existence of the Other and "the Other is recognized and confers recognition through a set of norms that govern recognizability" (p. 22). One recognizes the Other through a set of norms that come before us and our encounter with language. These norms structure who is legible and how one becomes legible. For Hegel,

recognition is a gift given to the Other but that in the moment it is given, it is given back to us. He argues that recognition is never a “pure offering, since I am receiving it, at least potentially and structurally, in the moment, in the act, of giving” (p. 22). The exchange between the giver and the receiver is an ethical relation. Our dependence on others to recognize our gender demonstrates this social exchange. Gender is produced and constructed in this ethical relation through an exchange of meaning making and reliance on common language and norms. Butler references these social theories of recognition to argue that the formation of the subject is dependent on the Other and an ethical relation that influences how one understands and makes sense of their gender.

In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler revisits her analysis of gender and the subject in *Gender Trouble* to question how normative conceptions of gender structure our lives. She understands gender as “a kind of a doing, an incessant activity performed”; this “doing” of gender is “with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary” (p. 1). The structures and terms of gender are “outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author” (p. 1). She addresses the desires of social norms and asks: “What does gender want?” (p. 1). She argues that gender, animated by desire, wants recognition. Building on her earlier work in *Gender Trouble*, she returns to the relationship between agency and gender to argue that

One only determines “one’s own” sense of gender to the extent that social norms exist that support and enable that act of claiming gender for oneself. One is dependent on this “outside” to lay claim to what is one’s own. The self must, in this way, be dispossessed in sociality in order to take possession of itself. (Butler, 2004, p. 7)

The subject becomes intelligible through their gender. For Butler, recognition is “a site of power by which the human is differentially produced” (p. 2) and has the power to determine “who qualifies as the recognizably human and who does not” (p. 2).

Recognition is influenced by social norms, varies across different social context, and is shaped by one’s individual experiences. What or who we recognize or do not recognize is important for thinking about gender as relational.

In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006), Sara Ahmed questions what it means to be orientated and what we are orientated toward. For Ahmed, the concept of orientation offers a way to think about why we are drawn to particular objects or in certain directions:

If we know where we are when we turn this way or that way, then we are orientated. We have our bearings. We know what to do to get to this place or to that place. To be orientated is also to be turned toward certain objects, those that help us to find our way. These are the objects we recognize, so that when we face them we know which way we are facing. (p. 1)

For phenomenologists, orientation is important for thinking about how we are directed toward some objects but not others. I draw on the concept of orientation to think about the role of recognition in understanding gender as relational. The gender of an individual influences which objects they turn towards or recognize. But I also want to consider gender as the object; as something that helps us “find our way” (p. 1).

The arrival or awareness of the object is also important in Ahmed’s discussion of orientation; “An arrival takes time, and the time it takes shapes ‘what’ it is that arrives” (p. 40). Ahmed offers the example of a “sticky object” to consider the arrival of the object:

What arrives not only depends on time, but is shaped by the conditions of its arrival, by how it came to get there. Think of a sticky object; what it picks up on its surface “shows” where it has traveled and what it has come into contact with. You bring your past encounters with you when you arrive. (p. 40)

Orientation offers a way to think about gender: gender is sticky, adhesive and orients us. For Ahmed, “gender is an effect of how bodies take up objects, which involves how they occupy space by being occupied in one way or another” (p. 59). She considers how gender influences what we can do and how the lived experiences of inhabiting a body influences how we are orientated.¹⁹ Ahmed brings her analysis of orientation to the concept of gender, arguing that gender could be described as “a bodily orientation, a way in which bodies get directed by their actions over time” (p. 60). How we are orientated influences which objects we are orientated toward and “how we extend through our bodies into the world” (p. 68).

In order to become orientated, we must first experience disorientation. Ahmed (2006) considers those moments when we first experience disorientation using the example of hearing someone behind you call out your name (p. 158). In those moments when you are focused on the thing in front of you, reading a book for example, and someone calls out your name and you lift your head from the book, you move from one world to another. Ahmed describes this experience as disorientating because you are “switching dimensions”: “They are moments in which you lose one perspective, but the

¹⁹ In her previous book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed also worked with the concept of orientation, but was instead interested in how we are affected by objects: “emotions are directed to what we come into contact with: they move us ‘toward’ and ‘away’ from such objects” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 2).

“loss” itself is not empty or waiting; it is an object, thick with presence” (p. 158). Like Ahmed, I am interested in what these moments of disorientation tell us: “What do they do, and what can we do with them?” (p.158).

In contrast to Butler, Ahmed focuses less on how others recognize our gender and more on how our gender orients and directs us as individuals. Ahmed is interested in the stickiness of gender and how our gender orientation shapes our actions, which in turn influences who we are as subjects and how we move through the world. Through her use of phenomenology, Ahmed discusses how bodies are shaped by their experiences and what they come into contact with. The body carries these “sticky” impressions and our gender is constructed by these experiences and interactions with others:

What sticks ‘shows us’ where the object has travelled through what it has gathered onto its surface, gatherings that become part of the object, and call into question its integrity as an object. (Ahmed, 2004, p. 91)

Gender as sticky points to the way others direct and shape how we make sense of our gender. For Ahmed, gender is a way of understanding our relation to the world, whereas Butler argues that the subject is formed through our relations to others. Ahmed’s theory of orientation offers a way to think about the intelligibility of gender and how recognition impacts moments of disorientation and the ways we become oriented.

I bring these theoretical frameworks to my analysis of my participant’s stories about gender and explore those moments when gender feels (dis)orientating or when the need for recognition influences how trans youth experience their gender. Trans youth must form a relationship with their gender, but this understanding of their gender is always complicated by their desire to be intelligible. This reliance on others to understand and

narrate gender demonstrates the ways gender is relational. In this next section I draw on Siobhan's stories about transitioning and feeling like a teenager to explore how some trans youth experience the newness of gender and their body when they first begin transitioning.

The Disorientation and Stickiness of Gender

Siobhan relates her experience of transitioning to the developmental process of being a child and becoming a teenager. When she began transitioning she was learning about her body and figuring out what kind of woman she wanted to be.

Siobhan: I was becoming a bit of a child who just realized they had a body. I would take a lot of pictures of myself. I constantly looked at myself in every reflection. It would be like thirteen, fourteen, like finding out what you look like, what you want to look like. It's really embarrassing; I hate that phase. I see it in other trans women all the time and it's like, oh you are going to hate yourself when you get over this.

Julia: So you think it's a thing that happens for trans women?

Siobhan: I think it is; amongst everyone I've seen anyway. There's always that first year, first awkward year that you know you splurge a lot on money for different kinds of style of clothing and you have this big euphoric period and you realize this was possible at all; That you could even kind of live now. And then I guess that kind of mellows out. Like in the same way that my way of talking changed dramatically and then kinda went back a bit. Like you know I would switch out everything for like missed oaths. So I would say like oh gosh, heck, darn, instead of swearing. I use to swear all the time. It was so constant and now

it's mixed; I do swear but I say a lot of gosh and heck's.

Julia: And do you think that's because of transitioning? Or was it intentional?

Siobhan: I think that I was just acting out my subconscious idea of women. Or whoever I want to be.

Siobhan generalizes the process of transitioning, normalizing her experience of gender and offering herself room in her gender narrative to discover how she wanted to be a woman. For Siobhan, identifying as a woman and expressing that identity was new and unfamiliar. Her body becomes a site of possibility and hope, and the child-like discovery of her embodiment is playful and exciting. The pleasure she finds in her body and the expression of her gender through new clothing is empowering. And yet, Siobhan is quick to note how she hated that phase. She is ashamed and embarrassed about this period in her life and in the lives of other trans women. There is a sense that she may feel like her gender expression is not authentic because she is exploring how she wants to dress and behave like a woman, rather than already knowing it.

Ahmed's conceptualization of disorientation and Butler's attention to the role of recognition each offer a way to think about these moments and the way gender makes itself known. We become aware of gender when we bump up against social norms and it is through the narration of this experimentation, discovery and euphoria that we can explore what it means to be a beginner. Siobhan felt excited about the possibilities of her gender and body as she explored how she wanted to be a woman and how she would become recognizable as a woman. Like many trans youth, Siobhan had to work at figuring out how she wanted to express her gender and was dependent on others to recognize her gender. She addresses how her choice of language changed as she aligned herself with her

subconscious idea of women and who she wanted to be. As Siobhan became more confident, familiar and aware of how she wanted to express her gender and identity as a woman, she also became more oriented and intelligible as a woman. The process of re-orienting the self frames the work of the beginner, but also points to the precariousness of gender and the ways gender is in relation to others.

Siobhan considers the repetition of gender and the role of others in her discussion of gender identity development. She argues that identity “develops through constant repetition and acknowledgement” and considers the risk involved in using different names or expressing your gender in different ways in various contexts. For Siobhan, one’s gender expression must be consistent and unwavering because “when you are using it in some places and not others it is very easy to squash it.” The fluidity and negotiation of gender in different spaces leaves gender susceptible to being destroyed. The squashing of gender suggests that gender is mutable and capable of taking on new forms, whether those different presentations of gender are forced or chosen. Choosing a singular gender identity offers consistency to her gender and makes it easier for others to recognize her gender, while simultaneously mitigating against the vulnerability of her gender identity. She uses the example of a house of cards to demonstrate how easily it would be for someone to collapse the understanding she has of her gender. If gender can be challenged and taken away so fast, gender is not something one owns or claims, but rather is an exchange dependent on others. Gender becomes something that one must prove. The demand that others should know Siobhan’s gender also requires that others should be able to distinguish between different genders and in this process identify Siobhan’s gender. Gender recognition is then something offered or gifted by the other to Siobhan.

Like Siobhan, Alex also struggled to have others recognize their gender and they describe their gender as a failure. Alex started identifying as genderqueer in university and told me about how they “struggled with [their] gender” in university and in their Master’s program. Alex felt like a “failed girl instead of a failed woman, or worse, someone who doesn’t fit the gender binary and doesn’t have to.” In high school, Alex thought that they did not look like a “proper girl”:

I was feeling like I’m not a proper girl and having to buy make up, learn how to use make up, and wear more feminine clothes (that I hate) just so that it’s clearer to people what I am. So that I don’t have to feel so awkward but of course like either you feel awkward in the gender that you’re trying to be good at or you feel awkward because people don’t recognize you as something legitimate. So you know either way you’re kind of fucked. Until you know you grow up and you meet people in the queer community and you’re like oh my god this is the place I belong.

Alex is caught between their desire for legitimacy and the expression of their gender. The awkwardness Alex feels offers a way to think about Ahmed’s concept of disorientation in conversation with Butler’s discussion of the need for recognition. Alex feels pressure to wear feminine clothing so that other people know “what” they are and yet they do not identify as a woman. The “what” Alex references, hints at their body, suggesting that gender is determined by one’s sex rather than one’s gender presentation. The disorientation or awkwardness of gender is resolved when Alex grows up, finds a queer community, and is able to orient themselves through people who have a similar gender identity. For Alex, gender orientation offered them a more stable and secure understanding

of their gender. Beryl and Jürgen also spoke about the desire to be recognized by others and described how by choosing a new name their gender and identity would become more intelligible, coherent, and would be taken more seriously by themselves and others.

For Beryl, choosing a new name and asking others to call them by that name “was the actual act of jumping over the (gender) fence, instead of sitting around on the fence.” Beryl felt like once they chose a new name they could no longer decide to be a different gender everyday. Beryl uses the metaphor of the fence to describe how the gender binary enacts a clearly defined boundary and yet they create a space “on the fence” for the ambiguity and messiness of gender. Beryl hints at the idea that they have been sitting on the fence but never locates themselves. Instead, the fence, as an in-between space, becomes something to get over, rather than a place to rest. Choosing a new name brings Beryl over the fence and allows them to frame their position as one of progress and moving toward becoming a woman. With this story, Beryl reflects a coming out narrative and puts themselves “out into the world,” seeking recognition from the world and demonstrating how their gender is constructed in relation to others. Whereas Beryl focuses on their name change as a marker in time, Jürgen attends to how his name will be received by others over time and in the future.

Jürgen brings hope and patience to his name changing process and predicts that over time people will start using his new name. He projects himself into the future with the name Jürgen and argues for the importance of the other in narrating the self:

But now I think with time, it's going to take patience and time, but with time, once I make it legal and once people start using it, it's going to stick. After years and years of people using it, finally it's going to stick and all these other names aren't

going to... I mean I don't know if they're going to be erased entirely but I mean they are not going to be part of my life.

Jürgen emphasizes the role of repetition and recognition in his process of becoming comfortable with his new name; becoming Jürgen is contingent on other people addressing him by his new name. In addition to wanting his name to stick to him, he describes how he wants to “stick to an identity.” Like many of the trans people I spoke with, Jürgen hopes that by legally changing his name, his name will offer stability and coherence to his gender. Vincent also references the stickiness of names in his discussion of his birth name: “It felt like a label that never really stuck. It would always peel at the edges and I could never keep it on because it didn't fit.” The stickiness of names points to the texture and adhesive quality of names and gender.

What might it mean to think about gender as sticky? For Butler, social norms determine the recognizability of gender, but these norms that construct how we understand gender and the legibility of gender change over time. Gender as sticky offers a way to think about how gender is shaped by and shifts through our relations with others. Ahmed explores the relationality of gender through the concept of orientation to consider how gender, as an object that travels with us, influences what we are directed toward. There is a history to our gender and the arrival of our gender, and we bring that history with us to each encounter we have with others. The recognition of gender is shaped by the history of our interactions with others and it is through repetition that gender becomes more stable, coherent, and adhesive. In contrast to Ahmed, Jürgen is not describing gender as an orientation, but frames his pathway to becoming oriented through his dependence on others to recognize him as a man named Jürgen. His conceptualization of gender is more

in line with Butler's attention to the way the subject is formed through social norms about gender and our reliance on others to recognize our gender. Jürgen's name and gender can only become "stuck" to him through his relation with others.

Gender as relational points to the ways we are reliant on others to make sense of our gender. Butler helps us see the ways gender is like a gift that comes to us from the other through recognition. Siobhan, Beryl, Jürgen, and Alex told stories about misrecognition and the desire to be intelligible, and experiences of pleasure and discomfort because of their gender. In these narratives, gender structures how they make sense of world and the crucial role recognition plays in the lives of trans youth. In this final section I turn to the ways gender exists inside and beyond language. My participants told stories about their gender that were complicated and language often failed them in their attempts to describe their experiences and negotiation of gender. Choosing a name offered a way for participants to make sense of their gender through language, and yet many participants in the project had more than one name they used or were addressed by, exposing the struggle to name the self.

Gender Exists Inside and Beyond Language

The study of gender and the task of narrating the daily-lived experiences of gender demonstrate both the desire to narrate gender and its impossibility. Jamison Green and other trans scholars believe that dichotomous models of gender fail to capture the complexity and diversity of gender (Bornstein, 1994; Fausto-Sterling, 1993/2000; Feinberg, 1996). Green (2001) argues that we cannot talk about gender "until we learn to separate gender from the language we have traditionally used to describe it" (p. 60). Trans

theorists Bornstein (1994), Prosser (1998), Namaste (2000), Green (2005) and Serano (2007/2013) draw on their trans identity and experiences to construct their understanding of gender and to develop theories about gender. Their narratives of gender highlight the importance of the everyday lived experiences of gender and the struggle to conceptualize what gender is, where gender comes from and what gender wants. For example, Serano (2013) defends her theorization of gender by pointing to people like herself who “gravitate toward exceptional gender and sexualities despite being socialized to the contrary” (p. 150). Drawing on her own experiences of gender, Serano describes her gender expression and counters the idea that it is a “performance,” insisting on how natural her feminine expression feels: “It resonates with my sense of self in a way that I don’t really have words to describe. It just feels right to me, where as masculine expression always felt wrong” (p. 63). The origins of gender become caught up in the wish to describe the “feeling” of gender and it is here that language fails Serano: she is unable to narrate how gender feels.

Francisco Fernandez (2010) also reflects on his gender to discuss the stickiness of gender and the limitations of language in an essay called “Transliteration” in Kate Bornstein and S. Bear Bergman’s edited collection, *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation*. Fernandez explains how it is hard to describe his gender and identity across languages and finds that the limits of language only offer him attempts at capturing his gender: “I am a boy. A boy who was born a girl. No, that can’t be right. I wasn’t born a girl any more than I was born with a name – both labels were stuck onto me by others” (p. 132). Through his experiences he has found that it is important for him to name his body, identity and gender. Fernandez describes feeling confined and without agency in his relationship to the adhesive quality of his birth assigned gender and name. Despite these

limitations, Fernandez concludes by arguing that language is important in “creating – or finding – ourselves” and insists on the relationship between naming the self and feeling “at home in the gender galaxy” (p. 133). For Fernandez, describing his gender and choosing a new name are interrelated and crucial to identity development.

In the same edited collection, Kenji Tokawa (2010) also discusses conflicts in language through the process of naming. In an essay titled “Why You Don’t Have To Choose A White Boy Name To Be A Man In This World”, he notes how his birth name is flowery and feminine in Japanese, and yet in a

Highly Latinized linguistic environment, ending with a ‘ko’ is perhaps a lucky trait in a name for a tomboy. However, for a young transman with any sense of the Japanese from which his name came, it is *verybadneedtochange*. (p. 209)

Tokawa struggles to make sense of his gender through the English language and describes how he intentionally chose a common male Japanese name that would enable him intelligibility as Japanese and as a man. He also addresses the push in trans communities to choose a white name and argues that within the normative trans narrative, choosing a “white” name offers someone greater recognition as a man. For Tokawa, to become a man involves more than just a gender transition; one must have a “white” name. Trans identities are then only available to a limited group of people and within the English language. Although there are some communities in which this may still be the case, I have noticed a shift in trans studies and in trans communities to recognize the experiences of trans people of color. For example in the edited collections *Transgender Studies Reader 2* and *Transgender Migrations* trans authors of color Nael Bhanji, Jin Haritaworn, Aren Aizura, and Mel Chen offer important contributions to the field of trans studies. The range

of trans identities and language to describe trans people has become more inclusive and yet there are still struggles in language to describe the complexity of identities and experiences.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, Bobby Noble (2006) reflects on his history as a lesbian and his identity as a trans man in his struggle to describe the complexity of his identity. The limits of language arise in his attempts to describe his gender: “Identifying myself through paradox as a “guy who is half lesbian” really comes closest to bringing a number of historical moments together to form something like an identity” (p. 80). This conflict of naming is also present in *Imagining Transgender*, David Valentine’s ethnographic study of the category transgender in which he explores how various people in trans communities resist, reject, and claim trans identities. Drawing on the feminist movements insistence that people self-name and self-define, Noble works with Denise Riley (1988) to trouble this seemingly simple task. He uses the simile “something like” to hint at how he is “something like” a man, “something like” a lesbian, and yet those identities do not encompass the complexity of his present and historical relationship to gender and sexuality. For Noble, gender exists both inside and beyond the capacity of language. The categories of gender and sexuality fail to capture his history and current understanding of his gender.

Similarly, Prosser (1998) reflects on his transition process and discusses his daily life experiences to address the ways autobiographical narratives offer trans people a way to make sense of who they are and construct a story of their intelligibility. Prosser introduces the idea of transsexuality *as* narrative work to think about “how to represent the transitions of transsexuality” and argues that transsexual transitioning “requires the

remolding of the life into a particular narrative shape” (p. 4). Prosser reads transsexuals as the authorial subject, and yet recognizes the ways trans narratives are shaped by both medical discourses and the trans community. Prosser claims that transsexuals become real through authorship, by writing themselves into transition: “Narrative is not only the bridge to embodiment but a way of making sense of transition, the link between locations: the transition itself” (p. 9). Prosser reflects on his transition process and discusses his daily life experiences to address the ways autobiographical narratives offer trans people a way to make sense of who they are and construct a story of their intelligibility.

