Exploring Non-binary Genders:

Language and Identity

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the

award of Doctor in Philosophy

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January 2020

Acknowledgments

Writing this thesis has been one of the most difficult tasks I have ever undertaken. It has been, in many ways, both a painful and exhilarating experience that can only be described as an emotional rollercoaster. I would have never been able to complete this thesis without the help of some wonderful people, all of whom I would like to thank here:

First of all, I would like to thank my partner – and soon-to-be-husband – Cooper Gatewood. Throughout this process, he has seen me experience every emotion, every feeling, and every possible mood. He has not only supported me emotionally, but also intellectually – through his amazing proofreading skills and willingness to listen to my random (insightful?) midnight thoughts. I could not have finished this thesis without you. I love you.

I am eternally grateful to my first supervisor, Dr Zowie Davy, who has not only expanded my knowledge in the subject area of trans studies, but has also mentored me in publishing, public speaking, and writing. I am also thankful for her honest, vibrant, and rich feedback throughout the duration of this project. I have enjoyed working together, and I am proud to have had Dr Zowie Davy as my supervisor. I would also like to thank my second supervisor, Prof Brian Brown, whose insight and stimulating comments enriched my thesis and brought the analysis to a higher level.

I would also like to thank my examiners, Dr Meg-John Barker and Dr Iain Williamson, as well as Professor Julie Fish (who chaired the session), for their commitment to ensuring my viva experience was not only intellectually stimulating and lively, but also fair, ethical, consensual, and compassionate, particularly amid the covid-19 epidemic. I am very thankful for their time and thoughtful feedback.

Abstract

This thesis explores the multiple ways in which non-binary people negotiate their identities, their authenticity, and their embodied experiences through language. Twenty-two non-binary-identified people living in the UK were interviewed for this project. Those same participants also provided writing samples which were included in the analysis. Additionally, a 2.9 million-word corpus of *non-binary language* was analysed using corpus linguistic tools. This thesis theorised gender as something one *becomes* rather than something one *is* (Linstead and Pullen, 2006), a relational process through *affective intensities* which move through the body, society, language, and other material and abstract elements. Drawing from *assemblage theory* (DeLanda, 2006) and Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) materialist ontology, which acknowledges the multiple (linguistic and material) components that merge at particular points to produce (or *assemble*) a *becoming*, I identified the most significant *affective intensities* which aided in the *(de/re)territorialisation* of non-binary *gender becomings,* or the *non-binary-assemblage*. Furthermore, the theory of *linguistic becomings*, which refers to the discovery, adoption, (re)assessment, and ongoing social negotiation of gender-related language, was developed in this thesis. The linguistic parameters of non-binary identities were found to be constantly reassessed, redefined, and renegotiated. A variety of material embodiments – and their relationship to language – were also identified, including affective fluidity and neutrality, and dysphoria. This thesis also explores the ways in which non-binary people in the present study navigated the world using *non-binary language,* the distress that originated from social interactions in which their language was not affirmed (i.e., misgendering), and the various ways in which they managed these situations. Overall, this research found that utilising a distinct type of language – *a linguistic becoming* – not only served as a tool to differentiate their gender and *territorialise* their identity, but also as a marker of social identity and group membership, thus allowing their identities to be recognised and more widely validated.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Smith (2019)

"Today is a good day so here goes. I've decided I am changing my pronouns to THEY/THEM ❤ after a lifetime of being at war with my gender I've decided to embrace myself for who I am, inside and out. I'm so excited and privileged to be surrounded by people that support me in this decision but I've been very nervous about announcing this because I care too much about what people think but fuck it! I understand there will be many mistakes and mis gendering but all I ask is you please please try. I hope you can see me like I see myself now. Thank you.
P.s. I am at no stage just yet to eloquently speak at length about what it means to be non binary but I can't wait for the day that I am. So for now I just want to be VISIBLE and open. If you have questions and are wondering what this all means I'll try my best to explain but I have also tagged below the human beings who are fighting the good fight everyday. These are activists and leaders of the non binary/trans community that have helped me and given me so much clarity and understanding."

Figure 1. Sam Smith's Instagram post, 13 September 2019.

Situating my Research: Non-binary Gender Identities and Language

Multiple genders – and terms associated with them – that challenge the gender binaries of boy/girl, woman/man and masculinity/femininity are becoming more prevalent in Western discourse (Nestle et al., 2002), particularly in the form of "expanded vocabularies of gender identity/expression" (Bragg et al., 2018, p. 1). Among these multiple genders, "non-binary" is one of the most commonly used terms, and is sometimes used as an identity category by people whose gender assigned at birth does not *align* with their current gender identit(y/ies) and/or gender expression(s), but who do not identify (exclusively) as the "opposite" gender (Beemyn, 2005). Non-binary is often used as an umbrella term for individuals who may identify as and/or express: no gender, two genders, a partial gender, an additional gender, a fluid gender, and/or a political and/or personal gender that disrupts the gender binary (Richards and Barker, 2015). Within this umbrella, there are a variety of terms that are sometimes used by individuals to describe (and label) their gender identit(y/ies). According to Barker and Richards (2015, p. 166), these include, but are not limited to:

- Having no gender: gender-neutral, non-gendered, agender, neuter, neutrois

- Having aspects of both man and woman: mixed gender, androgynous, pangender

- Having a partial identification with one gender: demi boy/girl, pangender

- Having an additional gender: third gender, other gender, pangender

- Moving between (multiple) genders: bigender, trigender, genderfluid, pangender

- Political and/or personal disruption of the gender binary: genderfuck, genderqueer

    Because non-binary people generally do not (solely) identify with the gender

they were assigned at birth, these genders are typically subsumed within the larger umbrella of trans identities and expressions (including, for instance, transgender, transsexual, transfeminine, etc.) in trans literature (see, for instance, Currah, 2006). However, not all non-binary people identify as trans and vice versa (Titman, 2014). It is also clear that terms such as pangender can mean different things to different people; therefore, meanings are not always stable and, as I will demonstrate in this thesis, are always shifting in unpredictable ways.

Non-binary gender identities have indeed gained some media recognition in recent years due to the increasing number of people who currently identify under this umbrella term, including celebrities such as singer Sam Smith, whose recent public coming out statement is displayed in Figure 1. It is therefore possible that the number of people who identity as non-binary is increasing, as cultural awareness of these genders continues to grow (Richards et al., 2016) and the number of people going to gender identity clinics increases (Arcelus et al., 2015).

In terms of embodiment, non-binary people may or may not want to go through gender-affirming intervention such as hormones and surgery. For instance, some non-binary people might choose to take "conventional" trans masculine or trans feminine treatment paths, while others may choose to combine them, or not go through any procedure (Richards & Barker, 2016). And while some non-binary individuals might want to undergo gender-affirming procedures, they might be unable to do so because they might not fit into the medical/psychological binary trans narrative of being "trapped in the wrong body" (see, for instance, Bornstein, 1994). Stone (2006) argues that this narrative is still prevalent within the medical and psychological discourses of transness. Nonetheless, in terms of gender expression, non-binary people might index

their gender identities through a variety of visual markers such as clothing, accessories, hair styles, etc. (Richards et al. 2015), as well as *performative* acts such as mannerisms, gait, pitch, etc. (Butler, 1999). Therefore, in terms of the materiality of their bodies and gender expressions, non-binary people are a highly heterogeneous group.

This thesis explores the gender identity and the language usage of those who identify as non-binary. While the materiality of the body will be present throughout this research, this project focusses on language, given the seemingly new, emerging, and rapidly evolving discourses around gender diversity and the language surrounding non-binary gender identities. For instance, the mere emergence of words such as non-binary, genderqueer, agender, bigender, etc. (to name a few) has gained a great deal of attention in academia, traditional and social media, and in political discourse in the past five years, a development which the National Geographic (2017) characterised as "The Gender Revolution." It is possible that such linguistic movement has allowed individuals to communicate their relationships with gender more "effectively" – that is, a wide variety of linguistic resources and terminologies have been devised, employed, and legitimised. Many have framed this as a positive development, given the constraints of the gender binary and the limited language surrounding it. Moreover, it has been suggested that many non-binary-identified people indeed request others to use a gender-neutral pronoun such as *they/them* when referring to them (i.e., '*they* are happy' rather than '*he* is happy'); use neutral language such as *sibling, parent, partner*, etc.; and may use titles such as *Mx*. While not all non-binary people employ this language, it is evident that non-binary people are 'in the know' about the linguistic parameters around linguistic gender-neutrality (Bennet, 2016). These linguistic features may be used as a way to index their gender identity to/by others. However, requesting other people –

especially strangers – respect this language can sometimes be difficult and, in some instances, dangerous. This poses a predicament that most cisgender (those whose gender identity *aligns* with their assigned gender) people do not typically face: to be misgendered, or have their gender misunderstood and sometimes disregarded, due the lack of understanding about gender diversity.

The present thesis, therefore, explores the ways in which non-binary-identified people come to embrace and/or understand gender-neutral language (including the label non-binary itself), and how they negotiate and navigate social interactions in a society that, in most cases, is still unaware of what is meant by the mere concept of non-binary gender identities.

Why is language important?

Language has the potential to both enable and inhibit the articulation of gender (Lev, 2004). In the fight for gender recognition, many non-binary activists have taken an approach to gender identity that can only be described as "strategic essentialism" (Spivak, 1985). This position understands identities as (temporarily) stable and fixed in order to legitimise and achieve political, legal, and economic recognition (as well as linguistic recognition). For instance, many non-binary activists have campaigned for the recognition and (legal) legitimatisation of gender-affirming language such as gender-neutral labels, pronouns, titles, etc. (All About Trans, 2016; Bergman & Barker, 2017). Such language is said to be *affirming* in that it does not deny the existence of multiple genders. Gendered language is therefore positioned as a stable part of the self, requiring affirmation and legalisation. These campaigns have indeed gained a great deal of recognition in recent years, affecting the ways in which gendered language is employed

in places like university campuses, banks, social media platforms, etc. (Bennet, 2016) by advocating, for instance, that *Mx* should be an option in official documents (Elan-Cane, 2014).

While this thesis acknowledges that there is more to one's experience than language and discourse, language is of special interest given that a great deal of non-binary people use linguistic markers such as pronouns, titles, and labels that often differ from the ones they were assigned at birth – and that can be considered atypical in English, which has many inherently gendered terms. While not all non-binary people change these markers, there is broad understanding and use of these linguistic markers within the non-binary community. Those outside the community, however, may not understand, recognise, or validate such linguistic markers, thus knowingly or unknowingly invalidating the (linguistic) identities of non-binary people. In other words, *misgendering* may occur. The concept of "misgendered" and "appropriately gendered" were first proposed by Julia Serano (2007, p. 179) in reference to the concept of "passing." Serano (2007) argued that, in naming these experiences, transgender people could shed light on the "cissexual gender entitlement" (p. 179) – that is, the privilege that cisgender people hold.