In her analysis of arguments made by trans theorists about the relationship between gender and embodiment, Gayle Salamon (2010) notes how the trans subject is framed as one that has the ability to “self-define apart from the oppressive social structures that determine gender” (p. 82). Salamon critiques this theory of gender and argues that the work of defining oneself, even if it is in opposition to or apart from oppressive social structures, is still within “the linguistic or social realm” (p. 82). She also finds that language is “figured as that which is able to deliver a stable and coherent identity to transpeople, but also that which obscures it” (p. 82). Salamon works with Lacan to explore the relationship between language and the subject: “language prefigures us, exists even before we deploy it and therefore shapes the conditions of possibility for us to speak” (p. 185). Much of Salamon’s work draws on theories of gender and subject formation put forth by Judith Butler.

Judith Butler (2001) argues that narratives about gender are influenced by a desire to be intelligible and “take place in a language that is already going on, that is already saturated with norms, that predisposes us as we seek to speak of ourselves” (p. 630). The

subject encounters the already existing language when the “I” attempts to offer a story of the self, and finds that one has no “story of its own that is not also the story of a relation—or set of relations—to a set of norms” (Butler, 2005, p. 8). The subject is formed in relation to the social and tells a story of the self through their relation to a set of norms. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler argues that power forms the subject, “providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire” (Butler, 1997b, p. 2). The condition for the existence of the subject rests on the individual entering into ‘linguistic life.’ She argues that by being called something by another, the individual enters into language. The Other names the subject through language, and yet the subject also acquires a sense of agency and power through their own use of language. Drawing on these theories about the relationship between language and gender, I explore how the trans youth I spoke with negotiate these conflicts of representation and naming.

Narrating Gender through Names

Jürgen used to be addressed by many different names depending on whether he was with friends, family, or at the doctor’s office and it made him feel like he was “hiding,” “divided” and confused. Occasionally he would forget which name he was using with whom, which presented moments when he would not know *who* to be. Before choosing a singular name, Jürgen felt like a different person when he used different names. He wanted his identities and names to be unified so that he would have one name, not multiple names in different spaces:

Now it is important for me to have it all unified. I don’t want to hide anymore. I want my name Jürgen to be the name I use everywhere. I want to unify my

experience because it was very divided. I was my birth name at home, I was Lucas out with strangers, I was Oliver in my writings, and I was Alex online. It gets to a point where it becomes very tiring to keep track of all these different names you are giving people. I began to forget who I told what name to whom. And it just became very confusing. So I'd rather stick to one name.

Although Jürgen felt like he was lying by having multiple names, they also allowed him to be different people in the various spaces he occupies. Theorists like Kate Bornstein argue that gender is fluid and changes when we enter different social situations, allowing subjects the ability to negotiate their gender depending on the context. Jürgen describes his different gender presentations through his names, reflecting trans theorist Jamison Green's insistence on the importance of trans people defining themselves. The conflict for Jürgen arises when the multiplicity of his names are hard for him to remember. The consistency in his gender presentation and names becomes easier to manage than the flexibility his names offer him.

Fox was also in the process of choosing his name and used different names in the various communities they were a part of. One of the conflicts Fox encountered in their naming process was that one of their friends that they attend a trans camp with is also named Fox. Although they do not live in the same area, when they are in the same space for the trans camp it is a "problem":

He didn't really like that he had such a unique name and it was being used for multiple people in the same vicinity. So what I'm going to do is, it will still be my first name but I'll have a middle name that I can use when I'm around him.

Fox negotiates their name with their friend in mind and yet Fox still chooses to name

themselves after their friend. The uniqueness of the self is both maintained and complicated by the name Fox. Fox chose a middle name that is a “Japanese name,” “somewhat intersex or unisex” and “that sounds nice.” It was important that they identify with their name.

Fox first changed their name when they were seven years old and has since changed their name a few times. They first changed their name when they were having “big problems with the schools” because they were being harassed by classmates about their masculine name. At seven years old, sitting with their parents, Fox chose a “more feminine name” and when they were fourteen or fifteen years old they changed their name again:

When I was fourteen or fifteen I had this big issue because I wanted to be gender neutral because I started becoming more acquainted with all of the gender spectrum. So what happened is that I decided I didn’t like Matea because it was too feminine and it implied that I had to fit inside certain rules in my head. So what I did was I just said Mat. And then the problem with that was that people would try, teachers would be like no it’s not Mat it has to be a full name. So they’d be calling me like Mathew or Matea or whatever they assumed to be the full common name, so then I’d be like okay so that’s not working. So then I had to change my name so that’s what I’m doing right now. So... that’s the whole process.

Fox struggles to find a name that reflects their gender. After choosing a name that they think is gender neutral, it is met by others with confusion and the desire to ascribe a binary understanding of gender to their name. Listening to Fox I was also confused as to how the name Mat was gender neutral. Through these conflicts with language, Fox describes their

own boundaries associated with gender and names, and the pressure they feel to express their gender in certain ways based on their name.

In addition to the names already mentioned, Fox is also “planning on adding a couple of other names to [their] official birth record.” These are names that “sound really good,” are “favorite characters from Animes,” and have a “Japanese component.” Fox is part Japanese and part Québécois and wanted a name that would honor and reflect their Japanese ancestry and cultural background. Another important aspect of their naming process is related to the meaning of the name:

Often when I look for a name, which I don't do that often but anyways, when I was looking for a name or as I am looking for names, one of the major things is that it, most of the time it had to do with like happiness or strength or tough times and stuff like that. And I really liked those because they really resonated with me and most of the time when I found names like that the meanings attached to the word, the word actually sounded really nice anyways. So that was another thing that was pretty helpful. Other times it just happened by coincidence that the name also had a really great meaning. In my opinion I've been through a lot of shit and I like to know that one of my names actually means that I have been through shit and that it validates my life and my experiences and that it does have a good meaning.

Fox read off a list of sixteen names they were choosing from and the meanings associated with each of those names. Their long list of names may be a way for Fox to experiment with their identity. They discuss how they wanted a name that would reflect the struggles they have faced and their name becomes a way of narrating their resilience and experiences as a young trans person. Their abundance of names may also speak to the

desire and inability to describe their gender through language. Fox's gender remains incoherent to them and to others. Their search for language and names fail to contain or represent their identity.

Like Fox's struggle to describe their gender and name themselves, Zoe is also ambivalent about their gender identity and told me a story about their gender through their process of introducing themselves. At university, Zoe often spends time in the Center for Women and Trans People. When new people enter the space there is a common practice of going around the circle of people in the room and stating one's name and preferred pronoun. Zoe told me about a time when they introduced themselves to a new person stating: "Hi my name is Nicky or Zoe, and you can use male or female pronouns." This introduction confused the new person, who was left wondering which name to use. Zoe explained how their gender identity changes, and their name and preferred pronouns reflect that fluidity:

It's dependent on how I'm feeling, how I'm presenting, and frankly I'm fine with them using both. But if I am presenting please use Zoe. That's pretty much how it is. If I'm presenting I do like to be referred to in my female name. But for the most part I'll either be presenting as male or gender neutral so I really don't care otherwise.

Zoe's gender is symbolized through their preferred name and pronoun and is dependent on "if [she is] not passing or if [she is] not even trying to." Similar to Bornstein's discussion of gender, Zoe locates gender expression and identity as a feeling; "If I'm not trying, it's not really how I'm feeling." Zoe's daily decision of whether to look like a woman also insists on the social construction of gender. For Zoe, gender is both fluid and rigid.

Zoe describes her gender insisting, “I present as femme, but my personality is more masculine.” When they wear a suit they like to “deviate” in some way by doing something “not fitting with the gender norms.” For example, when Zoe wears a suit they will also wear “the laciest underwear and the sexiest stockings” because it “helps [them] be able to do it.” When Zoe dresses more feminine they explained how “it makes [them] identify with the phrase, working for beauty”:

There’s a lot of work I need to put into it. I’ll put on my breast form, maybe shave, and there’s a lot to shave and then decide my outfit and make-up’s like an hour of make-up, and then you know. Deciding on which pair of shoes. And there’s a lot of work put into it and I take it a lot more seriously.

Looking like the woman Zoe wants to be is a lot of work for her, however I get the sense that she derives a lot of pride and pleasure from the process. She highlights the time it takes to get dressed and the repetition of the word “decide” emphasizes the number of choices she has in her gender expression as a woman. For Zoe, gender is best described through her clothing and gender expression. She struggles to bring language to her gender, and instead attends to the details of what it takes to look like a man or a woman when she gets dressed.

The complexity of gender resists language and yet as Prosser notes, trans people make sense of their gender through the stories they tell about their gender. Butler helps us understand how language is a way for trans youth to define who they are and how these narratives about gender are constructed within gender norms that shape how trans youth describe their gender. Noble offers a way to understand the complexity of gender within narratives of time and how stories about the self are tasked with creating a coherent

narrative of our gender. Jürgen discussed how by choosing one name his narrative of self will become more coherent, and yet in contrast, Fox had to keep choosing new names in order to have their gender recognized. Fox had created a long list of potential names, speaking to how their identity felt difficult to contain in language. The limited or inadequate language trans youth have to draw on pushes some to create new words and pronouns to describe their gender. Even with the development of new language, Zoe described how depending on whether they were at school or at a community center their pronoun choice and gender presentation would sometimes shift.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored trans youth experiences through three conceptualizations of gender: gender as social, gender as relational, and gender existing inside and beyond language. I began with Butler, one of the most influential gender theorists, and demonstrated how her analysis of the way the social informs and constructs the way we understand gender. Despite (or maybe because of) Butler's large role in shaping how we think about gender, her theories have been controversial and many trans theorists disagree with her description of gender. Many of the arguments made against Butler by trans theorists draw on personal experiences of gender and insist on the natural feeling of gender. Next, I shifted my attention to consider gender as relational and focused largely on Ahmed's theory of orientation to explore how gender orients what we are directed toward and our attachment to objects. Drawing again on Butler, I demonstrate how gender is always in relation to others through one's need for recognition. Lastly, I consider how scholars have discussed gender as both within and existing outside of

language. Trans theorists like Bornstein argue for the importance and complexity of narrating gender. Building on Butler's conceptualization of subject formation through language, Prosser highlights how trans embodiment is always narrative work and Salamon explores how gender, like language, is engraved on us from birth through our name.

I bring these conceptualizations of gender to bear on trans youth narratives about gender to explore how young trans people are offering new ways to think about gender. In these stories, trans youth navigate their internal and social worlds in the construction and understanding of their gender. The limits of language influences how young trans people describe their gender and has also pushed some youth to create new language to define and represent their gender. The narratives young trans people offer about their everyday lived experiences provide insight into how they navigate and negotiate gender.

Chapter Four

Queering Temporality in Trans Youth Developmental Narratives

I mean for a lot of people a name is not a big deal. But to me, I know for sure that when my name was changed and people started calling me Tye that was a huge deal. And it meant some... it just meant more than a name. It was like more like respect. They respected me enough to respect that I wanted to be called Tye. And that, that's what I prefer. The pronouns I was use to. The name was the first thing.

-Tye

Trans youth's stories are marked by time; they are waiting to be approved for hormones, hoping that over time people will use their new name, scheduling their next estrogen or testosterone shot, celebrating how long they have had their name, delaying puberty with hormone blockers and waiting for a body that cannot change soon enough. Time structures how they narrate who they were, who they are and who they will become. For trans youth, choosing a new name and having others use it, often marks the beginning of their transitioning process. When people started calling Tye by his new name, for example, the story of who he is changed and became defined by a new name. These stories of the self and of change are often documented—through writing, photographs and videos, trans youth create a narrative of their process of transitioning. These stories build on and are influenced by theories about trans identity development and contribute to a growing archive of what it means to be a young trans person. Despite the desire for a simple linear narrative of development, trans youth must account for a complicated history of gender, names and identity.

The stories trans youth tell about themselves are shaped by their narration of their names in the past, present and future. Trans youth often position themselves precariously in the present, silencing the past and imagining a future. The present can be uncomfortable

and change may feel like it cannot come fast enough. The young trans people I interviewed attempted to narrate a unified and coherent self and yet their gender experiences and identity pulled them to the side and away from the linear story of development they desired. They wanted their gender to be recognized as authentic while simultaneously trying to account for their birth name and the changes in their gender identity over time. The adoption of a new gender identity became a way for trans youth to narrate their development as a form of progress and shift toward adulthood. Many felt uncertain about who they would be when they transitioned and feared the unknown changes. These tensions in narrating a coherent life story point to questions: What do birth names and chosen names tell us about the work of narrating an origin story? How do birth names haunt stories trans youth tell about the self? What does choosing a new name offer to the future young trans people imagine for themselves? I draw on queer theories about time to consider how trans youth make sense of their new and old name in the stories they tell about themselves. In my interviews, I find that for many trans people, names mark time, representing the beginning of a life or a new identity. New names provide an opportunity to create a new origin story and new conceptualization of the self. When trans youth change their names, they express hope and these new names reflect a future they imagine for themselves. Names point to one's historical relation to others and the future others have imagined for us. The creation of a linear narrative offers a way for trans youth to trace their origins and provides a theory of development.

In this chapter, I analyze trans youths' desire to narrate a coherent, linear story of development and the sideways pull of development. I explore three conceptualizations of time in the life stories of trans youth. First, I consider how developmental narratives are

often structured around a linear normative story. Working with Jonathan Silin (1995), Jacqueline Rose (1992), Jen Gilbert (2007/2014) and Kathryn Bond Stockton (2009) I articulate a theory of development that accounts for the delays and pauses in constructions of time and sideways movement in developmental stories of growing up. Linear constructions of development are also influenced by what José Muñoz (2009) calls “straight time” and Lee Edelman (2004) terms “queer futurity.” Second, I bring my analysis of non-vertical conceptualizations of development together with theorists Heather Love (2007), Christopher Nealon (2001), Judith (Jack) Halberstam (2005) and Carolyn Dinshaw (1999/2012) to consider queer theories of temporality. Working with these critiques of progress narratives, I consider how the past “touches” the present, influencing how trans youth narrate time and their desire for an LGBTQ history. Lastly, I look to the ghostly matters that shape narratives of time and development. Working with Avery Gordon (2008), Abram Lewis (2014), and Judith (Jack) Halberstam (1998/2005) I theorize the ghostly figures that haunt trans youth stories. Throughout this chapter, I argue that development is not linear and resists notions of progress: rather, development must account for the sideways and backwards movement of growing up.

Sideways Constructions of Development and Time

Gender transitioning is often described metaphorically as a journey. This metaphor highlights how although each person transitions in a unique way there are paths that have been taken previously. Journeys are often planned but are also prone to unexpected circumstances and new possibilities that may have not been predicted. This metaphor is often used in support groups for trans youth to help start the conversation about the

complexity and process of gender transitioning. For example, in Toronto, Ontario there is an 11-week group program for trans youth called “Gender Journeys” organized by Sherbourne Health Centre. At Gender Journeys, trans youth are provided information and resources about gender transitioning through “guest speakers, activities, films and discussion” and explore “diverse gender experiences, transitioning, health and hormones, dealing with discrimination, relationships with loved ones, and creating meaningful communities” (<http://sherbourne.on.ca>). The journey metaphor offers trans youth the opportunity to narrate their gender and development within a linear coherent framework. In these narratives, trans youth become the storyteller of their gender, navigating social norms about gender and stories about what it means to be a young trans person.

In my review of trans studies, I found that researchers often frame their discussions with trans people around the topic of transitioning. In these stories, trans participants often default to telling a linear story about their process of identifying as trans and the steps they have taken in their transitioning process. These linear stories tend to construct progress narratives that leave out the challenges and messiness of transitioning and the ambivalent feelings some youth have about their gender (Aizura, 2012; Gilbert, 2014). Based on this literature, I made a point of not asking participants directly about their transitioning process or their trans identity development and instead, I began the first interview asking each participant to tell me about their name. However, I found that even though I did not ask for these narratives, participants often felt compelled to describe their gender, body and identity through a linear account of their trans identity development. Like my participants, many trans youth narrate their gender transition terminating in adulthood. In order to transition, trans youth may feel like they must become women or men, and can no

longer remain an adolescent at the “end” of their transition. The narrative framing of trans youth, by both young trans people and trans discourses about trans subjects, fails to conceive of the young trans person and can only locate adolescence within the developmental process of transitioning.²⁰ Up until recently, the only stories about trans childhoods and adolescence have been through trans adults retrospectively reconstructed narratives. The construction of the child in these stories raises questions about the role of young trans people in trans adult developmental narratives (Gilbert, 2014): How do trans youth narrate the relationship between their trans identity and the process of growing up? What is at stake in granting trans youth the space to express their uncertainty while simultaneously respecting their chosen identities? Youth identities are often not taken seriously because adolescence is conceived of as a time of experimentation, ambivalence and change. Trans youth strategically position their gender transition as a move into adulthood in order to create a more coherent, authentic and stable narrative of identity and development.

Trans youth often center their stories of development around their coming out story, influenced by normative stories about trans identity found in the media, trans memoirs and online blogs written by trans people. Coming out stories offer LGBTQ people an origin story of their sexuality and are often described as an important part of LGBTQ identity development and are central to the construction of LGBTQ subjectivities

²⁰ Masculine queer women often characterize their masculinity as boyish; resisting the developmental narrative of becoming a man and yet also do not feel like a woman. The story of boyhood for some queer women contains the fantasy of an everlasting childhood and the wish for a body unaffected by puberty. The development of hips and breasts disrupt the story of boyhood and queer women are left to narrate the messiness of gender and their sideways development. In the past few years, an increasing number of butch women have transitioned to now identify as trans men. Becoming a man offers queer women a linear narrative of development.

and communities. Although coming out is a process that happens throughout the lives of LGBTQ people, many people have a singular story of coming out. The durability of coming out stories is similar to the durability of developmental theory about LGBT identities. A common developmental model used to describe lesbian, gay and bisexual people is the CASS Homosexual Identity Development Model developed by Vivienne Cass in 1979.²¹ Following in the wake of the removal of homosexuality from the DSM, the CASS model was one of the first to account for a theory of development that did not pathologize lesbian and gay people. This model includes six stages: Identity Confusion, Identity Comparison, Identity Tolerance, Identity Acceptance, Identity Pride and Identity Synthesis. Although these stages are sequential, Cass argued that individuals might revisit stages at different points in their lives, influencing our understanding that sexuality is a life long process. Critiques of the CASS model argue that it is too rigid in its linear progression (Akerhind & Cheung, 2000) as well as outdated and not applicable to lesbian identity development (Nichols, 1999). Based on the CASS model, trans theorist Aaron Devor (2004) developed a Fourteen Stage Model of Transsexual Identity Formation that includes stages about gender discomfort and identity confusion, which leads to an acceptance of one's transsexual or transgender identity and transition, and concludes with the development of integration and pride (p. 41). In contrast to the linear progression of the CASS model, Devor explains how some trans people may not go through each stage,

²¹ In response to stage models of LGB identity, D'Augelli (1994) created a "life span" model of sexual orientation development that takes social contexts into account. Working with D'Augelli's model, Bilodeau (2005) found that transgender identity development, as described by trans college students, narrate gender identity in the same processes D'Augelli outlines. Mallon (1999) warns social service practitioners against the use of traditional models of human development with trans youth because they are based on biological constructions of gender.

may go through a stage more than once, may go backwards or forwards through stages, may go through some stages faster or slower or “may conclude that the best way for them to live their lives is to go no further than any particular stage” (p. 44). The flexibility and fluidity offered in this model attempts to account for the messiness of gender and the unique lives of every trans person.