Research conducted on (binary) trans people has indeed shown that linguistic misgendering has negative impacts on their sense of inclusion and belonging (Ansara & Hegarty, 2012). Yet, no empirical research thus far has aimed to understand the linguistic experiences of non-binary people – namely, how they arrive to, negotiate, navigate, and develop their identity – and whether (and to what degree) language is a part of their identity. Therefore, studying this population is crucial, especially considering that transphobia and non-binary invisibility (as expressed through

language) may also have serious psychological repercussions on non-binary people. By taking a robust approach to research that mixes both quantitative and qualitative methods and a bricolage of perspectives originating from psychology, sociology, sociolinguistics, and applied linguistics, this research aims to fill in a gap in the literature.

This research extends the theoretical field of psychology by implementing Deleuze's ideas of *affect*, referring to the ways in which the human body can both affect and be affected by its environment (Deleuze, 1988). *Becoming* is another important Deleuzian concept and is used here to theorise gender as "rhizomatic, nomadic, a constant journey with no final destination" (Linstead and Pullen, 2006, p. 1292). This theoretical approach steps away from purely positivist or constructivist theoretical commitments often found within the field of psychology, arguing instead that a *non-binary* approach to theory is required to understand non-binary people's *gender and linguistic becomings.* This research also employs theories and perspectives from social psychology and queer theory, while also acknowledging the importance of the material body through *assemblage theory* (DeLanda, 2006). *Assemblage theory*, which draws from Deleuze and Guattari (1987), acknowledges the multiple components (linguistic and material; human and non-human) that merge at particular points and in ongoing ways to produce (or *assemble*) a *becoming*. *Affective flows* have the capacity to either *territorialise* (or stabilise) or to *deterritorialise* (destabilise) the *assemblage* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988), thus creating the possibility for a *becoming* to emerge and to *reterritorialise*.

The concept of *linguistic becomings* is developed throughout this thesis as a contribution to the theory and the knowledge base in the area of trans and non-binary

studies. This theoretical development conveys the important role that language has on the *assemblage* of non-binary gender identities while demonstrating that the material body is also an intrinsic element that contributes significantly to this *assemblage*. I argue that the importance placed on language by non-binary people helps *assemble* a new set of social contexts and parameters, which are constantly being adopted, (re)negotiated, and (re)configured by non-binary-identified people. These processes are understood here as *linguistic becomings*.

Research looking at the experiences of non-binary people and language use is scarce, despite it being one of the most salient themes that emerges in research. Richards and Barker (2013) argue that some non-binary people have adopted a gender-neutral language which enables recognition and representation of their identities. This shift in language has produced the need of an "ask etiquette" during social interactions – that is, asking people what pronouns/titles/name they use, which is now common practice within some non-binary and trans communities (Richards & Barker, 2013). Psychological research has shown that linguistic misgendering increases the sense of exclusion of trans people (see, for instance, Ansara and Hegarty, 2014). This is also known as *cisgenderism*, "the ideology that delegitimises people's own designations of their genders and bodies" (Ansara and Hegarty, 2014, p. 2). For non-binary people, it can be hypothesised that this is also the case, given that language is a non-trivial issue for many of them. For instance, research conducted by Saltzburg and Davis (2010) in the US found that genderqueer youth feared that their genders were not being recognised through language. Their participants wanted to dismantle the binary language used when referring to them. The researchers mentioned that the participants struggled with titles, pronouns, gendered language, and birth names because they

misrepresented and mislabelled them. Additionally, participants' families had a hard time accommodating and some refused to use the language they requested (Saltzburg and Davis, 2010), thus invalidating their identities – and *cisgendering* their experiences. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) states that transsexual, transgender, and gender non-conforming individuals "feel uncomfortable being regarded by others, or functioning in society, as members of their assigned gender" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 454). Yet, no research has examined the ways in which non-binary people negotiate this linguistic emergence, navigate social interactions in which their genders are assumed, and whether non-binary people experience a sense of exclusion due the use of *cisgenderist* language. And, in fact, no research has examined whether the use of gender-affirming language has any benefits among non-binary people. The present research aims to fill these gaps in the literature.

Present Research

The thesis explores the experiences of non-binary people by analysing twenty-two semi-structured interviews alongside twenty-two short writing samples from non-binary people living in the UK. Additionally, a bespoke corpus of *non-binary language* (hereafter, the non-binary corpus or the NBC) was created for this project. This corpus consists of online language originating from an anonymous support forum where non-binary-identified people discuss their experiences and share information online. The corpus data was initially analysed using quantitative corpus linguistic tools which aided in deciphering the linguistic patterns (in the form of *intensities*). All data was then analysed qualitatively through the lens of *assemblage theory*, which aims to uncover the

non-hierarchical, relational affects that contribute to the emergence and negotiation of a given *assemblage* – in this case, the *assemblage* of non-binary gender identities both offline and online.

The interview data as well as the writing samples were analysed together in the first stage of the research, serving as a guiding compass for subsequent analysis. The NBC was analysed using corpus linguistics tools which allowed the researcher to extrapolate the most salient discourses within the dataset in the form of keywords, collocations, and concordance lines. These were then used to create a rhizomatic network of collocations. An in-depth analysis of these linguistics patterns was then conducted in order to reveal the most salient *affective intensities* within the corpus – that is, the interconnected meanings, metaphors, representations, and stories (Burr, 2003) that are *assembled* within the data. According to Baker (2014), this mixed methods design provides a more robust analysis. The research design and mode of enquiry provide a novel, empirical insight into this severely under-researched population. While corpus linguistics methods have not been widely used in the field of psychology, this method has been found useful in other social science disciplines (e.g., psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, cultural studies) for analysing large amounts of data. One of the main advantages of combining these methods is that it allows the researcher to study high volumes of data at once, making it possible for the researcher to explore a variety of themes within the data; something that, if done manually, would take a long time or it would be impossible to do.

Combined, the interviews, short writings, and the NBC make a significant contribution to the knowledge base on non-binary gender identities, their emergence, linguistic *assemblage*, and ongoing negotiation.

Research Aims

As noted above, within the social sciences, there is a dearth of research into the experiences of non-binary people, their identities, embodiment, and language use. Therefore, this research aims to gain a better understanding of the experience of people who identify as non-binary in terms of their psychological, linguistic, embodied, and social experiences. This analysis sheds light on the discursive and material elements that come together in order to *assemble* non-binary identities. As such, this analysis aims to shed light on the *assemblage* of non-binary identities and explores the following research questions:

- What roles do linguistic and material forces play in the *assemblage* of non-binary gender identities?

- What are the experiences of non-binary people in relation to language? Is language an important factor in experiencing non-binary gender identities?

- Does employing neutral language aid non-binary individuals' sense of identity and belonging?

- Does strictly binary language use in reference to non-binary people (i.e., misgendering) have an impact on non-binary people's identity?

- What are the daily challenges non-binary people face because of their gender identity?

The present research makes important theoretical and methodological contributions to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, etc. (LGBTQ+; queer) psychology and gender studies through its application to non-binary populations, thus contributing to their visibility in the social sciences. By exploring these *affective intensities* and the

influence of language, this research contributes to the knowledge base of non-binary gender identities and their *linguistic becomings*. The present study has a clear, problem-oriented objective that fits nicely within the areas of social psychology, gender studies, and sociolinguistics – making it a truly interdisciplinary study. This project also aims to educate policymakers, academics, and practitioners about the impact of misrepresentation and discrimination on non-binary people.

Positionality

In the interview and short writing portions of this study, where I was to interact with non-binary individuals, a primary concern for me was to engage with participants in the most respectful way. This entailed being well-aware of *trans and non-binary language* and acknowledging the power disparities that existed between myself and the participants. With this in mind, and as recommended by trans researchers/activists such as Jacob Hale (1997), Lal Zimman (2017), and Benjamin Vincent (2018), I familiarised myself with the literature relating to non-binary people's language, well-being, and social representations. This literature showed that non-binary people were regularly misgendered and invalidated in research, and that these linguistic invalidations have been shown to have negative impacts on research participants (Ansara & Hegarty, 2012; Serano, 2007). Therefore, I made it a primary issue to become well-acquainted with the terminologies, language negotiations (such as asking "what are your pronouns?"), and not assuming people's gender based on their appearance. I also made my position as a gay, cisgender man who grew up in Colombia and immigrated to the US and then to the UK clear to my research participants. This information was disclosed during the interviews as a way not only to establish rapport, but also to index

my insider/outsider role within this community (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2013) – that is, while I do not identify as non-binary, I am part of a sexual and ethnic minority.

Informed by non-binary activism, this thesis employs a (trans)gender-affirming (Raj, 2002) stance to research and language, which, "[i]n practice, […] means expressing an attitude that is respectful, sensitive, accepting, validating, affirming, empathic, caring, compassionate, encouraging, supportive, and mutually trusting and trustworthy" (Raj, 2002, para 1.1). This was particularly important as, in recent years, trans-exclusionary radical feminists (or TERFs; sometimes known as "gender critical feminists") have been given a platform in print media to devalue the identities of trans and non-binary people, portraying them as illegitimate and dangerous to cis women's safety (see, for instance, Raymond, 1979). This thesis rejects any type of anti-trans rhetoric. Instead, this thesis adopts a research stance that respects and honours gender diversity, thereby affirming non-binary people's various (linguistic and material) experiences. This will be reflected in the employment of gender-affirming language throughout. While doing so, this thesis does not intend to make an epistemological claim on a given *reality* of gender as an essential part of the self, but about the multiple linguistic and embodied possibilities of gender – of gender plurality (Monro, 2005). The present thesis understands gender as relational, fluid, shifting, and plural.

In the context of this thesis, I will refer to participants using the pronouns that they suggested were the most appropriate and respectful to them. In fact, the majority of the interview participants embraced *they/them* pronouns at the time of the interview; however, this was not the case for all. When language choices were not specified, particularly in the context of the online forum, I used *they/them* pronouns and other gender-neutral language when referring to forum users. I do not assume that all of these

forum users embrace gender-neutral language; however, since this type of information was not consistently available within the forum, gender-neutral language was deemed the most respectful when describing forum users' experiences.

Key terms

One of the key objectives of this project is to elucidate the linguistic parameters around non-binary identities in the English language. It is for this reason that I will outline some of the ways in which complex and multidimensional concepts such as sex, gender, trans, cis, and gender-neutral language will be understood in the present thesis. By doing this, I will situate this research within the current linguistic landscape of non-binary discourse. I aim to show that these concepts, and the language surrounding them, is not stable or muted, but rather constantly evolving and being redefined. In other words, language is in a constant process of *becoming*.

Sex and Gender

The process of *sexing* a person starts before birth. Typically, a pregnant person (anyone capable of childbearing) might have an ultrasound scan (sonogram) done in order to learn about the foetus' body, including the sex organs – that is, in most cases, the presence or absence of a penis – which will dictate the baby's 'sex' (either male/boy or female/girl). Though sonograms are not always accurate, once the child is born, the process of *gendering* often starts and will continue through time. Such process becomes reinforced through a variety of factors, such as society's gender expectations, the person's biological markers (primary and secondary sex characteristics), the culturally informed discourses about binary gender, etc. As such, these factors – along with many

others – *territorialise* the gender/sex binary. Therefore, the *gender assigned at birth*, which is based on the baby's visible sex characteristics, renders the person intelligible (Butler, 1990), meaning that people will quickly decipher the person's sex/gender as they grow up, mostly through visual and linguistic cues. Thus, sex and gender are often seen as inseparable, as they are sometimes understood and used in the same way in public and medical discourse.