Theories of development, like the ones Cass and Devor constructed, are often structured through stages and a predictable linear story of growing up. In response, queer theorists have pushed for a more complex analysis of time and development. Jonathan Silin (1995) argues that this insistence on the linearity of development creates an unbridgeable gap between children and adults: “the accomplishment of adulthood appears to be ever more complex and far from the haunts of early childhood” (p. 104). Working with Silin (1995) and Rose’s (1992) critiques of linear normative models of development, Jen Gilbert (2014) argues that “by positioning adulthood as an accomplishment, developmental theory constructs children and youth as deficient and not yet fully human” (p. 30). In this framework, young people can only be conceived in relation to their future self (p. 15). For Gilbert, developmental theory “is an effect of the conflicts between the experiences and struggles of children and the wishes and projections of adults” (Gilbert, 2007, p. 51). The child is constructed by the adult and must remain at a distance in order for the identity and progress of the adult to be maintained (Rose, 1992, p. 13).

In response to normative theories of development, queer theorist Kathryn Bond Stockton (2009) offers a theory of growing sideways. She critiques the way children’s growth and development has been “figured as vertical movement upward (hence, ‘growing up’) toward full stature, marriage, work, reproduction, and the loss of childishness” (p. 4).

In her critique of normative linear models of development, Bond Stockton attends to the idea of delay to explore “notions of the horizontal- what spreads sideways- or sideways and backwards- more than a simple thrust toward height and forward time” (p. 4). The central means of control for children is through delay. Children use delay to grow sideways, to establish non-reproductive, lateral relations. The concept of delay in stories about growing up offers a way to think about how the child grows sideways or “to the side of cultural ideals” (p. 13). Children must grow sideways, as well as up, because they cannot become an adult until adults say it is time. For Bond Stockton, the child is “precisely who we are not and, in fact, never were” (p. 5), created by the “act of adults looking back” (p. 5). A theory of sideways growth breaks down the distinction and gap between the “child” and the “adult” by exposing the queerness of children as a social construct. The desire to create distance between childhood and adulthood intensifies the queerness of the child.

Working with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s notion of the “protogay child,” Bond Stockton (2009) explores the concept of sideways growth through the figure of the gay child. She asks: “What might the notion of a gay child do to conceptions of the child?” (p. 3). The gay child presents adults with the queer temporality faced by all children, because for adults the child is always queer and yet also assumed to be “not-yet-straight” because the child is not allowed to be sexual (p. 7): “This child who ‘will be’ straight is merely approaching while crucially delaying (in its own asynchronous fix) the official destination of straight sexuality, and therefore showing itself as estranged from what it would approach” (p. 7). The gay child is seen as the terrible outcome of bad parenting and to gay people as the impossible object of retrospection. The notion of a “gay child” disrupts the

constructed nature of childhood as one of innocence and absent of sexuality, because the “gay child” implies that children have agency and sexuality. This figure also pushes against the normative story of development that sexual desire and sexual identities emerge later in life.

I bring Bond Stockton’s theory of growing sideways and conceptualization of the figure of the gay child to question how to understand the trans child: If the gay child exposes the queerness of all childhood, what sense then can we make of the trans child? Can gender develop sideways? The existence of the trans child demonstrates the ability of children and youth to understand, advocate and act as agents in their gender expression and identity. Tey Meadow (2014) captures the paradox of the transgender child:

While most adults understand gender development teleologically, they still struggle with whether and how to distinguish childhood self-knowledge from adult identity. They labor to determine if gender is ever fluid or stable, unfinished or finished, a property of the self or a creation of the outside world” (p. 58).

Similarly, Claudia Castañeda (2014) highlights the struggle to conceptualize the transgender child because the “the child is always already seen as incomplete, as not yet fully formed; its gender is not fully mature, and the child is also seen as not fully capable of knowing its own gender” (p. 59). Although we are all assigned a gender at birth, the trans child challenges the notion that we must be adults before we can understand our gender and that our gender identity is constant throughout our lives.

Recently, there has been a push for children who are questioning their gender or do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth to be receive hormone suppression therapy and cross-sex hormones therapy (Spack et al., 2012). Castañeda (2014) describes

how within medical discourse, “hormone suppression therapy puts the pubertal process “on hold” while cross-sex hormones begin a partial process of transition that can be halted up to a point without permanent cross-sex effects” (p. 60). Hormone blockers are also described as offering an opportunity for the families of gender variant children to have more time to decide what is best for their child. Within discussions about hormone blockers seems to be both a wish to give gender variant children more agency and simultaneously a question about when a child understands their gender and can make a decision about their future gender identity. Most medical providers and parents want the best for gender variant children but struggle to conceptualize the trans child. Castañeda (2014) argues that hormone blockers offer a way for medical providers to return trans children to a normative linear narrative of gender development and the trans child “becomes a recuperable transgender body in a way that the adult transgender body cannot, because the latter is already fully formed” (p. 60). For trans children and youth, narratives of gender development become heightened in the push to create a progress narrative. Unlike gay youth, young trans people often feel like they “miss out” on being a young boy or girl, and their linear narratives struggle to account for these gaps in their gendered stories.

Growing Sideways

In the previous chapter on gender, I explored the name changes Fox went through and how they wanted their name to reflect their gender identity. Their negotiation of their gender and names also tells a story about their development. Fox described their gender as a “little train ride,” drawing on the journey metaphor I discussed at the beginning of this

section. Thinking of gender or development as a train ride suggests that there is a track that has been already laid out and although the train may not know where it is going, there is still a linear story of moving forward along a predetermined path. Yet Fox uses this metaphor to express the unpredictability of their gender identity and development. Fox begins their story of development and gender at birth:

I started off, so at birth I was assigned male and then I transitioned to being MTF, which was around fourteen years of my life. Or rather like thirteen because I really didn't have much of a gender when I was one and two years old.

Fox struggles to narrate the origins of their gender, pushing against the normative cisgender assumption that your gender always aligns with your sex. Their story of gender begins at birth and yet is complicated by their dismissal of being able to have a gender during their first two years of life. Fox does not describe how or why their gender begins later, but the trajectory of being assigned male to being MTF makes the agency in their gender identity unclear.

Their linear story is marked by changes in their gender identity and once hitting puberty they explain how their sexuality influences their understanding of their gender:

So then I was MTF and I was using sexual orientation as a kind of like a big part of my gender when I was MTF, so I was lesbian at one point and hetero at one point and a bunch of other things and I thought that they explained kind of like who I was and why I acted that way and why I identify this way. So they were kind of like a cushion.

As a woman, Fox could not explain their appreciation of “very masculine things,” except to identify as a lesbian. At another point Fox said they were bisexual “because both

genders are awesome.” Later, Fox changed their identity again: “Then I was pansexual and from pansexual that’s when I became non binary.” Fox’s narrative about their identity development demonstrates the blurred relationship between sexuality and gender and the process of trying on identities to figure out who you are. Similar to the conflicts Noble (2006) encountered in his attempts to describe his gender and sexuality, Fox struggled to find language that would best describe their complex and shifting understanding of their gender and sexuality. Fox found new terms and gender and sexuality identities by searching the Internet and speaking to friends at the trans camp they attend. Their identity developed through their relation to others, from an internal sense of their gender and sexuality, and within and outside of the limitations of language.

For Fox, changing their name and transitioning was “really easy the first time around.” Their parents were supportive of their transition and called Fox by the new chosen name that they had all picked together. However, the second time Fox transitioned, their dad struggled to use their new name and still calls Fox by their previous name:

He kind of doesn’t grasp the whole idea of a second, what is it, um do you know the word for when you, not like come out to your parents, oh like second transition, there. He doesn’t really grasp the whole idea that you can have like a second transition or as many transitions as you need to find out who you are and what you’re comfortable in and how ever much you need to experiment. So he didn’t understand that. He thought that everything should be set in stone and now he has a daughter. And I’m like nope, you don’t have a daughter, you have um, you have me. So he doesn’t grasp that idea. Which is one of the reasons why I’m not in contact with him anymore. And so that was difficult with my mom. But for pretty

much everyone else it's just like oh we have to get use to using new pronouns, that's one aspect and another aspect would be we've been calling you this name for fourteen years now so it might take us like a little bit to not have that generic response of the name.

Having their family be a part of their naming process was important when they were younger, but family was not a part of choosing a new name in their second transition. Fox explains their frustration that their dad does not understand the fluidity of their gender. Transitions become a way for Fox to figure out who they are. Although at one point, Fox differentiated between their gender and sexual identity, they shift to focus their identity only on their sexuality. Fox concludes their narrative, stating that they are now non-binary, and dropping any discussion of their sexual preference or identity. Fox insists on their ability to have and name their gender and sexuality.

Fox seemed open to the fluidity and unpredictability of their gender and sexuality. In contrast, Chris told me about how he has a habit of “thinking way too far ahead” and constructed a story of growing up based on his gender being stable throughout his life. He is excited about the future and yet moves toward it cautiously. Like many of the trans youth I spoke with, he wanted to get “it” right—to choose the perfect name and make thoughtful decisions about his body. Worries about his family supporting his transition and whether people would accept him influenced how he narrated his life. His anxiety about the future shapes his desire for a linear story of development and a progress narrative that adheres to normativity and fits nicely into middle class values. He explains what it means for him to narrate a future:

I can think pretty far ahead, like my death. I even thought like, even the thought

crossed my mind, what do I want written on my gravestone [laughter]. This is a little bit far ahead for what I'm thinking about but okay. Let's work with this. So I was just thinking like when I do eventually do get married and have a family what do I want to be known as, what do I want to like have my sister in law, brother in law, whatever like, what do I want my mother and father in law to call me. And like or at least what I would be comfortable with.

Despite stories about young trans people committing suicide and the lack of narratives about older trans people (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006), Chris imagines living into old age. Strangely, death is anticipated within the story of his long life, allowing his narrative to align with those about suicidal and murdered trans youth.

For Chris, the gravestone becomes a symbol of his life. He imagines that the name written on the gravestone will tell a story of who he was: It is part of his archive. The story he tells builds an archive of who he is, suggesting that he fears how he will be remembered and wonders what will be left of him when he dies. It is through the gravestone and imagining a marriage that he curates a linear narrative of his life. The desire to predict the future often arises out of an uncertainty of the present or an absence of futures to imagine or consider. Chris wanted certainty in his transition and to be able to tell a normative linear story, and yet his gender resists the normative story of development. He realigns his story by imagining a future of growing up and becoming an adult. Chris bumps up against the gap between children or youth and adults. He is not yet an adult, but constructs a story of his adulthood that allows him to imagine growing up. Chris positions marriage, family, and death in adulthood, as something he will attain in the vertical movement of growing up. Contrary to much of queer theory, Chris draws on hope to

imagine a normative developmental narrative (Muñoz, 2009). He is worried about how he will be recognized and what he will be “known as.” The name he choose as a young person will determine what kind of adult he will become and how he will be remembered when he dies. Chris’s story demonstrates the desire some trans youth have to fit themselves into progress narratives and how in the process of growing up they are sometimes pulled sideways.

Stories about gender development often follow a linear narrative. Cass and Devor offer theories about the stages within these constructions of development and yet Bond Stockton demonstrates the way development can go sideways. The path Fox has taken in their development reflects Bond Stockton’s analysis that development is not always linear and disrupts constructions of gender that fail to imagine the trans child. Whereas Fox seems focused on the present, Chris discussed the future and even imagined his death at the end of his linear narrative of growing up. In this next section, I explore how critiques of progress narratives and theories of queer temporality offer a way to think differently about how trans youth narrate their development and relationship to time.

Progress Narratives and the Desire for History

Youth, and particularly trans youth, are uniquely situated in narratives about time and development. Trans youth are not yet adults, but are constrained by the pressure to narrate their trans identity development into adulthood and out of their youth. Normative trans narratives adhere to cisgender heteronormative progress narratives and have failed to conceive of young trans people (Aizura, 2012; Castañeda, 2014). Trans youth both desire a coherent narrative of development and yet development is never linear, and they are

pushed sideways or experience a shift in the speed of their development. If life experience is marked by birth, marriage, reproduction and death, then how do trans youth negotiate their own life stories, future and happiness in relation to this cisgender heteronormative linear narrative? Queer theory has turned considerable resources towards thinking about time and temporality (Dinshaw et al., 2007). Queer theorists provide a critique of developmental narratives and constructions of time that are influenced by normative understandings of gender and sexuality.

For Judith (Jack) Halberstam (2005), the concepts “queer time” and “queer space,” “open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space” (p. 2). “Queer time” is a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance. Halberstam locates the emergence of “queer time” at the end of the twentieth century and in relation to the AIDS crisis. For many gay communities, AIDS shifted the way they thought about the future and the present.

The constantly diminishing future creates a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now, and while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment. (p. 2)

Drawing on Foucault, Halberstam insists that queerness is not just a sexual identity, but is a way of life, and that this way of life develops “in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction” (p. 1). *Queer* temporality offers a way to re-conceptualize narratives of development and to open up possibilities for thinking about how tell stories about the past, present and future. Thinking about time and space differently offers Halberstam the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative

relations to time and space: “futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience- namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death” (p. 2). Western European middle-class norms have shaped a normative life course and queer time interrupts this narrative and creates new conceptualizations of time that resist the progress narrative.

In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, José Muñoz (2009) argues that the reproductive mandate informs his concept “straight time” and insists that queerness is “an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future” (p. 1). For Muñoz, “within straight time the queer can only fail” (p. 173). Queerness involves temporal modes such as waiting, anticipation, and belatedness to explore what Bloch (1995) called the “no-longer-conscious” and the “not-yet-here.” Similar to Muñoz’s critiques of the way the future shapes progress narratives, Lee Edelman (2004) argues that the Child is constructed as the future and at the center of all politics. In *No Future*, Edelman explores “the pervasive invocation of the Child as the emblem of futurity’s unquestioned value” (p. 4). He emphasizes how the child is constructed as innocent and in need of protection. Edelman argues that reproductive futurity has shaped the temporality of the normative life course and pushes against the “historical procession obedient to origins, intentions, and ends whose authority rules over all” (p. 180).

Building from and within an analysis of Edelman (2004), Halberstam (2005) and Muñoz (2009), Love (2007), Nealon (2001) and Dinshaw (1999, 2012) turn to the queer desire for history and consider how these histories align with progress narratives. Christopher Nealon’s *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion before Stonewall* (2001) explores the sense of belonging lesbian and gay people feel to history. He looks to

coming-of-age narratives that he calls “foundling” texts to describe the relationship queer writers have to the idea of history. For Nealon, this relationship that he terms “foundling” entails imagining, on the one hand, an exile from sanctioned experience, most often rendered as the experience of participation in family life and the life of communities and, on the other, a reunion with some “people” or sodality who redeem this exile and surpass the painful limitations of the original home. (pp. 1-2)

The shared experience of isolation brings queer people together to form a community of orphans and a shared narrative of history. Similarly, Heather Love (2007) works with literary works to think about the narratives offered to present day queers about the past.

Love (2007) looks to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary texts marked by queer suffering to conceptualize a theory of “feeling backward.” Love critiques the contemporary gay movement and the linear narratives constructed through the more positive and happy moments in gay history to suggest that by recognizing and engaging with the negative aspects of gay and lesbian history we can think differently about how this past affects the present: “Reading for backwardness is a way of calling attention to the temporal splitting at the heart of all modernism” (p. 6). Backwardness is a part of queer culture and yet, as Love points out, when we look back on queer figures in the past there is a desire to rescue them and create a more hopeful history and future for them. Love argues that these

texts or figures that refuse to be redeemed disrupt not only the progress narrative of queer history but also our sense of queer identity in the present. We find ourselves deeply unsettled by our identifications with these figures: the history of queer damage retains its capacity to do harm in the present. (p. 8)

Love's analysis of our relationship to the past, asks that we consider how we might engage differently with historical progress narratives that position the present historical moment as drastically different than the past and how with a focus on "negative affects" we can explore the relationship between the past and the present.

Like Nealon (2001) and Love (2007), Dinshaw (1999/2012) looks to the past to think about our relationship to the present and the future. In *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*, Dinshaw (1999) describes how different histories "touch" or brush up against each other, creating temporal chaos in the form of desire. In her most recent text, Dinshaw (2012) explores queer temporalities through the term asynchrony to describe "different time frames or temporal systems colliding in a single moment of *now*" (p. 5). For Dinshaw, queer desire links the past and the present, complicating linear constructions of time and demonstrating how "the present is ineluctably linked to other times, people, situations, worlds" (p. 36). Queers build an imagined community by creating relations across time and offers a way to think about the *now* as encompassing multiple temporalities.

These theories of queer temporality challenge linear progress narratives and offer a framework to think about the complex relationship between queerness, time and development. Young trans people often narrate their transition in a linear story and in the face of discrimination and oppression, trans youth are told that things will get better once they grow up. In these stories, trans youth cannot transition soon enough and yet are also tasked with narrating who they are by looking back. These stories are also marked by ambivalence and the unpredictability of the body: trans youth do not know how their body will change if/when they take hormones or get surgeries to modify their body. Trans youth

imagine their future self through the stories and images of other trans people, creating a community across time.

Looking Backwards and Touching Across Time

For some trans youth, feelings of surprise and excitement characterize their experience of transitioning and incite a desire to compare the images of before and after transitioning. In our first interview, Siobhan discussed the disconnect she feels between who she is now and “the person that wanted to transition.” I asked if those two figures “feel like different people” and she said “definitely,” explaining how she has “done things with photo shop to illustrate this.” At this point in the interview, Siobhan showed me on her phone how she has put photos of herself side by side. Like many trans youth, Siobhan has documented her transition through photos. This collection forms an archive of her transition and brings different moments in time together to form a narrative. I remark on how I think it is “so interesting” and she responds saying how she thinks, “it’s creepy.” Siobhan’s old self returns to her like a ghost and her discomfort reminds me that ghosts can be scary. Strangely, she invites this ghost and the comparison, suggesting her familiarity with the ghost and that she derives pleasure from this exercise.

Later in the interview, Siobhan once again exercises the ghost of her previous self when she imagines her old self meeting her present self. For Siobhan, choosing a name offered her the thought of a future and she imagined an “idealistic [sic] dream state” in which she could “hangout in a dress.” She describes the comfort and ease she experiences wearing shorts and how that would be difficult for her previous self to imagine:

I go outside in shorts, just now, like this, like for my entire life. If he met me now

like I don't know, he'd shit his pants or die or something. But for me it's like so hum drops everyday you know. Like I've kind of forgotten the person that wanted to transition.

Her tone is one of disbelief and she is at a loss for words in describing the fantasy of the interaction she imagines. Wearing shorts outside characterizes Siobhan's *now*, while simultaneously encompasses a future that speaks to a past. It is so common and ordinary for her to wear shorts that she describes it as "hum drops," suggesting that she does not even stop think about this practice anymore. The collision of these temporal frames offers Siobhan a complicated story of who she is and she struggles to include her past self in her narrative of development.

In the meeting of her past and present self, Siobhan's past self would "shit his pants or die or something." These potential reactions can be understood as a wish or a hope, and may even be her way of bragging about her intelligibility and comfort as a woman. The act of shitting your pants may involve a loss of bodily control and feelings of surprise, fear, failure, embarrassment, confusion or excitement. Shitting your pants is also symbolic of returning to infancy and great humiliation. Siobhan wants her past self to be shocked by how she has changed, and in fact, so surprised that he dies. This strange temporal encounter offers her the chance to kill her old self and yet she expresses some uncertainty after suggesting this death and concludes that "something" would happen. Siobhan may not know what she wants from an encounter with the ghost of her old self and in her fantasy it is also unclear what the ghost wants. The ghost may be searching for evidence that she could be a happy shorts wearing woman. Or, maybe the ghost is reminding her of a traumatic past. The distance Siobhan creates between her present and

past self allows her to forget who she was and leaves a gap in her linear story.