Gender and sex, however, are different constructs within psychological research and are unreservedly more complex than the common conception. Gender has typically been understood as the "psychological, social, and cultural aspects of maleness and femaleness," whereas sex is seen as the "biological components of maleness and femaleness" (Kessler & McKenna, 1978, p.7). Thus, one is abstract and socially constructed (gender) while the other one is physical and biological (sex). Stoller (1968) has been credited with distinguishing between *sex* and *gender identity*, arguing that the former is a product of nature while the latter one is a product of nurture. Kessler and McKenna (1978), however, made the case that, while they are independent constructs, they relate to one another as mind, society, language, and body are indeed all interrelated. While sex and gender typically correlate, this thesis understand both constructs as multidimensional and bimodal rather than linear and binary.

Historically, sex has been understood as the biological components that make up maleness and femaleness, typically differentiated in terms of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal reproductive systems, external genitals and, according to some research, brain (Kipnis & Diamond, 1998). However, Fausto-Sterling (2000) asserts that "complete maleness and complete femaleness represent the extreme ends of a spectrum of body types. That these extreme ends are the most frequent, has lent

credence to the idea that they are not only natural (that is produced by nature) but normal (that is, they represent both a statistical and a social ideal) (p.76)." Furthermore, Fausto-Sterling (2000) suggested that sex is made up of a variety of dimensions which typically (but not always) align in a bimodal fashion: male and female. Yet, it is entirely possible that these layers or dimensions can develop independently of one another, as it is the case with intersex people (see definition of intersex below).

This thesis understands both sex and gender not as stable features of the self, but rather elements that are in constant motion and in processes of *becoming* (Fox and Alldred, 2014). Monro (2003, p.442) argues that the current binary systems of gender categorisation "fail to address the fluid and developmental nature of identity" and envisions a "pluralist" perspective of gender that is not limited by the sexed body (the material) nor the socially constructed, performative (the discursive) elements of gender, but rather acknowledges the importance and active influence of both (Monro 2005). Gender diversity is therefore a possibility rather than a fact, which is influenced (and can influence) sex in a multitude of ways.

In this thesis, sex will be understood in terms of the biological as well as the socially constructed aspects of sex. The terms "assigned female at birth" (AFAB) and "assigned male at birth" (AMAB) will be used throughout this thesis when referring to the "sex" of the participants, as the participants mentioned it themselves. No physical condition beyond self-reporting was measured. This thesis will primarily focus on the participants' gender identity and expression and their relationship to language while acknowledging the importance of their embodied experience.

Intersex

Intersex refers to a wide range of biological sex variations that include

chromosomes, hormones, primary or secondary sex characteristics, among others. According to Fausto-Sterling (2012, p. 25), some of the most common intersex conditions include, but are not limited to:

- **Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia**: A genetically inherited malfunction which affects the production of steroids. It can cause masculinisation of genitalia in XX children.

- **Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome:** A genetically inherited malfunction which affects the reception of testosterone. XY children with this condition are typically born with highly feminised genitalia and develop a feminine body shape during puberty.

- **Gonadal Dysgenesis:** An umbrella term for a variety of conditions where gonads do not develop customarily, typically affecting XY people.

- **Klinefelter Syndrome:** A form of gonadal dysgenesis wherein males have an extra X chromosome (XXY). Adults are typically infertile and may develop breasts.

- **Turner Syndrome:** Another form of gonadal dysgenesis wherein females lack a second X chromosome (XO). As a result, children develop neither secondary sex characteristics nor ovaries.

Intersex people and their sexed bodies do not entirely fit the constructed binary notions of the body (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). For example, a male-identified intersex person might have a uterus and not a penis. While it is estimated that 1-2% of the population is intersex, these conditions might not be detected until later in life (when people try to become pregnant, for instance) or might not be detected at all (Intersex Society of North America, 2018). It is therefore likely that the number of intersex

people is larger than current estimates. As such, the idea that sexes are entirely binary, concrete, and absolute has been contested by biologists such as Fausto-Sterling (2000) who argue that the biological aspects of sex are just as diverse as the gender identities that are encountered in society. Similarly, sociologists such as Hird (2000) argue that the binary nature of sex is socially constructed rather than a biological fact. Intersex people therefore break the sex binary, making it difficult to identify concretely when male/manhood and female/womanhood begins or ends. Recent theoretical perspectives within the field of psychology conceptualise both sex and gender development as multiple rather than as binary (Schweizer et al., 2013).

As previously mentioned, some non-binary people, at a physical level, may opt to alter some of the aforementioned sex characteristics through hormones, sex reassignment surgeries, and facial and vocal surgeries, thus altering both their primary and secondary sex characteristics, as well as a wide range of gender expressions. Therefore, similar to intersex people, non-binary people blur the boundaries of sex as well as gendered possibilities.

Trans(gender)

The sex someone is assigned at birth based on their visible sex characteristics (i.e., having a penis or a vagina, and sometimes intersex) may not always align with their gender identity throughout their life, as is the case with trans people. Trans (the abbreviated form of the word transgender) will be used in this thesis as an umbrella term for people who do not identity as the gender they were assigned at birth (Currah, 2006). This does not mean that people who fit these criteria identify with the term trans(gender), as some may use other terms such as transsexual, cross-dresser, etc. to

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refer to themselves, or simply use the terms girl, boy, man, or woman. Some trans

people do undergo gender-affirming procedures such as taking hormones, surgery

(chest surgery, breast augmentation, vaginoplasty, phalloplasty, to name a few),

depending on their embodied desires, as well as the financial and social resources they

possess. Other trans people, however, do not undergo any procedure and only transition

socially. Thus, trans people too are a highly heterogeneous group experiencing genders

and bodies in a variety of ways.

Among some of the most common terms for trans people in English-speaking

societies nowadays are trans men and trans women. A trans man is typically someone

who was assigned female at birth (AFAB) and identifies as a man, while a trans woman

is typically someone who was assigned male at birth (AMAB) and identifies as a

woman. For some, "passing" is extremely important – that is, being read and

understood as their desired gender. However, for some, this notion is not as important.

The difference between passing (sometimes called "true transsexual") and non-passing

(sometimes referred to as "transgender" or "genderqueer") trans people has indeed been

a point of contention within the trans community. Roen (2002) argues that the

"either/or" (passing) versus "both/neither" (non-passing) binary creates unnecessary

and problematic hierarchies of what it means to be trans, wherein those who "pass" are

sometimes portrayed as subjugated by the binary system while "non-passing" trans

people are portrayed as subversive (Davy, 2018) and in opposition to one another

(Elliot, 2009). These points will be explored further within this thesis and in relation to

non-binary identities and the productive capacities of language.

Cis(gender)

The term cis (the abbreviated form of cisgender) literally means "on the same side." In terms of gender and sex, it refers to people who are not trans; that is, people whose sex aligns with their gender identity (Aultman, 2014). Serano (2007) argues that the employment of cis(sexual) is useful in that it demonstrates the privilege and legitimacy that is given to so-called "normal" men and women. Positioning cis people as "normal," thereby framing trans people as "abnormal," has been labelled *cisnormativity*, the assumption that "those assigned male at birth always grow up to be men and those assigned female at birth always grow up to be women" (Bauer et al., 2009, p. 356). *Cisnormativity* operates in a similar way to *heteronormativity* (Kitzinger, 2005), which places heterosexuality as the default sexual category. Cisnormativity therefore operates by erasing all genders that "deviate" from cis, e.g., trans and non-binary. *Cisnormativity* can lead to *cisgenderism* by placing cis people as the norm. This is done by framing binary sexes/genders as superior and more desirable than non-binary people's genders and bodies, thus delegitimising their existence. This thesis, therefore, understands the label cis as a gender category rather than as a universal or default form.

It is important to note that the term cis is controversial and is still not widely used in public discourse. For instance, in an article for the Irish Times, writer John Boyne rejected the notion that trans people could/should impose a term to define his gender identity (Boyne, 2019). In academia and in trans communities, the term cis is becoming more frequent, especially when discussing trans and non-binary issues. There has been some opposition, however. Enke (2013), for instance, argued that the term cisgender reaffirms and normalises and naturalises cisgender people, framing transness as *different*.

In this thesis, the term cis or cisgender will be used, especially in the contexts of *cisgenderism*, given that it is through language that the identities of non-binary people can be invisibilised (Ansara & Hegarty, 2012). Simultaneously, this thesis demonstrates that the trans/cis binary is unhelpful, as gender – and the language surrounding it – can be re-assessed and re-negotiated in continuous ways by individuals, communities, and societies. As such, hierarchical thinking is rejected and genders are framed as constantly *becoming* rather than *being*.

Gender-neutral Language

While not all non-binary people change any of their linguistic features assigned at birth, a significant number of non-binary people do prefer to use gender-neutral language such as pronouns, titles, etc. that best reflect their genders, even if only contextually or momentarily. For instance, the singular pronoun "they" (*they/them*) may be one of the most common pronouns. According to Barker (2013), some non-binary people like "they" for a variety of reasons, including because it challenges the notion that people are single selves. However, others do not like this association with plurality (and duality).

The gender-neutral use of "they" has a long history in the English language. In the 1300s, the word "they" was employed as a genderless pronoun that was both singular and plural (a singular and plural third-person pronoun), the same way that the pronoun "you" (singular and plural second-person pronoun) is used. In fact, a number of writers such as Shakespeare, Chaucer, and Fielding used *they/them* as genderless and numberless (O'Conner and Kellerman, 2010). Nevertheless, towards the end of the eighteenth century, several influential grammarians such as Lindley Murray (1795) and Anne Fisher (1750) suggested that using "they" as singular and plural was simply

illogical. Since then, the use of "they" as an encompassing, genderless third-person singular pronoun has been essentially banned, making "they" strictly plural. Nowadays, several grammarians anticipated the inevitable "return" of the singular "they" (see, for instance, Zimmer, 2015). In fact, in 2015, the singular "they" was named the "word of the year" by the American Dialect Society for its "emerging use as a pronoun to refer to a known person, often as a conscious choice by a person rejecting the traditional gender binary of he and she" (American Dialect Society, 2016). In 2019, Merriam-Webster dictionary added to the definition of "they": A pronoun "used to refer to a single person whose gender identity is nonbinary" (Merriam-Webster, 2019). The same year, the APA endorsed the use of "they" as a singular third-person pronoun in the upcoming edition of their publication manual (Lee, 2019), providing a societal and academic legitimatisation to the usage of this pronoun. These linguistic movements are said to be inclusive of non-binary people, as well as creating a standard in academic writing where gender is not assumed and the generic male is decentred.