Unlike Siobhan, who has a pleasurable relation to her past, trans youth often struggle to make sense of their past self in narratives about who they have become. Because trans youth typically choose their new name when they begin transitioning, their name is often a bridge between the past and the present self. Vincent feels old when he does presentations for high school students about LGBT issues because he is reminded of how long ago he changed his name: “It feels like I have been Vincent for so long, for almost half my life and ... I’m going to encounter very few people who would know me as anyone else.” Vincent marks time through his name and the number of people who know him by his old name. Becoming Vincent means that other people only know him as Vincent and suggests that the people who knew him before do not know him now. Listening to Vincent I questioned what it means to know Vincent. Knowing him by the name Vincent is important to knowing who he is and yet it remained unclear what this tells me about him. In his reflection about how long he has had his name, Vincent is also telling a story about the half of his life before he chose the name Vincent. It is a story of feeling like he was someone else. For Vincent, names relate to embodiment and yet in his discussion of feeling like Vincent, he imagines the lifeline of a person with two different names and feelings associated with embodiment. His life is both the half when he is Vincent and the half before he became Vincent. The name change marks his story of becoming who he is.

Part of changing his name relies on others using that name to address him. Encountering people who know him as Vincent enacts a repetition that comes to solidify his identity. He can only become Vincent through the help and recognition of others. I

asked Vincent what his relationship is like to his old name and he explained how he feels detached from his old name:

It felt like a label that never really stuck. It would always peel at the edges and I could never keep it on because it didn't fit. It wasn't the right name for me because I wasn't ever really a female and so I have this detached relationship with that name...I like to think about it as my past, but I like to look forward into the future.

Vincent's description of his old name as a label reminds me of nametags and their tendency to peel off or be positioned on the body in strange places. Nametags are used in social settings where people may be strangers and want others to know their name. They are used as a way to introduce people and aid those encounters where people have forgotten a person's name. Nametags draw attention to the body and away from the face, asking the stranger to read the name the person has requested to be called. The nametag is a label to describe the body. Nametags command others to address the person by the name they have written down, while also offering encounters with stranger's greater clarity about who a person is. There is certainty in a nametag and hope that through the use of the name, the person wearing the nametag will be recognized by the stranger.

Vincent describes how his old name did not fit him and that it felt like there was a lack of adhesiveness between his old name and who he is. He explains this disconnect by stating how he was never "really a female," hinting at how his old name could only fit a female. Vincent also calls attention to his complicated relationship to having been or being a female. In his assertion that he "wasn't ever really a female" Vincent acknowledges and negotiates his femaleness through the qualifier "really." He both claims being a female and not being a female, bringing into question what it means to be a female. The detached

relationship Vincent has with his old name is exposed in the connection he draws between his old name and femaleness. Similar to my analysis of his relationship with once being a female, Vincent's detachment relies on an attachment. These tensions expose the ambivalence Vincent feels about the attachment he has to his old name and being a female.

He concludes this discussion about his old name explaining how he likes to think about it as his past, but also likes to "look forward into the future." Vincent narrates his past as something to recover, temporally splitting his past from the present, and searching for a way to rescue his old self and bring these stories into a hopeful and future oriented narrative. Love (2007) offers a way to think about how Vincent constructs his past and how he engages with his past through a desire to incorporate it into a linear progress narrative. Love (2007) suggests that by engaging with the past we might think differently about the present and the future. Vincent is unsettled by his identification with his old name and childhood and this presents a risk that he will be harmed by them again. The retelling of his past provides Vincent with a sense of control over his old name and childhood.

Vincent returns to the idea that there are two parts to his life history by describing a past and a future. Once again this divide in his story about the self is marked by a name change. His old name is part of the past and his new name offers hope and something to "look forward" to as he envisions a future. In this section, I have focused on how trans youth narrate who they have become and I explored the ways they negotiate their past self in these stories. As Love suggests, the narrative constructions of the past influence how trans youth collectively tell stories about the present. For Vincent and Siobhan, the past is

uncomfortable and yet they both spent time discussing how the past influences how they understand themselves. Dinshaw helps us understand Siobhan's return to her old self as a disruption of linear notions of time and how the present is always filled with different time frames. I now turn to the role of birth names in the lives of trans youth and consider how these names haunt young trans people and disrupt their coherent narratives.

The Traces of Trans Youth

In her book *Ghostly Matters* (2008), Gordon addresses the complexity of power relations and the idea of complex personhood. In her discussion of power relations, Gordon uses the concept of haunting to describe how “abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life” (p. xvi). For Gordon, haunting “raises specters” and “is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known” (p. xvi). The haunting ghostly figure points to what is missing and appears when “the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view” (p. xvi). The ghost is important both because of its presence and what it represents: “What it represents is usually a loss, sometimes of life, sometimes of a path not taken. From a certain vantage point the ghost also simultaneously represents a future possibility, a hope” (p. 63). I bring Gordon's concept of the ghost to think about birth names. Trans youth often describe their birth name(s) as only part of their past and yet their birth names often arise in their life in unanticipated and unwelcome ways. Originating in the trans community, the term “dead naming” describes when someone calls a trans person by their birth name after they have changed their name. The act of dead naming has the effect of “outing” or making public a

trans person's identity. Dead naming is sometimes accidental; like when a friend or family member is still adjusting. However, there are also many times when dead naming is used to silence and shame trans people. Although trans youth often experience their birth names as triggering, I draw on Gordon's concept of the ghost to think about the possibilities birth names raise for trans people.

The loss and lingering presence of birth names takes on a kind of ghostly figure in the lives of trans youth. The ghost that Gordon (2008) understands is one that is not invisible; rather, this ghost "has a real presence and demands its due, your attention" (p. xvi). If one's birth name is a ghost demanding our attention, what does it want? How should we attend to it? Gordon suggests that one should listen to the ghost because "the ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life" (p. 8). Gordon's concept of ghosts provides an opportunity to explore how trans youth negotiate their identity and relationship to their birth name. Birth names might offer trans youth the possibility of forming a different relationship with their past. Trans people often speak about the death of their old name and the birth of their new self through their re-naming process, suggesting that these names cannot exist simultaneously. However, birth names remain a part of the history of the trans person, haunting them in unanticipated contexts and moments. The birth names of trans youth are often used to discredit their gender and new name, but what if instead we understood birth names as evidence that gender is a process. Or what if we imagined birth names as a confirmation of trans youths' ability to understand and narrate their gender? The ghostly presence of birth names in the lives of trans youth invites a rethinking and asks that we question the role of birth names in the

stories we tell about trans youth. For trans youth like Tye, school is one of the sites in which their birth name often remains present in their lives.

“It’s Non-Existent”: Haunting in Trans Youth Narratives

Tye described that he has always known he was trans and that it was hard for him to come out to his mom. A couple years ago, when he knew he wanted to change his name from Tiffany (birth name) to Tye (chosen name), he brought it up to his mom and “she was like no, absolutely not, that’s insane!” After some time, Tye’s mom “came around” and now “she’s really supportive.” In fact, Tye’s mom even helped him fill out the forms to legally change his name. In ninth grade, before Tye had legally changed his name but was still using the name Tye with his friends and family, his birth name was the only name on record at the school. Tye explained how “on attendance and stuff that was a huge thing for me because I did not want people, teachers to call out Tiffany.” Tye went to his guidance counselor, who is “amazing and gay” and “really involved in LGBT youth and stuff.” Tye described how his guidance counselor was a really great advocate for him at school:

He sent a note out every year, at the beginning of the year saying to the teachers you know could you please use the male pronouns with Tye. I think he did change it on the attendance to Tye, but it was just considered a preferred name. So it wasn’t legal, so when I got, for example, like on my report card or whatever it would say Tiffany.

Tye and his guidance counselor recognized the limits of the school and found ways to help him navigate his name in the classroom and with teachers. Tye believed that once he

changed his name legally his chosen name would be respected throughout the school and that his birth name would cease to represent who he was at the school. Tye legally changed his name in his last year of high school and described how he brought the formal documents of his legal name change to his school's administration but that he continued to be referred to by his birth name, rather than his new legal name. This insistence by the school to retain his birth name is a form of structural violence and came to a head at his high school graduation.

Tye explained that at his school's graduation ceremony students are given a piece of paper with their full name printed on it and as the student approaches the stage, they hand their piece of paper to someone who will read the student's name as they walk across the stage in front of the crowd. Tye stood in line waiting with all his other classmates when he was handed his slip of paper. It read, "Tiffany (Tye) Thomas." Tye described his reaction to being given this piece of paper:

I'm like okay, this is ridiculous, I'm like technically Tiffany is non-existent. Like this is not a person. Like come on, how do you screw that up? I was so pissed and I took someone's pen and I had to search for a pen first of all because no one had one and I scratched out Tiffany.

Tye insisted that the person named Tiffany does not exist and yet there are traces of her that he cannot escape and forms of structural violence that keep Tiffany attached to him. Tye's story raises questions about names: What does it mean for a name to exist even after it ceases being of use? And, how do names represent who we are or were? The existence and ghostly figure of names gain traction because they represent the ways oppressive and abusive systems of power are at work in everyday life. Despite legally changing his name,

institutional forces continue to demand the presence of his birth name, and this persistence of Tye's birth name is the way the ghost makes itself known. He may wish Tiffany was dead but does not have control over how this name haunts him.

Tye worried about getting in trouble for scratching out the name Tiffany and his behavior might be seen as an act of rebellion, resistance or resilience. But what does it mean to scratch out a name? Tye might hope that by scratching out the name Tiffany will die or become non-existent, raising the question: Are ghosts scratched out people? Like the ghost, the name leaves a trace of who he was and remains on the paper despite its legibility.²² The visibility and invisibility of the name hint at the ghostly presence of his birth name, Tiffany remains a ghost in Tye's story of himself, leaving traces of herself throughout his life and offering the possibility of a different kind of relation.

Gordon's concept of haunting offers a way to consider the recognition and representation of Tye's birth name in his life story. For many trans people, birth names can be emotionally triggering and the presence of their birth name challenges their new name and identity. This conflict of representation and recognition is complex for trans youth. If birth names are part of the self, what would it look like to provide a space for trans youth to work through their relationship to that self? How do trans youth mourn their old names and past self? The distance Tye creates between himself and the name Tiffany divides his old self from his new self, but the space between these two people and two names remains unspeakable, unknown, and tenuous. Tye was unable to describe his relationship to his

²² Scratching or crossing out words can signify different meanings and present a range of interpretations. For example, Jean-Michel Basquiat, the American artist, used crossed out words in his art to emphasize their importance and is famously quoted for stating "I cross out words so you will see them more; the fact that they are obscured makes you want to read them" (Schlatter, 2004, p. 55).

birth name, except to say that he wished it did not exist. Tye's birth name appears as a conflict for Tye and the school, representing the haunting Gordon describes by pointing to the gender oppression and abusive systems of power affecting the lives of trans youth. For Tye, being called Tiffany is traumatic and the repetition of being mis-named and mis-gendered exposes the presence of ghostly figures.

When Tye receives his name from the school at graduation it reads like a math formula, Tiffany (Tye) Thomas. The school recognizes his preferred name but resists the erasure of his birth name. The presence of Tye's birth name speaks to the complex ways the name Tiffany represents part of Tye's life and high school career. Graduation is a ceremony to celebrate and recognize the hard work students have completed, and Tye's high school career includes a period of his life when he was addressed by the name Tiffany. The inclusion of his birth name may speak to the school's desire to recognize their relationship to the student named Tiffany. Although Tye is a new name, some trans people argue that it is important to refer to someone's past using their chosen name, and not their birth name. For example, despite the fact that the name Tiffany represented the person who would become Tye, the name Tye should be used to describe his high school career; Tye did not become who he is because he transitioned, instead he transitioned because he already was that person.

In this analysis I have been discussing how Tye's birth name haunts him, but I also want to consider how by bracketing the name Tye, there is a strange way the name Tye haunts his birth name and past self. The story of Tiffany, will always be haunted by Tye and who she would become. And maybe he was always also a part of her as she is now a part of him. Brackets are used as a punctuation device to insert explanatory material or to

indicate where a passage was omitted from original material by someone other than the original author. In this sense, the name Tye was left out of his “original” name by someone other than himself. The slip of paper, given to him by others, becomes part of the story of who Tye is and is a reminder to Tye that he will never control his own story. If the “original” was the name Tiffany (Tye) Thomas, who authored this name? This question points to the complex ways stories about the self are always narrated in relation to others and how one’s ghosts move through stories about the self.

Drawing on Gordon (2008), Tye’s birth name as a ghost may represent a “loss” or “a path not taken” (pp. 63-64), but I want to conclude by thinking about what it represents as a “social figure.” Trans youth have diverse, complex and changing relationships to their birth name. The ghost of Tye’s birth name or the presence of Tiffany may want a more complex relationship to Tye’s history. But I also recognize that the school’s refusal to recognize Tye by his legal and chosen name makes way for the ghost. The persistence of the name is the way the ghost makes itself known. The school is both hospitable and not hospitable to Tye’s new name and does not know how to attend to his birth name. The ghostly presence of his birth name draws attention to the norms of the school and conflicting stories about how to represent and name trans youth. The presence of the ghost and what it represents as a “social figure” is influenced by oppressive systems of power, narrating Tye’s name and identity. In this way the ghost that haunts Tye, may not be his, but is instead a ghost haunting the school. The social figure of Tiffany secures the stability of gender norms and challenges the existence and presence of trans youth at the school. Tye’s name and intelligibility is disavowed and the structural violence of the school haunts trans youth like Tye. This insight suggests schools need to look closer at their ghosts and

the stories they tell about trans youth in order to gain a more complex understanding of the meaning of names and trans youths' experiences at school. The oppressive systems of power perpetuated by the school limit the ways young people imagine and understand gender and sexuality.

Tye expresses that he was both recognized and denied recognition at school, and demonstrates the conflicts birth names present for trans youth and schools. The administrators at Tye's school might argue that the name Tiffany is a part of the story and record of who Tye was at school. This story demonstrates the way names are an important part of the stories we tell about who we are and the stories others tell about us. Schools need to attend to the ghostly figures that haunt trans students and recognize the unique, complex and emotional relationship trans students have with their birth names and chosen names. Schools also need to take more seriously the work of supporting trans youth in their process of choosing a new name and considering the abusive systems of power that shape the intelligibility and lives of young trans people.

Conclusion

Trans youth are affected by their experiences at school and the way their family, peers and the other people in their lives encounter their trans identity. The stories they tell about their development are influenced by how their social worlds respond and engage with their gender. For some trans youth, these spaces feel inhospitable to their trans identity, while others feel supported and recognized, and some may feel both ways at different times. Many of the stories in the media about trans youth focus on their high rate of suicide. These deaths haunt trans youth and their narratives of growing up, impacting

how we understand what it means to be a young trans person. The high rate of suicide among young trans people portrays adolescence as a risky time and it is no wonder trans youth construct their stories of development to end in adulthood.²³

In this chapter I discussed the role of development and time in the lives of trans youth. Their stories about growing up are characterized by their process of transitioning and for many, choosing a new name was an important marker in defining who they are and want to become. Working with Bond Stockton, I explore how growing up is not always a vertical movement. Some trans youth desire a linear coherent story of becoming an adult man or woman, however their gender and body pull them sideways. The complex relationship between time and development also offers a way to think about how the present also encompasses a past and a future. Trans youth narratives of development are also greatly influenced by their family and cultural background. In the next chapter, I consider the role of family and culture in trans youth naming practices and how origins stories shape narratives of the self.

²³ Trans youth project themselves into the future to escape being at risk, however for many of the trans youth I spoke with, they experienced high rates of unemployment and continued to struggles with mental health issues in their adulthood.

Chapter Five

Exploring the Role of Family and Culture in Trans Youth Naming Practices

They say like being trans and going through transition “the old you dies.” And that really struck a cord with me because assuming I change my name, out of the five families I’m the one heir. Of the five families of my Chinese family, I’m the sole heir as well I’m the last person in the family line. So that will die with me. So me coming out as trans, if I intend to go on hormones, that will likely make me infertile so no more babies after me, so that means the family ends there. So it’s really as if I’m just dying.

-Zoe

The family is seen as a key site of support for young people (Bowlby et al., 1997; Dupuis & Thorns, 1998). Youth are moving out of the home and into the world. They are gaining a sense of self and constructing narratives about themselves that are both tied to the family and separate themselves from the family. The family takes on new significance and importance for the adolescent in their struggle to create a coherent story of the self. For Zoe, for example, changing their name and going on hormones will end their family lineage. Their origin story is tied to their name and culture, and yet in the process of choosing a new name and taking hormones they will become disconnected from their family.

Names often represent the complex relationship and symbolic ties we have to our family. Trans youth, like all youth, narrate the self in relation to their family. Materially, as well, trans youth are reliant upon their family even as they are developing an identity that separates themselves from their family. In the midst of transitioning, and while still materially, and emotionally, dependent on their families, trans youth try to re-write their origin stories through, in part, the adoption of a new name. This is, of course, work that all youth undertake as they begin to imagine a world larger than their family, but for trans youth, the process of re-writing their life history, this time as either a boy or a girl or

something else all together, puts their relationship to their family at risk. Trans youth are acutely aware of this tension and, when choosing new names for themselves, they navigate the conflict between wanting to remain part of their family and wanting to become the sole author of their lives. Their chosen names bear the traces of this conflict.

In my research I find that my participants chose a name that will help them maintain their belonging to their family of origin and cultural background, even if their family has rejected them. In this chapter, I consider how trans youth narrate the role of family and culture in their naming process. I ask: What does family mean for young trans people? How do young trans people negotiate their relationship to their family and culture? The process of choosing a name offers a way to explore how trans youth navigate their relationship to their family. In addition to the identity work youth do at home and with their family, they also develop a sense of who they are or want to be through their relationships with peers. For many trans youth, their connection to their culture and ethnicity also play a crucial role in understanding who they are and finding language to describe their identity.

This chapter has three sections. In the first, working with Adriana Cavarero (2000), I analyze the concept of the family in origin stories to consider how we are dependent on others for the story of who we are. In Cavarero's theory of the formation of the self, she insists that our name announces the uniqueness of the self and yet is given to us by our family. The family is how we come to narrate who we are and where we came from. In the second, drawing on research about the role of family acceptance and rejection in the lives of trans youth, I explore how young trans people negotiate their naming process in relation to their family. In the third section, I investigate how ties to culture, race and ethnicity

influence trans youths' naming process and desire to be intelligible.

Origin Stories and the Unique Life-Story

In *Relating Narratives*, Adriana Cavarero (2000) draws on Hannah Arendt to question the relationship between selfhood and narration. In one of Arendt's most influential books, *The Human Condition* (1958), she considers humanness through our actions and our relationship to agency and freedom. Arendt argues that it is

In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and sound of the voice. (p. 179)

The uniqueness of the self is exposed through action and speech and it is through our story of the self, where we are the protagonist and the hero of that story that we can come to know somebody. It is in our first action, being born, that we begin our relation to others. For Arendt, the story one tells about the self is the only way we can know *who* they are. However, in these stories of the self, one is never the "author or producer of his own life story" (p. 184). We are always dependent on the Other for our life story.

In our attempts to know the Other, we ask: "who are you?" Arendt (1958) explores this question as a way to consider how language frames what kind of stories we tell about the Other. She argues that it is language that fails to address the 'who' of who somebody is, and that

Our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying *what* he is; we get entangled in a description of qualities he necessarily shares with others like him; we begin to

describe a type of “character” in the old meaning of the word, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us. (p. 181)

The uniqueness of the Other is lost in our desire to describe *what* he²⁴ is rather than *who* he is. The ‘who’ of who someone is, told by the self and given to the self by the Other, points to the ways we come to know the self through the Other. We can only know *who* someone is by the story they tell about themselves, and yet we desire to hear this story of the self from the Other. Our story of the self necessarily relies upon the Other because we are constitutively in relation with others and offers us a story of *who* we are. In this way the Other both obscures who we are by asking ‘what’ we are, and provides the conditions for our coming to understand ‘who’ we are.