While "they" seems to be one of the most common gender-neutral pronouns, others have indeed been proposed over the years, including "ey/em/eir/eirs/," also known as the Spivak pronouns, Nunn, 2015), "ze/hir/hir" (Feinberg, 1992), "Per/per/pers" (Piercy, 1976), among others. Yet, most of these have failed to attain mainstream acceptance (Zimmer, 2015). For example, "ze" and its possessive "hir" were introduced in the 90's, but neither has gained enough popularity to become a relevant part of the vernacular – most changes in vocabulary sound clumsy and are grating to the ear (Langer, 2011). According to Matsuno and Budge (2017), some non-binary people may use more than one type of pronoun (e.g. *they/them* as well as *she/her*) or no pronouns at all (using their name instead, for instance). For some, the use

of a fixed pronoun is not even necessary. It is important to note that pronouns are typically "selected based on comfort and alignment with the gender identity of the non-binary individual and/or safety of their environment" (Matsuno & Budge, 2017, p. 2) – and some people might not disclose their pronouns to everyone. Furthermore, the use of *they/them* pronouns is not a monolith among non-binary-identified people.

In addition to pronouns, some non-binary people may choose a gender-neutral title such as *Mx* rather than Mr/Sir or Miss/Mrs/Ms/Madam (Hord, 2016). Non-binary people might also request others to refer to them in neutral ways: person, human, child, sibling, and parent (rather than with gendered terms, such as boy, girl, man, woman, son, daughter, sister, brother, father, or mother). Moreover, some non-binary people may also change or shorten their birth name in order to index androgyny.

This thesis explores these linguistic negotiations at various levels of interpersonal interaction – both online and offline.

Chapter outlines

Chapter one situates the present research on non-binary gender identities and language, establishing that there is a significant gap in knowledge within the social sciences on the ways in which non-binary people experience their identity linguistically. Therefore, there is an urgent need to understand the *linguistic becomings* of non-binary people, as previous research has suggested this is an important area of interest among these individuals. The research aims for this project are outlined and some of the key terms that will be used throughout this thesis are defined. This chapter evidences the significant contribution to knowledge in terms of methodology, theory, outputs, and praxis that this thesis offers.

Chapter two will continue to outline and critically evaluate the relevant research that has been conducted on non-binary gender identities, offering a historical perspective on how these subject positions have *assembled* in an ongoing way through a variety of *affects,* including sexuality, politics, media, psychology, etc. This chapter will also defend the need for exploring language among non-binary people both offline and online.

Chapter three outlines the ways in which gender has been theorised within the field of psychology and will build an argument for the employment of *assemblage theory* – a materialist ontology – to analyse non-binary gender identities. This chapter will outline some of the early psychological understandings and epistemologies of gender, including the positivist and social constructivist perspectives, suggesting that a material ontology that cuts across both of these perspectives is required in order to capture the complexities of gender. I argue that it is through a DeleuzoGuattarian approach to research (in the form of *assemblage theory*) that the emergence of non-binary gender identities – and the language surrounding this emergence – can be more accurately conceptualised.

Chapter four defines the methodologies used in this thesis including the participants, research design, recruitment, collection of data, and analysis techniques – which are all part of the *research-assemblage* of the current thesis. This chapter is divided in two main sections – one section deals with the interviews and the short writing samples while the other section deals with the corpus linguistics techniques. I will also outline the ethical considerations that were taken in this project, as well as some of the potential limitations of these methods.

Chapter five and six outline the results that emerged from the interview participants

(including their short writings) and maps out the ways in which non-binary gender identities and the language surrounding these identities emerge and are constantly negotiated in a variety of contexts – both online and offline. Such emergences, I argue, are affected and affect a variety of *assemblages* and *intensities*, which I explore in these chapters. Chapter five describes the *gender becomings* and *affective intensities* of this emergence among interview participants, and further develops this theoretical approach. This chapter outlines five *affective intensities* which were said to *territorialise* non-binary gender identities among these participants – albeit inconsistently – including the *affective intensity* of *linguistic becomings*. Chapter six outlines the language-related distress that many interview participants underwent in their process of *linguistic becoming*. This was one of the major *affective intensities* that were identified in this project. Such distress was found to be context-related and mediated by the social proximity to other individuals. Therefore, this chapter outlines the different ways in which this *intensity* was experienced within a variety of social contexts.

Chapter seven and eight present the quantitative and qualitative results that emerged from the non-binary corpus (NBC), respectively. Chapter seven displays the quantitative findings – namely, the keywords, collocations, and the rhizomatic network that allowed me to explore the corpus in a systematic way and gain qualitative insights from it. Chapter eight presents the qualitative results emerging from the NBC. This chapter outlines the linguistic and material elements that *territorialised* non-binary gender identities within the forum. These elements were found to be intrinsically related, interacting ceaselessly to produce new gendered capacities. These capacities were expressed both linguistically and materially, but not always in consistent ways.

Lastly, chapter nine summarises these findings and discusses the ways in which

these results have the capacity to be affected and can affect other bodies of research on this subject matter. This chapter also draws upon the principles of a rhizome in order to extend the theoretical contribution of *linguistic becomings.* The contribution to research is outlined here, along with the potential limitations of this research, and recommendations for future research.

2. NON-BINARY HISTORY AND RESEARCH

"My voice on this subject is not representative of all transgendered people. But when a minority group has been silent for as long as we have, as disjointed as we have been, the tendency is for those in the majority to listen to the loud ones when they first speak up; and to believe that we speak for the entire group. More important than my point of view, than any single point of view however, is that people begin to question gender" (Bornstein, 1994, p. 14).