In *Relating Narratives*, Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero (2000) works with Arendt’s investigation into the “who” in philosophical discourse to explore the narratability of the self. Cavarero agrees with Arendt’s statement that life-stories never have an author and argues that “biographies or autobiographies result from an existence that belongs to the world, in the relational and contextual form of self-exposure to others” (p. 36). Cavarero argues that we are always in relation to others and develops a theory of the formation of the self as a “narratable self.” The formation of the “narratable self” or the individual who can write their own autobiography is only possible through our linguistic exposure to others. It is through our story of the self, told to us by another, that we are offered a beginning and unity in our life-story. This necessary other is another person, who is also a unique being. In the Translator’s Introduction to Cavarero’s *Relating Narratives*, Paul Kottman offers further clarification of the relationship between our

²⁴ I will be following Arendt’s use of “he” as the universal.

unique identity and life story:

For Cavarero, as for Arendt, the intelligibility of the unique existent is not ‘first established in language,’ but rather he/she is a flesh and blood existent whose unique identity is revealed *ex post facto* through the words of his or her life story.

(emphasis in original, p. xiii)

In other words, we are the protagonists of a story we desire to hear from others. Cavarero insists that narratability is embodied, demonstrating the uniqueness of each individual and emphasizing the importance of beginnings, through the desire for the telling and retelling of our life-story from the Other.

Our arrival in the world marks our uniqueness and yet we have no memory of this beginning: “From the beginning, *uniqueness* announces and promises to identify a *unity* that the self is not likely to renounce” (Cavarero, 2000, p. 37). Our innate sense that we are unique and therefore narratable extends towards others, and so just as we know that our life-story is unique, we know that who we meet also has a unique life-story, even if we have never met them before (p. 33). This relationship points to the ways we are vulnerable and exposed through the others’ narration of our life-story and that our exposure to others reveals ‘who’ we are. For Cavarero, we cannot narrate our birth, and so while we feel ourselves unique, we require someone else to offer us a story of our beginning, a story that can hold our sense of self together. Our dependence on others to tell us our own story of the self is especially poignant when thinking about stories of our birth.

Cavarero (2000) works with major figures and themes in philosophy and literature (Oedipus, Odysseus, Orpheus, and Scheherazade) to present conflicts of narrating the self and to insist on our dependence on others in order to tell the story of who we are. In the

story *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus frees Thebes by solving the riddle of the Sphinx, pointing to himself to answer the question, which animal walks first with four legs, then with two, and finally with three? Cavarero points the paradox in this situation: “At a time when he has yet to learn who he himself is, Oedipus recognizes himself in the definition of Man” (p. 9). Oedipus has the knowledge to define what Man is, but “does not know *who* he is” (p. 9). “Oedipus does not embark on any introspective journey into the *interior* of his self,” she writes, “but rather [he] comes to know his identity from the *outside*, through the story that others tell him” (p. 11). Cavarero’s discussion of *who* Oedipus is points to how each individual is a unique self and that our story of the self comes to us from others and that “the story of one’s life always begins where that person’s life begins” (p. 11). We need stories about us, told to us, so that we can craft a version of ourselves that feels as though it emanates from inside us.

Stories of the self bring us into existence, setting the terms of our recognition and creating a unity in our life story. At the heart of Cavarero’s (2000) mediation of the self is the question “Who are you?” This question is central to recognition and considers the rhetorical address to an ‘Other’ that is not known. She argues that this structure of address to the Other points to the ways we come to recognize the Other. The ‘you’ addressed in this question is necessary for the existence of the ‘I’, because without the ‘you’ one’s story becomes impossible. Cavarero demonstrates this paradox further, noting how everyone responds to the question “who are you?” by answering with their proper name, and yet many people have the same name; “the proper name is the strange, verbal synthesis of a uniqueness that is exposed to its own question; moreover, there is no further knowledge that corresponds with it” (p. 18). We answer this question with the hope that our names

will represent our singularity and uniqueness. However, our name fails us in these moments, further pointing to our relation to others even as we attempt to narrate our uniqueness. Paradoxically, one's name is introduced before one can know *who* someone will be:

The name announces the uniqueness, in its inaugural appearing to the world, even before someone can know who the newborn is; or, *who* he or she will turn out to be in the course of their life. A unique being is without any quality at its beginning, and yet it *already* has a name. The newborn does not choose this name, but is given it by another, just as every human being does not choose how to be. The uniqueness which pertains to the *proper* is always a *given*, a *gift*. (emphasis in original, p. 19)

One's proper name is both a representation of one's uniqueness and yet is shared with many others. Cavarero points to names as a way to conceptualize the unique self, arguing that the name announces the uniqueness of the self. Names also point to the ways one's story first comes to us by another.

Cavarero's theory of the formation of the self and proper names is in tension with trans youths' insistence that they can name themselves, but provides a way to think about the names as a narrative of the self and the way names represent origin stories. For trans youth, choosing a new name provides them with the opportunity to describe who they are and how they want others to recognize them. Although we are all given a name at birth, the history and story of our name changes. I refer to Cavarero to insist on the significance of names in the stories we tell about who we are and the role of the other in the formation of the self. Many of the trans youth I spoke with wanted a name that would reflect their

ties to their family and the name they had been given at birth.

Trans youth are tied to their families and their origins through among many things, their given names. If names are a gift- a sometimes unwanted gift- from our family, representing the story of who we are, then what does it mean for trans youth to chose a new name? How do trans youth make sense of the relationship between their new names and their family origins? Choosing a new name offered the trans youth in my study the sense that they could re-write or revise the story of who they are, and yet, our origin story is always tied to us whether or not we change our name. In my research I found that trans youth often wanted help and support from their family in their re-naming. Drawing on stories from participants, I explore the conflict of names and the ways trans youth narrate their connection to family through their process of choosing a new name.

Narrating Family and Origins in Naming Practices

Beryl hoped that by choosing a family name as their new name, their trans identity would be accepted and they could fit into the family again. Beryl's story about their process of choosing a name provides an example of some of the tensions and challenges trans youth may face in their relationship with their family. Although Beryl's family may not accept them, it is only through their family that they can conceive of a self.

When Beryl was first choosing a new name, their plan was to have their dad choose it. He was not interested in being part of this process and told them to "pick whatever name you like best." Beryl is closer to their dad than their mom and Beryl's relationship with him comes through in the various nicknames he calls them. One of these nicknames was a shortened version of their legal name and they liked it "even though

[they had] grown out of [their] legal name.” Beryl chose a name that aligns with their family naming practices and the origin story given to them by their parents. Their dad was “theoretically” okay with their new name but “wasn’t super enthusiastic about having a trans kid” and does not address them by their preferred name or pronouns. In asking their father to choose a new name for them, Beryl attempted to invite him to narrate *who* they are and yet his rejection of this offer may reflect his feelings of not knowing *who* Beryl is. When their name is changed, the story their father tells about them must change.

Cavarero helps us think about this tension, pointing to the ways names are tied to the self and announce our unique existence. Beryl learns *who* they are from their family, and yet changes their name to reflect their own story of who they are. If names represent a story of the self, given to us by our family, how does Beryl make sense of their re-naming process? For Cavarero, our linguistic exposure to others allows us to write our own biography. Similarly, Butler argues that we become a subject through language and that we enter into language by being called something by another. Although Beryl has chosen a new name, their name is created through their relation to others. Beryl’s story of who they are comes to them from others and these stories influence the name they choose. Beryl’s new name points to a wish to be recognized by their family. Stories of the self set the terms of our recognition and in order for Beryl to be recognized in the way that they understand themselves, they must change their name.

Beryl began the first interview telling me about how their dad chose a “white name” for them at birth. They narrate their origin story by beginning with how their parents met in China when their dad was living there teaching English. Their parents moved to Canada before Beryl was born and Beryl uncomfortable laughs about the

colonialism embedded in the story of their father going to China and bringing home a “Chinese bride.” It is apparent throughout the rest of the two interviews that this tension hangs heavy over their story of who they are. For example, Beryl struggled as to how they would incorporate their Chinese and Irish background in their process of choosing a new name. Beryl’s dad chose their birth name “based on this Irish saint he really liked and read about” but was also given two Chinese names: one from their mom and one from their grandfather. Their grandfather chose a name for Beryl that transliterates into the name Link:

He chose the name [Link] for me because I was the metaphorical [link] between cultures between countries and other metaphorical notions of like being like a [link]. And I thought about that and like when he passed away I started thinking about how that name actually means more to me than other ones.

Beryl wanted their names to “fit together meaning wise” and connected the transliteration of their Chinese name Link, from their grandfather, to the name Beryl. Beryl likes how the meaning of their new name reflects the meaning of their birth name: “it fell back to the narrative of how I was named the first time around. Where my Chinese name and my English name were matched up.” Their new name offers them a way back to their origin story and the alignment of these stories allows Beryl to narrate a more coherent narrative of the self.

When Beryl chose their new name they “felt connected at least somewhat spiritually to the process [their] dad went through” because just as their father had named them after an Irish saint, Beryl chose a new name after another Irish saint. Beryl did this because they wanted to respect their dad’s naming practices and “follow a bit within the

family guidelines.” Despite their father’s reaction to their trans identity, Beryl spoke at length about their desire and responsibility to choose a name that would represent or “honor” both sides of their family. Beryl explains why they decided to take their mom’s maiden name: “I felt I wanted to have her last name because even though I’m physically very distant from my Chinese family I felt more connected to them in a lot of respects than my white family.” Beryl’s negotiation of their name raises questions: What does it mean to feel connected to a culture or family? What role do names play in describing one’s cultural background? Beryl wanted a name that reflects their racial and cultural background and their “connection” to their different families influenced how Beryl integrated them into their new name. Beryl imagines that with a Chinese last name they will be less “white passing” and worries that their Chinese identity will be “erased” if they do not incorporate their mom’s maiden name. The precariousness of Beryl’s identity is reflected in their fear of the erasure of aspects of their identity through their name. In Beryl’s story, the name becomes a site of expressing and representing their identity, and a way for them to belong to the family. Despite changing their name, Beryl insisted on narrating who they are through their relation to their family, demonstrating the ways gender is social. Similarly, Tye’s name incorporates his relationship to his family and it was important to him that he could trace the story of his origins and ties to his family through his new name.

When Tye first came out as trans to his mom and told her that he wanted to change his name she was unsupportive: “She was like no, that’s insane! She was like absolutely not. You’re not changing your name and then finally she came around.” Tye’s mom is now “really supportive” and when he was choosing a name she told him a story about his birth:

She said that she was sure that she was having a boy when she was pregnant with me and that she wanted a boy. And then when the doctor said that ‘oh you have a girl’ she was disappointed. She was actually disappointed.

Tye’s mom offers him a story of his origins and her wish that he be a boy. The narrative his mom tells him invites him to imagine a story of his birth as a boy. In a way, his origin story is being re-written and in this new story his gender identity is recognized as part of who he always was. Furthermore, his new name has a history and life of it’s own before he chose it.

She said she always wanted to name me Titan. Like from the Bible I think or I don’t know, I’m not religious. She is. So she likes that name. And so I knew that she had that name, like chose that name like a couple years ago, or like a long time ago, that she had Titan for a boy. So I kind of went by Tye for short. Like Tyton, Tye. But to be honest, the spelling it’s T-Y-E. And I wanted it, so like Tye, like T-Y but everyone would think that it was Tyler so I honestly just put the E there just because. Just so it’s more of a complete name not just like oh Ty, where people think that it’s short for something. I mean it could be short for Tyton, like T-Y-T-O-N.

Tye is excited to be given a new name by his mom and yet spells his name differently than his mom and in turn, changes the story and meaning of the name. His rejection and inclusion of the name his mom chooses for him speaks to his complex relationship with his mom and his desire to narrate an identity separate from her. Tye wants a story of himself, told to him by his mother, to offer a beginning to his life-story, and yet the religious connotations Tye associates with the name Titan makes him feel unrecognized.

Although Tye pushes back against his second given name he was excited and proud that his mom could be a part of his naming process: “In a way. I mean it’s her name, right, that she chose.” What was important for Tye is that his name “was rooted from her”:

It still has some relevance to like my, my mom or, or my birth, sort of you know.

So it’s not completely like I just choose that name out of nowhere. But yeah I really like it.

His origin story is made complete by his mom; he has become the boy she always wanted and now has the name she gave him. Tye becomes something she has imagined and wished for, rather than becoming a disappointment. Cavarero helps us understand the ways Tye and Beryl narrate their relation to their family and how their family has formed the stories of who they are. Although Tye and Beryl’s birth name announced their uniqueness when they were born, it is through the stories told to them by another that they can chose a new name and write their autobiography. For both Tye and Beryl, family reactions to their trans status influenced their naming process. In this next section, I attend to the complexity of family reactions and trouble the notion that family reactions are static and polarized into being either accepting or rejecting of their child’s trans identity.

The Complexity of the Accepting and Rejecting Family

Family acceptance is often described as one of the factors effecting the mental health and well-being of trans youth.²⁵ Trans youth need support from family, friends, and

²⁵ Very little research has been conducted on the relationship trans youth have with their family and much of the research I draw on in this section only explores the experiences of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals (LGB). I am aware that transgender identities and issues often get grouped together with those of LGB people and yet I find this research helpful for thinking about the experiences of young trans people (Blumer et al., 2012). Like trans

peers during their coming out process and familial support can be essential to the transgender person's identity development (Ryan, 2001/2009).²⁶ Young trans people are often still financially dependent on and live with their parents at the time of their coming out process (D'Augelli, 2006; D'Augelli et al., 2010). Most youth come out to a friend or other person close to them before coming out to their parents and family (e.g., D'Augelli et al., 1998; Ryan, 2009).

Historically, many LGBT people assumed that in the process of coming out to their family they would automatically lose both their family of origin and the possibility of creating what they imagined as family in the future (Weston, 1997). Trans youth often conceal their trans status because they fear that by disclosing their trans identity to their family they risk parental rejection, withdrawal of financial support, social restrictions, forced counseling, violence, and homelessness (Johnston & Valentine, 1995; Kawale, 2004; Kirby & Hay, 1997; Ryan, 2009). In response, research has explored how some young trans people withdraw from their family as a way to cope (Green, 1994), while others may cope by using substances (Valentine & Skelton, 2003), engage in risky sexual behaviors or attempt suicide (Savin-Williams, 1998). Trans youth might also keep their trans identity a secret from their family because they worry that something is “wrong”

youth, LGB youth often have complex relationships with their family because of their gender identity and expression. Additionally, these two groups share many of the same challenges, including financial dependence and the need for emotional support from their family.

²⁶ Parents and caregivers are better able to support their child's new trans-identity when they are receiving support (Ellis & Eriksen, 2002; Norwood, 2012/2013; Rosenfeld & Emerson, 1998). Families often express a sense of having lost their child in response to a child's gender transition (Norwood, 2012/2013; Pearlman, 2006; Wren, 2002). Like parents of LGB children, parents of trans-identified children use the metaphor of death to describe the impact of their experience of loss (Norwood, 2012/2013; Pearlman, 2006).

with them. Some research suggests that trans youth who are closer with their families may be less likely to disclose their trans identity because of a greater fear of rejection and will be more likely to conform to traditional gender role expectations (Waldner & Magruder, 1999). Throughout my interviews, I found that family acceptance is complicated and sometimes family reactions change over time.

Although some trans youth I spoke with discussed being rejected by their family, many others shared that they have a supportive and close relationship with their family of origin. Led by Caitlin Ryan (2003), The Family Acceptance Project considers the strength of families as support systems for LGBT youth and the possible developmental benefits of family acceptance, arguing for the importance of understanding and embracing gender variance among children. The Family Acceptance Project found that family reactions can have a large role in the mental health and lives of LGBT young people and characterizes family reactions to the identity of their trans child into three categories: rejection, tolerance, and acceptance. Similarly, Connolly (2006) found that family reactions to trans identity (and gay, lesbian and bisexual) disclosures are “rarely neutral and typically have a wide range: positive and negative, static and erratic, with overt and covert communication” (pp. 7–8). Higher rates of family rejection were significantly associated with poorer health outcomes, including higher reports of attempting suicide, high levels of depression, and having engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse compared with peers from families that reported no or low levels of family rejection (Ryan, 2009). Although it is important to explore how family rejection affects trans youth, the complex ways families and trans youth negotiate their relation to each other is lost in the push to categorize family reactions. These descriptions of family reactions are also limited in their

ability to capture the way these relations change over time and the (sometimes silent) agreements that are made between family members.

In “Queering the family home: narratives from gay, lesbian and bisexual youth coming out in supportive family homes in Australia,” Andrew Gorman-Murray (2008) considers how literature on the coming out experiences of LGB people in the nuclear family home has concentrated on negative and distressing experiences. In response, Gorman-Murray explores “the experiences of those gay, lesbian and bisexual youth coming out in supportive nuclear family homes” (p. 31) and warns against describing all young queer people’s experience in the home as necessarily difficult. In my research I found that trans youth experience family rejection, acceptance, and at times a messy combination of both. Family reactions are not stagnant or simply binary, but change and are negotiated over time and in different contexts. I argue that trans youths’ experiences and narration of family are complicated and are influenced by an intersection of complex factors.

The relationship one has to their family and identity is not fixed, but is mutually and continually negotiated. Home is often the site in which family relationships are negotiated. Julia de Montigny (2013) works with Gorman-Murray’s analysis of the home and considers the ways queer and trans youth negotiate exclusions from spaces and how they “participate in and create meaningful places for themselves” (p. 2). De Montigny argues that home is a dynamic space for young LGBTQ people:

Home is a site with diverse meanings for all youth, and young queer and trans* people’s experiences mirror this understanding: some participants described the home as a space they avoided; others identified their home as the only place they

truly felt at ease; some described hostility between family members; one youth had actually been homeless; and for some the home was uncontested and insignificant.

(pp. 84-85)

Her analysis demonstrates the way “home contains inconsistencies and contradictions that youth navigate and which come to constitute each of their personal realities” (p. 95) and “affirm that the home can be a site of either, and at times both, exclusion and inclusion” (p. 135). In addition to her analysis of the role of home in the lives of queer and trans youth, de Montigny also considers the significance of friendships for these young people and finds that peer groups offer important sites for new identities to be explored and recognized (p. 135). Peer groups can be especially important for trans youth, who may express their gender in different ways around their family from fear of rejection.

For trans youth, family can take new forms and may include friends, the LGBTQ community, or those that have acted as mentors or role models.²⁷ In a case study with two trans youth, Rosario (2009) explores the role of family in the lives of trans youth. For Robert/Taisha/TJ, one of the trans youth Rosario discusses, family is a place where they

²⁷ Within some trans communities, trans men often endearingly call each other brothers. Similarly, young trans women often find another trans woman to be their “mother.” For example, in *Transparent*, Cris Beam (2007) writes about how “for many transgirls who have had to raise themselves in some fundamental way, their drag mothers are totemic; they become part of their own personal creation myth” (p. 29). Mothers act as someone who will teach them about how to be a woman and look out for them when they are in need of care. These “parents” are often “just a few years older than their ‘children’” and “have already been living in their rightful gender and are in the position to teach their younger counterparts” (p. 29). These familial relations in trans communities speak to the ways trans people create new forms of family and support systems within communities of shared identities. In contrast to Beam, none of my participants formed these kinds of relationships with other trans people. In fact, some of the trans women I spoke with described their frustration and annoyance when trans women would approach them in a motherly relation with advice about how they should dress or apply their make-up.

are accepted as a transwoman but are met with confusion and anger when they go back to being a boy. Robert/Taisha/TJ's friends also express confusion when they identify as a boy, and assume that they are now a female-to-male transsexual, however it is unclear whether they are treated any differently because of this change. For Starr, the other trans youth Rosario describes, the drag ball scene became a home where she could explore her gender and was valued for her loud personality. The ballroom scene is a place where some trans youth find they can explore and express themselves, in addition to finding pride and support for the different aspects of their gender. Over the seven years Rosario met with Starr, she was moved from residential placements and group homes, often running away for a period of a few days and then returning with new clothes and accessories. These various housing arrangements never became sites where Starr felt at home or had a sense of family. Starr found her home in the "house" scene and expressed a great desire to be recognized as a "real" woman in the scene. In this example, family and home are important sites in which trans youth are seeking acceptance and approval of their gender and identity.

This research on trans people's experience of family points to three large themes that emerge, as well, in my research. First, I found that many of the trans youth who had felt rejected by their family because of their trans identity still chose a name based on their family naming practices and traditions. Second, half of the trans youth I spoke with felt accepted by their family, but the ways this acceptance was expressed and enacted was different for all the participants. The way acceptance is negotiated and experienced varies with each household and family member. Lastly, for trans youth who do not live at home, choosing a new name was a way to separate themselves from their family and reflected a

shift to find other forms of family and support. I now turn to stories from trans youth about their experiences with their family and analyze how they negotiate their relationship to their family and identity.

Choosing a Name With (out) Family

When I began this project, I was surprised by the complicated role family plays in some trans youths' process of choosing a name. For many participants, identifying as trans pushed them away from their family and yet choosing a name that aligned with their family naming practices and culture presented a way for them to return to their family. Names present an opportunity for imagining a future relationship with one's family. For example, although some trans youth were not accepted by their family when they were in the process of choosing a name, their naming practices speak to a wish that their family will accept their trans identity in the future. Siobhan's story demonstrates how some trans youth chose a name that they hope their family will address them by and will render them intelligible in their family and cultural background. Siobhan chose a name that provided her the opportunity to tell a story about family belonging. My analysis of Siobhan's story explores her concern that without a name that places her in relation to her family she will be unrecognizable.

When Siobhan told her family that she is trans they "weren't that great about it" and the close relationship she had with her family suffered because she felt rejected based on her gender identity. Siobhan wanted to choose an Italian name because she "thought that it could still be repaired and that they would get over it." Siobhan hoped that her parents would accept her trans identity in the future and so she chose a name that would

make it easier for her parents to use and would allow her to fit into her family:

I chose something that was similar style with my sisters. So ten years from now, people wouldn't notice anything and it feels like as time has gone on it feels like that's impossible. And that they do not want that and that's like well this was a bad idea then.

Siobhan imagined that her new name would offer a way for her to remain in the family and demonstrate respect for her cultural background. Siobhan also considers whether others will recognize her as part of her family. She imagines a future where despite being rejected now, she will fit in with her family in the future because of her name. She describes her actions as “assimilationist” and there is a sense that she regrets her decision. Despite having chosen a name with her family and cultural background in mind, her family does not address her by her new name.

Siobhan expresses a complex desire to be intelligible as Italian, as a woman, and as a member of her family. Simultaneously, she “hates” Italians, “everyone thinks [she is] Greek” and feels rejected by her family because of her gender identity. These tensions reflect the way Siobhan negotiates her identity and the important role family and society play in how she constructs and understands her identity. Siobhan uses her name to explore how others recognize her relationship to Italian culture, femininity and her family. In these stories she positions her trans body and trans identity as a barrier to her membership in her family and visibility as a woman. Choosing a new name presents Siobhan with an opportunity to narrate this complexity and yet despite all her work to choose a name that describes herself, her name fails to render her Italian background recognizable.

Unlike Siobhan, Araneae did not consider their cultural background or family in

their naming process and decidedly chose a name separate from their family. She “intentionally detached from them” and was very conscious about having nobody else involved in her naming process. In fact, Araneae chose her name the day she moved out of her parent’s house. She first used it when introducing herself to her new roommates. Araneae came out and first changed their name to Luna in high school, but chose the name Araneae when she dropped out of high school and left her parents house.²⁸ Choosing the name Araneae represented a new beginning and a chance to narrate an origin story separate from her family. The name Araneae is not in relation to and is unknown by her family, offering her a way to imagine a life outside of her family. By keeping the name Luna with her family, her origin story is kept intact and safe with her family.

Araneae uses different names in the various relationships and communities she is a part of. For example, Araneae uses the first name she chose, Luna, with her family and high school friends, but introduces herself to new friends using the name Araneae. Araneae wanted to change their name because they felt a lot of “angst with the name, on the fact that someone else chose it but in retrospect I think it was a lot more because of it felt then sort of co-opted. It was associated with like a very, just a very very different person that I didn’t feel like.” Araneae still uses the name Luna with her family and people like doctors and professionals, stating:

I mean I’m nineteen. I’m kind of angsty. I know that I kind of don’t want to share this particular part of my identity with them right now because I don’t know... they’re not uncool with things. They were never hostile to my transition. In fact, my mom is kind of like almost creepily fetishizing of it. But I just I don’t know,

²⁸ Araneae dropped out of school because it “is uncomfortable and discriminatory and able-ist and hard.”

this is my name and then I have a family name which I use for family things and Araneae is kind of like my moving past that.

Family acceptance seems fraught and confusing because of the way their mom is both “not uncool with things” and “almost creepily fetishizing of it.” Araneae wanted to have a separate name now that they do not live with their family. This new sense of the self is narrated through their name. Moving out of the house means becoming or being able to become someone different.

Araneae changed her name because she felt like she could no longer “claim ownership” of the name Luna. Araneae only uses the name Luna with her family and the name acts as a shield to protect herself from her family. Here she explains how her chosen names make her feel and relates to her gender:

It’s complicated, there’s no (gender) dysphoria attached to Luna, but I felt like my name had ceased to become my own. I felt like maybe part of it was that originally it was a nickname given to me and it was based off my previous name. I felt like especially when I was detaching from my family and all of this, this name was not my own and I wanted a new one as part of basically my fresh start. So I picked Araneae because it was a word I knew and thought was pretty. And it’s also sort of represents my transition into more sort of neutral territory. And sort of more distancing, distancing from myself. Distancing myself, not distancing from myself, that would be weird. Distancing myself from sort of like cis-centrism and from this idea of like becoming a cis person, which was my goal for a while. In that it is my own name that was it’s a word that is kind of meaningful for weird reasons to me but I claimed it as my name. It’s sort of this like weird it’s, it’s something that feels

very distinctly mine and I really like that. It's representative of my like weird identity that isn't even in between everything, it is just sort of there.

Although Araneae may have mistakenly described her naming process as a sort of “distancing from myself,” this slip in language may actually be quite representative of how the process of choosing a new name creates a feeling of space and separation between the body and the self. These tensions raise questions: Who is Araneae distancing herself from? Which of Araneae's names represents who she is? These questions push at the relationship Araneae has to her names and family. Araneae felt like her name was not hers, yet there is a way our names are part of who we are and always a gift given to us by others.

In contrast to Araneae's story about choosing a name, family played an important role in how Chris chose his name and started using it. Chris spoke about how most of his family is supportive and he chose the name Christopher because it “came from part of [his] given name” and he wanted to “keep true” to the naming practices in his British family in which there is typically “either a Chris or a Charlie in [his] generation.” After choosing a name he liked, Chris asked his family to support him in trying out the name:

I asked my family to see if they could do it for a week and then if they think that it's good then let me know because I thought it was great and they were just like, after that they were just like yeah we are just going to keep calling you Chris because it suits you so much more and you seem so much happier and stuff like that.

Like many of the youth I spoke with, Chris tried out his new name for a period of time before deciding to choose that name and happiness became as marker of his name being a

good fit. Unlike other participants, Chris shared his new name with family before he had decided on it and they aided him in his naming process. Chris wanted his family to accept him with his new name and the trial period presented his family with space to make mistakes, experiment and actively engage with his new name. This week also gave his family a chance to re-narrate *who* Chris is and will become.

Chris's stories about his family included what he described as one of the "fondest memories" about an exchange he had with his four-year-old cousin. When Chris asked his cousin if he could call him Chris from now on his cousin responded "but why, you're a girl?" Chris explained to him, "well, actually now I'm a boy and I want you to call me Chris." His cousin replied saying "Okay." Chris understood this to mean that his cousin "didn't care," is young so "he doesn't understand" and so it is "much easier for him to just sort of accept it." On the other hand, Chris's uncle, and the father of his cousin, is not accepting of Chris's trans identity and does not use Chris's preferred name or pronoun. By understanding his cousin as innocent and naïve, Chris is more hospitable to questions about his gender and name.

Despite his family being a part of his naming process and helping him pick his name, "a lot of the time they don't use it." In fact, the only people who "use it consistently with the pronouns as well is my mom and my sister. And my sister's my twin, so she didn't really care. She adjusted really quickly." Chris's experiences support Israel's (2006) findings that particularly siblings of trans people can sometimes become their brother or sister's "biggest cheerleader" helping him or her to adjust to a new gender role (pp. 56–57). Similarly, Savin-Williams and Cohen (1996) posit that once parents become comfortable with the issue of sexual orientation and gender identity, they can become

“agents of social change” (p. 178). They also found that youth feel affirmed when parents support them in acts of countering homophobia and becoming social activists in schools and communities.

Chris describes his family as supportive even though many of his family members do not always address him using his preferred name or pronoun. For Chris, the supportive family is one that includes rejection, acceptance and tolerance. The advocacy from his mom and sister may provide enough of a supportive atmosphere in the face of his father or extended family members who are still struggling with his trans identity. What is “enough” is unique to each person and is influenced by how much a young person is financially and emotionally dependent on their family.

For Chris, using the correct pronoun and name was a clear sign of support and something both his mom and twin sister adapted to quickly, and this advocacy is especially important when he is around extended family or peers. At school, Chris’s sister stands up for him and “does it more so than [he] would like her to”:

She stands up for me more than I stand up for me and at some points it gets really annoying, so I’m just like dude if I wanted to fight this battle I would but there’s a reason I’m not.

Chris offers an example of a time his sister advocated for him at school and it felt like too much.

I think it was at like the beginning of grade nine and there was a guy who was kind of picking on me and he was like “But if you’re a girl why are you saying that you’re a guy?” And like well that’s not how it works. I’m trans: I’m biologically female but I identify as male. And he was just like “Well how the fuck does that

work?” And my sister just went off. She was just like “You asshole! It’s just like he just wants to be a boy and that has nothing to do with you.” I’m just like that doesn’t have anything to do with you either just calm down, it’s okay. And she’s just like “No, it’s not okay. If you’re not going to fight your battles for yourself I’m going to do it.” I’m just like I don’t want you to. It’s why I’m not doing it. Like no. It’s like if I wanted... because I know when to pick my battles, when to pick my fights, and when to just sort of leave it be. And it’s particularly bad when it comes to other people.

Chris appreciates the support from his sister but does not want her to interfere with some of his “battles” at school. Chris wants to determine how and when he is supported, and understands the harassment he faces at school as only affecting him, however this conflict is also one that affects his sister and the rest of the school. Chris recognizes that not all trans youth have supportive families and there is a way that by telling this story he is able to narrate the intensity of his sister’s support and the risks she is willing to go to in order to protect Chris. His trans identity is defended at all costs and without Chris asking for help.

Families are complicated for trans youth, even when their families offer support and acceptance in response to their trans identity. Participants often narrated the trajectory of trans support as moving from rejection to acceptance, however this linear narrative does not reflect the messiness of the “transition.” Despite categorizing their families as either accepting or rejecting, their stories about their families were much more complicated than these categories suggest. Gorman-Murray helps us see the complexity of family reactions and the relationships trans youth have with their family over time. Although Siobhan and Araneae did not feel supported by their families, they remain in connection with them and

face challenges in navigating these relationships and home spaces. Although we often hear about families rejecting their trans child, Chris described the ways his sister and mom offer support and acceptance. De Montigny and Rosario discuss how trans youth often find new forms of family in peer groups and help us understand how Araneae engages with peers to find support. For some trans youth, their relationship to their family is connected to their ties to their cultural background. In this last section, I consider the role of culture in trans youth naming practices and identity formation.

Impossible Identities

Language is rooted in cultural practices and values, varying across geographic locations, communities, and histories. By locating names in language, I insist on the cultural significance and background associated with naming practices and names. This relationship points to questions: How do names reflect one's cultural or ethnic background? How does one negotiate their name and naming practices in different cultures and spaces? In my project I explore how trans youth in Canada navigate the constructs of language, a desire to be intelligible in a Western culture and their own cultural background in choosing a new name. For many trans youth, negotiating their relationship to their family also means thinking about their ties to their race, culture, and nation. This can be especially complicated for trans youth of color who do not fit into Anglocentric trans narratives. Historically, stories about the experiences of trans people have been dominated by western conceptualizations of sexuality and gender and transitioning is structured as a linear narrative. Societal constructions of gender have pushed trans people into narrating their gender in relation to white cisgender

heteronormative ideals. These linear narratives shape the notion of the good transsexual citizen and create borders of gender intelligibility and nationhood. In this section I ask: How might a trans narrative that resists these normative structures tell a story about gender, race and bodies? How do non-Anglocentric trans narratives discuss the relationship between gender, culture and family? Discourses of sexuality and gender are tied to histories of colonialism, nationalism, racism and migration. Gayatri Gopinath (2005) uses the concept queer diasporas to challenge how we think about state formation, family ties, sexual politics and the ways queer diasporic youth narrate who they are and where they came from. She describes how this concept “recuperates those desire, practices, and subjectivities that are rendered impossible and unimaginable within conventional diasporic and nationalist imaginaries” (p. 11). Names and the process of choosing a name offers a way to explore how trans youth of color and queer diasporic youth negotiate their relationship to their family and culture, while simultaneously bumping up against Anglocentric trans narratives that influence their intelligibility.

In “Of borders and homes: the imaginary community of (trans)sexual citizenship,” Aren Aizura (2006) draws on Anzaldúa’s analysis of borders to discuss transnationality in trans studies.²⁹ Aizura explores the relationship between transsexual/transgender rights and nationalism, to question the “connections between the borders of gender and those between nations” (p. 289). Aizura points to the complex relationship between home, bodies and citizenship to consider how “conceptions of a normatively sexed body as home relate to political strategies that institute domesticity and normativity as the privileged

²⁹ In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) writes about growing up on the border of Texas and Mexico to theorize a new understanding of borders. For Anzaldúa, borders are a psychic, cultural and social space dividing and defining people

trajectory of citizenship” (p. 290). Aizura speaks further to the “politics of transsexual citizenship” and argues that the metaphors of homecomings, borders and boundaries found in narratives of transsexual citizenship perpetuate a linear narrative of transitioning and a fantasy of normativity that is “racially and culturally marked as Anglocentric, heteronormative and capitalistic” (p. 290). Aizura argues that the privileging of normative trans narratives enables the intelligibility of trans people who represent and reflect the image of a white cisgender heteronormative people, while simultaneously silencing those who fall outside of this construction. Furthermore, Aizura points to the ways the nation maintains borders between male and female through the state’s regulation of bodies. Questions of transsexual citizenship point to the ways trans narratives are regulated and the complicated ways we find home in our body.

In “Trans/scriptions: Homing Desires, (Trans)sexual Citizenship and Racialized Bodies,” Nael Bhanji (2012) critiques how theories about trans people conceptualize home and argues that much of transsexual theory fails to “take into account racial and ethnic differences without resorting to imperializing gestures” (p. 157). For Bhanji, the “(trans)sexual citizen” is “marked by the values and norms of the Anglo-American majority” (p. 157). Building on Aizura’s (2006) analysis of borders, Bhanji considers the concept of belonging in a discussion of the relationship between the borders of gender and the borders of home (p. 289). For Bhanji, (2012) theories of transsexuality must consider “the question of broader/border traversals” and argues “the border marks a sphere of normality, of homeliness, the privileges properly gendered and sexed national bodies” (p. 165). He questions the attachments society has to the idea of home and how this “home” structures the journey’s we take. For trans youth, stories about transitioning and choosing

a name reflect these tensions of borders and belonging. Trans youth want to feel at home in their body and with their family, and yet these desires for intelligibility and adherence to normative conceptualizations of gender are sometimes in tension with their gender identity and cultural background.

Anglocentric trans narratives bump up against non-western narratives about sexuality and gender, exposing the struggle queer diasporic youth face in narrating their identity. In her work with South Asian lesbians living in the US, Gopinath (2015) discusses the complex ways queer sexualities are pushed outside the home and yet also shift the home, influencing what is allowed in the home:

Home is not simply or necessarily the place from which the queer subject is evicted or exiled. Home is a space that is ruptured and imaginatively transformed by queer diasporic subjects even as they remain within its confines. This queer transformation of the diasporic “home” constitutes a remarkably powerful challenge to dominant ideologies of community and nation in ways that may very well escape intelligibility within a logic of visibility and “coming out.” (p. 79)

Queer diasporic youth challenge the conceptualization of home as a place where their subjectivity cannot exist. Gopinath (2005) argues that the “lesbian” is experienced as “foreign” and a product of westernization. Drawing on Dorinne Kondo, Gopinath conceptualizes home as something the queer diasporic subject “cannot not want but also that which [they] cannot and could never have” (p. 173). For the young diasporic queer, their sexuality makes them an outsider to their home or racialized nation and yet they remain an unfit subject in the mainstream white lesbian and gay movement.

Andil Gosine builds on Gopinath’s (2003) discussion of the unfit queer subject to

explore how queer youth occupy “a space of impossibility” (p. 265) in which concepts of home, nation, race, gender, and sexuality are at stake in the negotiation of their identity. Gosine (2008) discusses these tensions to explore the ways queer diasporic youth navigate these complexities:

The situation of the young diasporic queer is further complicated: an outsider to her “home” ethnicized/racialized nation, and a marginal, racialized figure in the white-centered gay and lesbian community and heterosexual public space of her adopted “host” nation, her “youthfulness” offers the possibility of being shaped to fit nationalist objectives of either (or both). She is recognized as a subject still in formation; her ills may yet be remedied, her outsider status, revised. A young queer is a deviant body but, still, a recuperable citizen. (p. 224)

Queer youth are uniquely positioned as being both responsible for the future of the nation and a threat to its sustainable future. Gosine demonstrates how the dominant queer migration narrative in Canada characterizes migrants’ home countries as uncivilized because homosexuality is criminalized. In this narrative, Canada is positioned as a safe land, a queer utopia. However, for many queer diasporic youth, becoming intelligible and finding home in western nations mean that they must fit into scripts offered by the mainstream white lesbian and gay movement. Narratives about the process of choosing a name offers a way to explore how queer and trans diasporic youth navigate these normative scripts that influence their intelligibility and relationship to their family and culture.

Tokawa (2010) found that among people who did not know Japanese, his name was just an androgynous ethnic name. However, when he went to university and met other

people with his name, it “became something [he] needed to move away from” (p. 209). In choosing a new name, Tokawa considered the intentions his mother had in her naming process, explaining how his “white mother gave [him] a Japanese name and in this tradition, [he] renamed [him]self with another Japanese name” (p. 209). Tokawa is aware of the associations people have with his name and describes how he intentionally chose a Japanese name that is common among male Japanese characters in film and video games. The familiarity of his name enables his intelligibility as Japanese and as a man. In addition to the influence family and tradition had on choosing a new name, Tokawa also points to his desire to be intelligible as a Japanese man and the pressure for trans men to choose a “white” name. He argues that within normative trans narratives, choosing a “white” name offers one greater recognition as a man.

I turn now to stories from participants about how their cultural background or ethnicity influenced their process of choosing a name. A little over half of my participants identified as a person of color and yet very few of my participants who are not white passing discussed how their cultural background or ethnicity played a role in their re-naming. In contrast, those participants who are white passing often wanted their name to reflect their cultural background and/or ethnicity. Although this difference among participants exerts the tendency to draw generalizations, it also points to how race, ethnicity and cultural background might influence how trans youth negotiate their intelligibility in their naming process.

Names as a Reflection of Cultural Identity

Although Zoe’s birth name did not include their father’s last name, they chose it as

their last name in their re-naming process because they “identify as a person of color” and their “birth last name doesn’t show that.” Zoe wanted their identity as a Chinese Canadian to be more visible and feel like they are “an invisible person of color because [they] look white.” Zoe describes the borders of their ethnicity and family, locating herself in relation to these constructs and negotiating her naming practice based on her relationship to her family members:

Often I’ll get asked what type of Asian are you? And that type of thing or I’ll just be written off as white. I really chose [father’s last name] so it’s like I’m relating to the Chinese part of my family. And that’s important to me. I don’t relate well with my mother’s side and my mother’s side is primarily white and my father’s side is primarily Chinese. I grew up really relating with my Chinese part and it’s something very dear to me. They don’t know the real me but they are the people that accepted me as the person I presented as the most. They took care of me and for the most part they haven’t been the same like how my direct family has been. They of course they don’t have the opportunity to be I guess because it’s not in a close home situation but...I would consider myself more raised by my grandmother than my mother and dad.

Throughout my interviews with Zoe, she discussed topics like gender, culture, and family in binary ways. For Zoe, family is broken down into her mother and father’s side and is defined by their ethnicity. She identifies as mixed and as a person of color and states that she relates to the Chinese part of herself, but it is unclear if she is describing her connection to her family members, Chinese culture, or her identity as a Chinese person.

Later in the interview, Zoe explains the difficulties she faces as a mixed person:

“But I wanted to be more visible I guess because I’m proud to be a Chinese Canadian and a lot of times people don’t see that at all in me. I feel really awkward going to groups for people of color looking like this.” Zoe imagines that by choosing a Chinese last name people will ask them about their ethnicity and cultural background and that by having a Chinese last name it will “push the point” that they are “mixed.” Despite choosing a last name that relates to her Chinese culture, Zoe expressed a strong dislike of her given Chinese names and the possibility of choosing a Chinese first name:

I have Chinese names and I hate them. I was given stupid Chinese names just because they worked with how my names worked apparently. I don’t relate with them at all. I don’t like the sound of it. I don’t like the way it rolls off my tongue. I don’t relate with it at all. Also in Chinese culture it’s a sign of respect and dignity to have a Western name. A lot of people claim a Western name because it’s respectful. People choose the stupidest western names just so they will have a western name. And sometimes it’s, in some cases it’s really sad because they feel this need to project western culture on to themselves. But I guess that’s just how it’s been.

The hate Zoe describes is confusing; she chose a Chinese last name yet does not like the sound of their given Chinese names. Zoe is neither identifying as Chinese or as someone from a western culture, and rejects the names given to her. Zoe’s relationship to her identity, culture and names raises questions: what does it mean to relate to a given name, especially if it is in a language we do not speak? What does it mean to hate the sound of a name? Zoe may not be able to conceive of a young trans person with a Chinese name and defends their naming practice as a form of respect. However, Aizura might argue that Zoe

feels pressure to narrate their trans identity, including their name, in alignment with normative trans narratives that will enable them intelligibility.

Some trans youth I spoke with chose a name that was not related to their family or cultural background. Peer groups can be especially important for trans youth, who may express their gender in different ways around their family from fear of rejection. For trans youth, family can take new forms and may include friends, the LGBT community, or those that have acted as mentors or role models. Friends were an important part of Alex's process of choosing a new name and may represent a form of family for them. When Alex was in their junior year of high school, they knew they were moving to a new city in a different province and decided that they wanted a new name to be addressed by. They brainstormed possible names with their friends and chose the name Alex because a girl they liked thought it would be a good gender-neutral name for them. Alex's new name contained traces and emotional ties to their friends and allowed Alex different forms of recognition and relationships with their current and future friends. The family's decision to move arises as a conflict and an opportunity for Alex; they may feel like the story of who they are can be rewritten, and yet by moving they will be leaving behind those who have helped to name them and narrate who they are. Choosing a name with the help of their friends offered a way for Alex to narrate who they are through their relationships with their friends, rather than through their family.

Alex felt "awkward" about their given name and described it as "really feminine" and noted how it did not "match" who they are. Alex identifies as genderqueer and wanted a name that would reflect the ambiguity of their gender. Alex chose a name that did not relate to their cultural background because they felt that "would mark [them] in ways that

[they] do not want to be marked.” Alex is Lebanese and spoke of a wish for a “culture neutral name.” Alex “hates” being asked where they are from and remarked on how they are always unsure of how to answer that question. Growing up in a city where most people are white and of European decent, Alex often had the experience of being one of the few people of color in the room and reflected on how like most people in high school, they just wanted to “be like everyone else.” For Alex, becoming intelligible involved choosing a European name. They found that “people react differently according to your name” and did not want “people to treat [them] differently right off the bat just because they saw [their] last name or a ‘racial’ first name.” For Alex, “having a European name might make things easier” but also stated that this naming practice does not align with their current values. Like most teenagers, Alex wanted to fit in and be normal. They did not want to stand out because of their race and explained how their name and gender are often sites of difference that they are interrogated about. Gosine and Aizura offer ways to make sense of Alex’s process of choosing a name and their desire to be intelligible among their white cisgender friends. Alex chooses a name that allows them to fit into existing norms about gender and Anglocentric trans narratives, offering them a way to be a “recuperable citizen,” despite their “deviant body” and status as an “outsider.” Alex’s stories about choosing their name provide an opportunity to consider how trans diasporic youth living in Canada navigate their identity, relationships with family and friends, and conceptualization of home.

Zoe and Alex offer different stories about their relationship to their cultural background and race, and this contrast may be a reflection of their visibility as people of color. Zoe passes as a white person and may not face some of the racism and challenges

Alex experiences. Aizura and Bhanji offer ways to understand how Zoe and Alex narrate their gender and the pressures they may feel about fitting into Anglocentric trans narratives. Their stories about choosing a name expose how they want their gender and racial identity to be recognized and understood by others.

Conclusion

Research about trans youth makes it clear that family plays an important role in the lives of trans youth and yet there is very little research about this. The relationship trans youth have to their family is significant because they are at a time of transition and growth, moving out of the home and into the world. They are gaining a sense of self and constructing narratives about themselves that are both tied to the family and separate themselves from this family. We know that families often struggle to understand and support their trans child. In this chapter I explored trans youths' relationship with their family through their stories about their process of choosing a name. These stories add to our understanding of the daily lives of young trans people and the structures that influence how they narrate their identities and move through different social situations. I also explored the ways trans youth are using language to render themselves intelligible, navigating discourses about what it means to be a young trans person and resisting victim narratives through the construction of stories about their family experiences as both accepting, rejecting and complex, because family reactions are never just about acceptance or rejection.

The legitimation offered to young trans people is constructed by the state and influences what is recognizable and intelligible. Historically, notions of family and kinship

were tied to blood relationships and monitored by the state, however the definitions of these concepts are changing. Youth are narrating their relationships to family, home and culture through their naming process and exposing the shifts and boundaries of these dynamics. These stories offer a way to think about the norms that govern intelligibility and raise questions about the meaning of kinship.

Conclusion

Re-Framing Stories about Trans Youth at School

In *A Murder Over a Girl: Justice, Gender, Junior High*, Ken Corbett (2016) describes his observations of the trial of the murder of fifteen-year-old Lawrence “Larry” Fobes King. In February 2008, Larry was shot twice in the back of the head by a classmate named Brandon, during his first period English class at a junior high in Oxnard, California. The prosecution argued that Brandon shot Larry “because of his perceived gender or sexual orientation” (p. 4). What remained absent from the courtroom was the fact that Larry had changed her name to Leticia, identified as trans and asked to be addressed with the pronouns she and her about a month before being killed.³⁰ Furthermore, the judge and the prosecutor did not include race as a factor in the crime, despite the fact that Brandon is white and Leticia was black and police detectives found materials related to white supremacy in Brandon’s house and personal items. Throughout the trial, Leticia’s blackness and femininity are erased from the story of who she was.

In this case and in the lives of many trans youth, choosing a new name is an important part of the process of identifying as trans and coming into one’s body. When Larry changed names to Leticia, she also started dressing in feminine clothing, discovering how she wanted to navigate the world in her body, and exploring desire in her relationships with classmates and friends. In his analysis of the case, Corbett draws on

³⁰ For Corbett, the name Larry is “the language of the record” and to change that record “we lose an important part of the story, that is, the way Leticia was not named, and her transgender identity was not granted” (Corbett, 2016, p. 42). In my continued discussion of this case I will use the name Leticia and use her/she pronouns. Although the name Leticia was new, it reflects how she wanted to be addressed and recognized at the time of her death. My decision to use the name Leticia is also in response to the #sayhername movement that calls attention to the violence against black women by police and the silencing of the experiences of black women and girls.

Judith Butler (2001) to consider the intelligibility of Leticia and argues that “the norms about who gets to be recognized, who gets to be seen as wanted, desirable, and worthy, did not support Larry or Leticia in any life-sustaining way” (Corbett, 2016, p. 42). Despite teachers remarking on their acceptance of Leticia’s clothing and femininity, the school was not a hospitable place for her. Leticia’s death points to how her embodiment as a young black gender variant person was not allowed at the school. School was sometimes a dangerous place for Leticia, while simultaneously offering her a space to explore her identity. Recognition of complex personhood (Gordon, 2008) offers a way to understand more fully the risks Leticia faced at school and at home. Leticia was constantly bullied at school because of her gender expression and yet continued to wear dresses and paint her nails. We also know that Leticia had a difficult home life and had been recently moved from her foster home to a group home facility, but had a group of friends at her group home who supported her in exploring her gender. Within the systematic nature of oppressive forces we are able to see Leticia’s agency, resistances and creative ways she makes space for herself and to question what else might be happening in her life. Leticia’s multiple identities (black, gender variant, young, living in poverty, homeless) and components of her life become a small piece of the story of Leticia’s complex personhood. We simplify the story of Leticia when we flatten her narrative into one of being at-risk. A more rich and nuanced story about Leticia and trans youth extends beyond their status as at-risk or resilient and recognizes them as having a complex personhood.

By granting trans youth a complex personhood we can explore the intricacies of their daily life experiences, question how institutional forces influence how they move

through the world and the small and big ways they challenge, resist and make space for themselves in a society that is often oppressive. For Gordon,

those who live in the most dire circumstances possess a complex and oftentimes contradictory humanity and subjectivity that is never adequately glimpsed by viewing them as victims or, on the other hand, as superhuman agents... Complex personhood means that all people (albeit in specific forms whose specificity is sometimes everything) remember and forget, are beset by contradiction, and recognize and misrecognize themselves and others. (p. 4)

Trans youth deserve a complex personhood and it is through this understanding of their experiences that we can better support them. The story told about Leticia begins with her being bullied at school and ends when her classmate Brandon kills her, but there are other stories we can tell about Leticia that are not centered on her victim narrative. These are hard to find amidst the suffering, abuse and struggles that trans youth face. However, we do know that Leticia was also a lot like other teenagers and enjoyed the practice of trying on new identities and expressing her gender in different ways. School is an important site in which young trans people must navigate social norms, negotiate their identity and narrate who they are and who they want to be.

Research about trans youth is increasingly focusing on trans youth experiences in schools and addressing the high number of trans youth who drop out of school, are bullied at school, and struggle with mental health issues. In this conclusion, I analyze this literature and bring this discussion to a story Chris told me about an experience he had with a girl at school. His story offers a way to explore how trans youth navigate their gender and sexuality at school: a story that sometimes includes risk and resilience, but also

leaves room for a more complex story of trans youth experiences at school. Drawing on this story, I consider how young trans people are re-framing narratives about trans youth and explore how they navigate these complicated social spaces. I begin by looking at some of the research literature about trans youth experiences at school and discuss the recent growth of inclusion policies and practices addressing the challenges facing trans youth.

Trans Youth Experiences at School

In the introduction of this dissertation, I discussed how the research about LGBT youth has focused largely on their risk of suicide, substance abuse and mental health issues. I also noted that recently, there has been an increase in research about trans youth experiences at school. Quantitative studies have assessed the campus climate and in some cases conducted a needs assessment, highlighting the pervasive harassment and assault young trans students face because of their gender identities, gender expressions, and their actual or perceived sexual orientations (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Gutierrez, 2004; Sausa, 2005). These early studies also found that school policies and spaces have excluded trans students and create barriers to trans students' academic achievement (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Sausa, 2005). In 2005, the *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education* published some of the first articles on the experiences of trans youth and trans college students. Included in this issue is a nationwide study by McKinney (2005) about trans undergraduate students experiences at college and a qualitative study Lydia Sausa (2005) conducted with trans students. Findings from McKinney's (2005) study document the lack of programming and resources available to trans students and the low level of education among faculty and staff on trans issues. McKinney insists that although there is

information for educators on how to create a supportive and safe campus for trans students, we still lack information regarding the strategies that trans students use to navigate higher education. Sausa reports similar findings in his research with trans students and emphasizes the importance of including trans voices and experiences in the development of policies and practices at schools.

Recent large quantitative studies find that not much has changed since the first studies documenting trans youth experiences at school; trans youth are still verbally and physically harassed at school and often feel unsafe (Kosciw et al., 2014; Taylor & Peter, 2011). For many trans youth, this can lead to negative mental health outcomes and poor academic achievement (Almeida et al., 2009; Kosciw et al., 2012). In these studies, trans students also report low levels of support from school administration and counselors (Kosciw et al., 2012). Findings from a 2009 Canadian Climate survey conducted by Egale found that 59 per cent of LGBTQ high school students reported they were verbally harassed, compared to seven per cent of non-LGBTQ students. Furthermore, 73 per cent of LGBTQ students reported they felt unsafe at school, compared to 20 per cent who did not. Another nation wide Canadian study surveyed more than 900 trans youth and found similar results, however they did discuss some positive findings. The study found that transgender youth who felt connected to and supported by their family, their school and their community were more likely to report better overall health, particularly if they felt supported in identifying with their chosen gender. In addition to these quantitative studies, there have also been some qualitative studies exploring the resilience of trans youth and how they advocate for their needs in schools (Singh et al., 2013). These studies have inspired a broad range of programs, policies, and legislation meant to protect LGBTQ

youth from bullying and harassment.

In the last few years there has been a shift in school policy to be more inclusive of trans students. This shift reflects one of the findings from Egale’s Every Teacher Project, in which Canadian educators responded to the question “What does school safety mean to you?” by selecting “Inclusion” instead of “Security” and “Regulation”. Egale’s Project found that some provinces and school officials are focusing their efforts toward school safety by fostering inclusive school cultures rather than through punitive measures. This change in strategy is also being supported in recent school district policy and provincial legislation:

The Government of Manitoba (2014) amended The Public Schools Act to require all publicly funded schools to implement safe and inclusive policies for LGBTQ students; the Ontario Accepting Schools Act (2012) mandated that school boards develop equity policies and support student-led groups aimed at promoting inclusivity, including Gay-Straight Alliances. Alberta was the most recent province to introduce this kind of legislation in 2015. In Québec, Bill 56, An Act to Prevent and Stop Bullying and Violence in Schools, was unanimously passed in 2012, requiring public and private schools to develop action plans to end bullying—including that which is based on sexual orientation, sexual identity, and homophobia. Vancouver School Board (2014) has recently revised its LGBTQ-inclusive education policy to reflect best practices in transgender accommodation and inclusion; and, while not amending their provincial legislation, the government of New Brunswick has nonetheless gone one step further than Ontario or Manitoba by instituting a ministerial policy requiring schools to provide a GSA when

requested not only by students but by anyone. (Taylor et al., 2015, p. vii)

This shift in policy and the increasing role of the government in responding to the safety of trans youth at schools is also occurring in the United States (Dear Colleague Letter on Transgender Students, 2016). In May 2016, the U.S. federal government issued guidance to school districts on creating more inclusive practices for trans students based on interpretations of the existing law, case Title IX. This letter includes recommendations for schools regarding sex-segregated activities and facilities and insists that trans students cannot be discriminated against because of their sex. This push towards inclusive practices and policies might reflect a move away from understanding trans youth as always at risk, and yet I am left questioning which trans youth will be included in these new practices and policies and under what conditions trans youth will be welcomed at school.

Alongside these measures is the development of bathroom bills. Trans people, including trans youth, often face harassment and violence when using public bathrooms. In the past few years, bathroom access for young trans people at school has become a highly debated topic and is often where the fight for trans inclusion takes place. Trans youth describe feeling afraid to use the washroom at school and this fear affects their mental health and feeling of safety. In Canada, these debates have focused on the Gender/Bathroom Bill C279; Bill C-279 “seeks to fight hate crimes against transgender individuals by adding gender identity provisions to both the Criminal Code and the Canadian Human Rights Act” (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/transgender-rights-bill-gutted-by-transphobic-senate-amendment-1.2975024>).³¹ Despite the tensions surrounding

³¹ Trans advocacy groups have described amendments to the bill as transphobic because of access restrictions and spaces that are exempt from the bill that affect trans people. Senators like Conservative MP Rob Anders argue, “it is the duty of the House of

these debates, a number of school boards in Canada have already begun to make changes. For example, in Alberta, the Calgary Board of Education has decided to include gender-neutral washrooms in the design of its new school buildings. In Ontario, recent changes to the Ontario Human Rights Code have required the Toronto District School Board accommodate transgender and non-binary people through practices like the implementation of all-gender washrooms in public schools. These shifts in Canadian schools to create all-gender or gender-neutral washrooms demonstrate both the desire to protect the safety of trans youth and the complexity of gender.

Debates about the need for trans inclusive bathrooms highlight the way gender norms and gender recognition influence who has access to which bathrooms. The tensions in discussions about school bathrooms offer a way to explore the complexity of gender and the diverse needs of all students. For example, while some may argue that schools must protect and allow trans youth to use the bathroom of their choice, this is complicated by the fact that some young trans people identify as non-binary and want to use a bathroom that recognizes and reflects their gender identity. Despite the ways schools are adapting to new conceptualizations of gender through the construction of new bathrooms, schools are also reinforcing social norms about gender by continuing to have bathrooms for men and women.

Inclusion practices and policies often encourage the normalization of gender

Commons to protect and safeguard our children from any exposure and harm that would come from giving a man access to women's public washroom facilities" (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/transgender-rights-bill-gutted-by-transphobic-senate-amendment-1.2975024>). In these controversies about gender and public space the child is often invoked and fears about safety and risk are used to maintain normative constructions of sexuality and the body.

identities and expression among trans youth. In *Normal Life*, trans theorist Dean Spade (2011) argues that LGBT movements that have worked to increase rights for inclusion and visibility by creating antidiscrimination and hate crime laws have been very popular. He notes how these laws do not always “improve the life chances of those who are purportedly protected by them” (p. 81) and sets up the ways discrimination laws are reliant on a perpetrator perspective. Spade argues that by looking at “how trans and gender nonconforming vulnerability is produced through population-management interventions” (p. 123) we can further analyze how institutions like schools use gender as an administrative category. Spade argues that policies and laws that target specific issues like using one’s preferred name do important work, but that only focusing on anti-discrimination laws, policy makers do little to address the systemic issues affecting the lives of trans youth and defines the problem of oppression so narrowly that it “erases the complexity and breadth of the systemic, life-threatening harm that trans resistance seeks to end” (p. 86). Drawing on Spade’s critique of inclusion policies, I question whether inclusion is the best practice for addressing the needs and challenges facing trans youth in schools: What does inclusion mean in these policy documents and how are educators implementing these policies? Often, inclusion practices attempt to normalize the complexity of individual experiences, rather than recognizing and respecting difference. And yet, many of the trans youth I spoke with wanted to fit in and be seen as normal at school.

I bring these tensions to my analysis of Chris’s story and I am attentive to how the construction of his narrative tells a story about how he wants me to recognize him. In my discussion I ask: How does the school matter in his story about being a young trans

person? What role does the school have in his story and how he navigates his gender? For Chris, school is a place where he tries on new identities, interacts with peers, has a crush, and builds relationships with teachers. This narrative is important because it offers another story about trans youth experiences at school.

Encountering Desire at School

Chris told me a story about his relationship to his trans identity and his sexuality through a story about his body and his intelligibility. He reflected upon his first two months in a large public high school and an experience he had while going stealth. Stealth or “passing” is defined as the non-disclosure to others of one’s trans history and that the sex they were assigned at birth does not align with their gender (Garber, 1997; Goffman, 1963). As Kristen Schilt (2010) points out, “passing suggests acting rather than embodying” and as opposed to “the assumption of fraud or deceit implied by passing” (p. 15). When a trans person is going stealth others read them as someone who was born with a sex that aligns with their gender.³² Chris told me about an experience he had while going stealth and begins by him setting the scene: Chris is standing outside, alone after school, waiting for someone to pick him when a girl approaches him.

And this girl came up to me and she was like, ‘hey- you wanna hook up?’ And I was like... um, no. And she was like, ‘come on, it would be fun.’ And she full on

³² Aaron Devor (2004) theorizes a fourteen-stage model of FTM identity development, in which the FTM progresses from doubting his trans identity to learning about transsexuality, to strongly identifying as a trans person. In this model, stealth is conceptualized as part of the thirteenth stage in a developmental sequence; “Integration” is a time when the trans person’s goal is to live completely and invisibly as a male. In “The Power of Stealth: (In)Visible Sites of Female-to-Male Transsexual Resistance”, Elijah Edelman (2009) critiques Devor’s analysis of stealth and argues that stealth is a “dynamic and situated practice of ideological negotiation” (p. 169).

just came at me and kissed me and I was like okay, hold on, okay hold on. And then she put her hand up my shirt and I was like wow, okay we're in the school right now and like, I'd like try to pull her hand out and she like grabbed my boob and I was like okay. And she was like, 'what the fuck was that?' And I was like, you didn't let me finish. And then like, she like didn't even wanna like ask any questions, she like just left and I was like, I told you not to.

The public/private setting is important to the story, providing Chris and the girl a different relation to each other that is not always possible during school hours but still influenced by the fact that they are at school. After class, the school is unsupervised, strangely caught between the rules and regulations of the school and the public domain of the neighborhood and city in which the school is set. The site of the school continues to hold all of the desires, smells, bodies, flirtation, and risks that move through and are contained by the school grounds.

Chris reminds the girl of their location as she makes her sexual advances, hinting at what sexual behaviors are deemed appropriate at school and communicating his ambivalence through the limits of the school. Despite his requests that she "hold on," the girl continues to pursue Chris. So often the trans body is positioned as the foreigner in schools, and yet Chris offers us a different story about trans embodiment at school. Rather than offer a narrative about his struggle to find a safe bathroom or the gender pronouns his teachers use to refer to him, Chris tells a story about his body being desired. He also narrates a complicated story about his masculinity, sexuality and intelligibility. Through his narration of his experience of the event, Chris reframes discourses about trans youth from risk to one that can also hold stories about pleasure and desire.

Narrating Intelligibility and Inclusion through Desire

From the beginning of the story Chris tells the girl that he does not want to “hook up”. As her advances progress, Chris offers another story about his desires by telling her to “hold on.” His short responses to her sexual impositions articulate his ambivalence and presents questions about how Chris wants me to understand the story: Is it a story about sexual assault? Is it a story of him being desired by a girl? Maybe it is both of these and also a story of fitting in and being normal. The narrative centers on the girl’s desire for Chris, or as we find out later, the first cute guy she saw. But how does Chris want me to understand and recognize him in the story? I am a thirty-year-old genderqueer masculine researcher and, as the audience to Chris’s story, I wonder how Chris structures his story about himself in order to be intelligible. It might be that Chris feels like he needs to tell a story about being desired by a girl so that I will acknowledge and accept his masculinity.

As I discussed in my methods chapter, Butler argues that the narrative form takes on a structure with a “set of sequential events with plausible transitions” and is “directed toward an audience with the aim of persuasion” (Butler, 2001, p. 12). Stories are persuasive in nature, arguing for a particular representation of truth. In the interview, Chris tells me a story about himself that relies upon existing norms and relations, and is influenced both by his desire to be understood by others and to fit into existing narratives about transgender people. Chris seems proud of how he is recognized as a “normal” straight guy and desired by an attractive “normal” straight girl. His story is a narrative of experience, told chronologically and constructed to unfold that way. In order to understand Chris and what it is like being a young trans person it is important to consider who Chris

imagines I am and if he thinks we share similar experiences and language. This is not to say that his experience does not represent the truth, but that the way the story is told might offer an opportunity to think about the experience of being a young trans person. How might the stories Chris tells me act as devices for him to narrate the self he wants me to see? For instance, Chris might be using the young woman as a device to tell me a story about being desired, transforming a story of rejection into a story of desire.

In the story, Chris is the attractive cis guy who is *so* desired by women that they are out of control and cannot keep their hands off him. While Chris is telling her to “hold on” the girl puts her hand up his shirt. Her advances threaten to reveal Chris’s body and he tries to stop her from touching him but she is too fast or forceful and grabs his “boob.” The girl is surprised by his body and his breast, and it is at this moment when she leaves him and asks: “what the fuck is that?” Chris narrates a story of how the girl wants to know what she has touched, but she is unable to communicate her desires through Chris’s body. It is hard to impute what the girl desires or thinks about the situation, and I am left wondering what Chris’s recounting of her behavior means for him and his gender and sexual claims. Chris narrates the girls’ experience of Chris’s body as something that is foreign to her, and in this way his trans body becomes the foreign object at school

The surprise the girl encounters offers a pause in her sexual advances. We could read this moment as a way in which Chris’s body fails him. Or perhaps it is a story about how his body changed the girl’s experience or sexual desire. How does unwanted attention fit into his effort to become legible? In defense of her question about his body, Chris responds, stating: “I told you not to.” For Chris, telling the girl to “hold on” was in anticipation of her reaction and a warning about his body. After the surprise, Chris wished

she had wanted to ask questions. He seems to be saying that he wanted her to be curious about his body or that he wanted to be understood and intelligible, and remain desired.

Gordon's (2008) complex personhood helps us understand both Chris's agency and the challenges he faces in this story. Although Chris may wish for the inclusion and recognition the girl offers him in her initial approach, he may also feel scared about being exposed or rejected. His fear that his body makes him vulnerable bumps up against the excitement and pleasure he might feel in being desired. His hesitation and ambivalence is in tension with narratives of masculinity. After the girl finds his breast, the tone of the exchange shifts and Chris's wish for inclusion becomes less about being desired or recognized as a cis-boy and more about being understood.

Embodying Risky Gender

Two weeks after the girl approached Chris at school, she comes up to him again and apologizes. Chris recounts the experience:

And I saw her like two weeks later, and that was like after I got the binder, and she actually came up and apologized to me. She's like, 'I'm really sorry for like what I did. That was really, really, like, uncalled for and I was really horny, and I don't know why, and like, I went for like the first cute guy I saw.' And I was like, oh, okay thank you, I guess. And then like, and she was just like, 'Oh well you look like, like you are very attractive and like you do look better with a flat chest and stuff like that. And like no matter what, don't let people put you down and, like, I'm really sorry if you took that the wrong way. It's just it really, really surprised me that you have boobs.' And I was like yeah, I don't, I kinda surprised everyone

when they found out. And she just like started laughing and like so I haven't really talked to her since then [...] it was nice that she apologized and, like, she said that she didn't mean it to come across as like rude or anything, so she didn't know how to react, and like, I didn't know how to react cuz like, I was like, what is going on right now?! So like, but otherwise it ended well I guess.

Chris seems unsure how to understand this apology and her ambivalent desire for him. Her return comes after Chris has started to wear a binder and his breasts are no longer visible or able to be grabbed. The foreignness of his body has been contained and she offers him recognition and desire in his new presentation, noting how he looks "better with a flat chest and stuff like that." Her comments voice her attraction for him and yet through her command that Chris should not let people bully him, she simultaneously constructs him as a young at-risk trans person. The story the girl gives to Chris about his legibility is caught up in discourses about trans youth, influencing how the girl tells a story about herself and what stories are possible for Chris to tell about himself.

The girl is unable to recognize and understand Chris as just another teenager when Chris becomes an at-risk trans youth. The girl feels sorry about how her reaction to finding Chris's breast might have been interpreted in the "wrong way" however it is unclear how Chris is supposed to make sense of her reaction. Chris's account of the girls' desire for and recognition of him can be interpreted in a number of ways, but it is unclear what the girl is communicating to Chris about her experience of the event. The uncertainty, ambivalence and contradiction in what the girl says might tell us something about the process of learning and encountering the unknown in others and ourselves. Chris tells a story about how his "boobs" are a surprise for everyone, possibly even a surprise for himself. This

surprise offers Chris and the girl new stories about gender, bodies, desire, and identity. They are both met with not knowing how to react and how to make sense of the situation.

In my analysis of Chris's story I broke it up into two sections to explore how the story is constructed and how this construction matters for how Chris wants to be recognized. For example, if I had only heard the first half of his story I might understand his narrative as a tale of sexual assault, and while it may be that, it is also a story about Chris trying to describe the pleasures of both recognition and misrecognition. It pleases Chris to be misrecognized as a cute cis-boy and it may also please him to be recognized as a trans boy who elicits the care and concern (if not the desire) of the girl. Chris's narrative is possibly about being sexually assaulted *and* about being a normal teenage guy, who feels ambivalent, curious, disappointed, and hopeful in his interactions with a girl at school.

Chris offers a story about his experiences at school that complicate how we understand the success and purpose of trans inclusion policies in schools. He wants to be recognized and understood by his peers and yet the only narratives available to the girl he encounters is that trans youth are at risk of being bullied. For Chris, it is as if these narratives get in the way of him being seen as a peer and just another guy. Throughout the story, inclusion becomes tricky for both Chris and the girl to navigate. The development of recent policies focused on bathrooms, preferred names and pronouns, and the creation of safe spaces for trans youth seem far removed from the story Chris offers about his experience as a young trans person at school. These policies attend to the procedural and administrative components of the school's inclusion of trans students, whereas Chris's story addresses more of the daily life experiences and challenges of being a young person.

Of course, Chris also spoke about the importance of having policies and resources that attend to the needs of trans students. In high school, he helped re-start the GSA and told me he became known as an advocate for trans students in the surrounding public high schools. After leaving the large public high school he attended and enrolling in a small public high school, Chris benefited from and valued the mentorship of a trans teacher. The creation of new policies to aid trans students like Chris is important, but may not be the only way to support them.

As I discussed earlier, Spade (2011) reminds us that inclusion policies often leave out the most marginalized and vulnerable individuals and do not create large systematic change in our institutions. I agree with Spade that inclusion policies have vastly different effects on each individual and do little to address the systemic issues affecting the lives of trans youth. Compared to the young person named Leticia that I introduced at the beginning of this conclusion, Chris is white, masculine, and comes from a middle class background with a stable supportive family life. Gordon (2008) helps us see the racial and gender systems of oppression that effect how Leticia moved through the school and the choices she made to make her life livable. Chris has a different set of needs and experiences than Leticia did, and yet inclusion policies are tasked with supporting both of these individuals. Although I heed Spade's critique, I believe that inclusion policies and practices in schools are a great step in supporting young trans students.

Conclusion

Chris's story demonstrates the need to re-frame discourses about trans youth, so that we can better understand the challenges they face and how they want to be

recognized. Although this story has little to do with Chris's name and how he chose it, his narrative exposes how Chris understands and constructs his identity. This project has used the topic of names and naming to explore trans youth narratives of the self. Names provided a way into these conversations and invited trans youth to begin their story of who they are removed from a discourse of risk and resilience. Throughout this dissertation, I have explored how young trans people narrate who they are through the themes of gender, family and development. Names and the process of choosing a name presented a way into many of these discussions, but was not always a part of the stories trans youth told me.

The conversations I had with participants often began with a discussion of the name they had chosen and moved quickly into a detailed history of their relationship with their family. I heard about how naming practices and family dynamics influenced their naming process; how despite tenuous relationships with parents, some young people had close relationships with their grandparents; or how current family conflicts could be overlooked in hopes of building stronger and more supportive relationships in the future. Throughout many of these stories young people's cultural background and/or racial identity shaped the list of possible names they chose from, and names became a way of expressing and representing their identity. For some, names were a way to announce and claim a less visible racial identity, while others choose a more European name as a way to better fit into normative constructions of masculinity and/or the privileging of people with a European name. Similar to the way family naming practices provided trans youth with a sense of family belonging, acceptance and connection, some trans youth invited their friends into the process of helping them chose a new name in the hopes that their friends would be more supportive of their transition. Trans youth felt a great sense of acceptance

and recognition when friends and family addressed them by their new name, and yet beginning to identify with a new name was often strange for both trans youth and their loved ones. The intimacy and vulnerability accompanied by asking someone to use a new name sometimes felt too great for trans youth and that first request or announcement of a new name was described as taking that first big step in their transitioning process. Names carried a heavy weight and symbolized the start of becoming or identifying as someone different.

Representations and expressions of gender were an important part of how trans youth narrated who they are and how they wanted others to recognize them. Trans youth told stories about difficult and sometimes painful interactions with friends, family and service providers where their gender was mis-read. For instance, despite wearing a dress, some trans women were referred to using he/his pronouns. I also heard complicated stories from young genderqueer people who wished that people would address them using they/their pronouns and struggled to confront friends, family, and authority figures like teachers and professors about their preferred pronoun. Throughout these difficult conversations and interactions was a deep desire to be recognized and understood.

This dissertation was also about stories of development and exploring how trans youth narrate their transition from being a young person to becoming an adult. The process of growing up is often described in a linear progression and yet I have argued that growing up also involves backwards and sideways movement. Trans youth stories about who they are become tasked with incorporating a childhood with a different gender and an old name, while simultaneously imagining a future self in the face of research that tells them about the high statistics of trans youth suicides and mental health issues. Their gender

pulls them sideways and their stories about who they are attempt to realign their narrative of growing up with normative stories about young people and adulthood. In this process, trans youth are navigating social norms about gender and finding ways to fit in with their peers and family. These stories of development reminded me that trans youth face many of the same challenges that all young people encounter. Like most young people, trans youth want to have close friends, a supportive family, go on dates, find a partner, and get a job.

Schools are where young people spend most of their time; it is where they do their growing up, where they make friends, where they find mentors, and where they learn about social norms. My dissertation offers these five ways to help us understand the experiences of trans youth in schools. First, trans youth, like all young people, use school as a site to explore, understand and experiment with their gender. Trans youth are figuring out how they want to express their gender and use others to learn about gender and to construct a narrative about their own gender identity. Schools, peers, and family play a crucial role in this process and it is important that trans youths' gender identities and names are respected. Second, trans youth also expose the ways gender is messy and is difficult to narrate. It can take time for trans youth to describe and understand their gender. Third, trans youth help us think about the queerness of development, pointing to the ways development is often sideways and delayed. The push to construct development as a linear progress narrative limits how we think about the process of growing up and the ways we support trans youth in schools. Fourth, trans youth, like many young people, have complicated relationships with their families and sometimes feel like their gender is misunderstood or not recognized. Despite these challenges, trans youth often still feel very connected and close to their family. Lastly, although trans youth are defined by their gender,

they describe and construct their identities through their relationship to their racial identity, cultural background, class background, abilities, sexuality and nationhood. These five ways of understanding the experiences of trans youth in schools demonstrate that trans youth face many of the same challenges all young people experience.

Schools are always changing and teachers, administrators and students are in constant renegotiation of the social norms and practices at school. The recent shift in some schools to be more welcoming and hospitable to young trans people is being shaped by both policies and trans youth who play an important role in influencing what trans inclusion looks like and how they want to be treated. In this conclusion I have explored the ways inclusion is complicated and argued that it is important for educators to listen to the needs of young trans people and to recognize that like all youth, they deserve a complex personhood. The stories we tell about trans youth matters, and when educators and policy makers only see trans youth as trans, they limit the stories available to trans youth about who they are and who they can become. Part of creating a more inclusive environment at schools is listening for the multiple and competing stories about what it is like being a young trans person. This dissertation has helped to re-frame stories about trans youth and contributed to the increasingly diverse experiences and identities of young trans people.

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Appendix A

Call for Participants

Hi, my name is Julia Sinclair-Palm and I am a doctoral student at York University in the Faculty of Education. I am doing a project about how trans youth choose their name(s). I am interested in listening to the stories trans youth tell about their name and process of choosing a name, as a way to learn more about the experiences of being a young trans person and to think about how people tell stories about themselves. I am hoping to talk with trans people who are between the ages of 15 and 25 years old. If you decide you want to be involved in the project you would participate in two interviews, each about an hour long. You would get a small form of compensation for your participation.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, you may contact the Senior Manager and Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics.

As part of the study, I will provide confidentiality to all participants. This project is conducted with the supervision of my project advisor, Dr. Jen Gilbert.

If you are interested in any additional information or have any questions please contact me.

Thank you,

Julia Sinclair-Palm

How did you choose your NAME?

I am a grad student at York University and I am interested in talking to young trans people about how they chose their name. You must be between 15-25 years old in order to participate. If you decide you want to be involved in the project you would participate in two interviews, each about an hour long. You would get a small form of compensation for your participation.

If you want to know any more information or are interested in participating please contact Julia.

Appendix C

Interview Guide #1

1. Tell me about your name.

What does your name mean to you? (history, origins, significance)

What do you want your name to say about you?

What does your name make you think about?

How does your name make you feel?

What qualities do you value in your name?

How do you feel when you hear your name?

2. What was it like to choose a name?

When you were thinking about what your name would be, what fantasies did you have about what you would be like?

What qualities did you look for in a name?

What are the different parts of your name?

Do you know anyone with your name?

Is your name common or unique?

Where did your name come from?

3. Describe the last time you introduced yourself to someone.

In what ways do you introduce yourself?

Are there other names that people call you?

What do those other name that people call you mean to you?

Do you ever wish your name were different?

Often in research projects, in order to ensure anonymity for participants, researchers, or in some cases, participants, choose a pseudonym to refer to each participant. I will ask each participant to take some time and think about a pseudonym they would like me to use to refer to them in the project.

4. Choose a pseudonym that I can use to refer to you in this project.

What pseudonym did you choose?

Tell me about it.

How does it describe who you are?

5. Tell me about the three words you wrote down on the questionnaire.

How do they describe who you are?

6. How has it felt to talk so much about names?

What does it feel like to be asked about your name?

Is there anything you wish I had asked about?

Is there anything you want to add?

Appendix D

Interview Guide #2

Welcome back.

1. Tell me about an experience you had with your name since we last met.
 - What happened in the incident?
 - How did you feel?
 - What did it make you think about?

2. How did you tell the people in your life about your new name?
 - How do you talk to other people about how you choose your name?

3. Tell me about a time when you told a friend about your name?
 - What stories do you tell about your name to friends?
 - How do your friends or partners feel about your name?
 - What role did your friends play in the process of you choosing a name?
 - Are there any friends who don't call you by your name?

4. What stories do you tell your parents about your name?
 - How does your family feel about your name?
 - What role did your parents have in your process of choosing a name?
 - When your parents were choosing a name for you what kind of fantasies do you think they had for you?

5. What happens when you talk to people with authority about your name (police officers, medical providers, airport)?

6. Did the second interview feel any different from the first interview?
 - Is there anything you wish I had asked about?
 - Is there anything you want to add?