Figure 2. Kate Bornstein from hir 1994 book *Gender Outlaw, on Men, Women and the Rest of Us.*

This chapter will outline some of historical precedence of non-binary gender identities across the globe, demonstrating that non-binary gender identities have existed for millennia. While non-binary genders have also existed in the "West," their histories have not been recorded or have been erased due to the predominance of the gender binary. I will show how some of the most significant non-binary thinkers such as Kate Bornstein (above) were influential to the resurgence and proliferation of non-binary

thinking. As such, the linguistic emergence of non-binary identities (such as genderqueer) began to emerge in academia and activism, thus contributing to the *territorialisation* of these identities. It is likely that these theoretical developments have influenced the ways people think about gender and have allowed more people to embrace these identities. As such, the current prevalence of non-binary gender identities will be discussed, outlining some of the studies that have attempted to measure the number of non-binary-identified people in the general population and within the trans community. Despite the growing number of non-binary-identified people, these identities are still largely invisible in the mainstream consciousness. Therefore, in this chapter, I will also show some of the ways in which non-binary identities have captured some social awareness in mainstream media. This section demonstrates that knowledge around gender diversity is still scarce. Furthermore, social unintelligibility carries some consequences for non-binary people in the form of poor mental health outcomes due to discrimination, stigma, and language-based violence. Lastly, this chapter will summarise some of the literature on the linguistic negotiations of non-binary people.

Gender Diversity Across the Globe

Measuring the degree of masculinity and femininity that a person has is context-dependent; it is different across time and place. For instance, what is considered masculine in the Japan of today is not the same masculinity of fifty years ago – and both may be quite different to the masculinities found today in the UK. Likewise, the mere concept of masculinity might not have existed as we know it today in early societies. Therefore, gender is not a fixed and innate characteristic of a person: it is culturally dependent and malleable. West and Zimmerman (1987) term this "doing

gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987), referring to the various ways in which different societies and cultures understand gender.

The notion that there are more than two genders is not novel in some "non-Western" cultures, where – in some cases – gender diversity has been around for millennia (Stryker, 2008). Indeed, gender diversity has been documented throughout history and across cultures (Herdt, 1996; Matsuno & Budge, 2017). Nanda (2000) argues that "cultures construct their sex and gender systems differently and these systems do not always neatly divide into male and female, man and woman" (p. 1). This section will discuss some of the most notable ways in which "non-Western" cultures have understood and continue to understand gender in non-binary ways, in places such as the Indian subcontinent, Thailand, North America, Brazil, and Polynesia.

In the Indian subcontinent (India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan) the Hijra have been present for thousands of years. The word Hijra, however, is an umbrella that is not as easily defined as a "third gender." This umbrella includes people who are intersex, transvestite, transgender, and feminine bisexual and homosexual men (Jami & Kamal, 2015). Hijra people are almost always AMAB and are seen as having both masculine and feminine attributes – from a Western understanding of the binary. While the Hijra are currently recognised as a "third gender" by most of these governments (Khan et al., 2016), their history is quite tumultuous. British colonial rulers in the 19th century sought to criminalise and eradicate the Hijras, a process that caused the Hijra to lose some of their sacred status in society. It was not until India attained independence that some of these laws were repealed, but the effects of colonialism still persist. For instance, while the Hijras are, in some ways, still revered in society and some people still seek blessings from them, they are also a marginalised community that faces a

great deal of discrimination and stigma. Nowadays, some Hijras resort to begging or sex work in order to survive (Chakrapani, Babu, & Ebenezer, 2004).

Similarly, in Thailand, multiple genders have been part of the Thai worldview for a very long time and a third, mixed gender was part of the traditional belief system (Matzner, 2001). There, the term "kathoey" was traditionally used to refer to intersex people and those who "mixed" genders. In Western terms, kathoey has been used to refer to AMAB people who would be considered gay and/or effeminate, as well as trans(feminine) women. While kathoey people do not enjoy legal recognition in Thailand, it is much easier to acquire gender-affirming services such as hormones and surgery than in many other countries, such as the UK and the US where the requisite psychological examination and diagnosis can prove to be obstacles. Kathoey people are very common in Thailand, and people are very used to their presence (Winter, 2002).

Gender diversity has also been observed in North American indigenous cultures (two-spirit), in Brazil's sex workers (travestís), and in Polynesian cultures (fa'afafine in Samoa; māhū in Tahini and Hawaii; fakaletī in Tonga; pinapinaaine in Suva) (Nanda, 2014).

One thing that all of these genders have in common is that across cultures AMAB people are usually the subject of study and emphasis (Nanda, 2000). Within academic research, there are very few mentions of AFAB people who break the gender binary; however, these individuals do exist. For instance, in Thailand, the Tom are AFAB who, in "Western" terms, would be considered transmasculine. In Albania, the Sworn Virgins have been described as "the biological female who, later in life, after having been socialized as a woman for many years, reconstructs herself as a 'social man'" (Grémaux, 1993, p. 244) in order to maintain the economic stability of the

household. Nonetheless, the overemphasis on AMAB and trans femininity might be due to what Julia Serano (2007) describes as the demonisation of trans femininity, or *trans-misogyny*. Serano argues that those on the transfeminine spectrum receive more societal attention, fascination, and thus demonisation as a result not only of transphobia but also of misogyny. Therefore, she argues, misogyny is at the root of transphobia – and the erasure of other gender-diverse people/identities.

Gender, therefore, has not always been nor does it currently exist as a strict binary. It is important to also note that some of these "third" genders may be conceptualised differently depending on the cultural and historical contexts in which they *emerged*. And while these genders have been around for a long time, gender-diverse people have faced continued discrimination and marginalisation because of their "non-normative" gender (Nanda, 2014), a result of colonialism, which inflicted their set or gender rules upon these communities (Tompkins, 2015).

Gender in the "West" has not always been understood as binary in nature. However, much of the history around gender diversity has either not been recorded, has been erased, or has simply not been conceptualised using the nuanced linguistic developments we have today (Namaste, 2000). The concept of "transvestite," for instance, was only created in 1910 by German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld (1919); however, this does not mean that those individuals did not have terms to describe themselves. As such, the history of these linguistic movements has been largely influenced by the psycho-medical endeavours to study these phenomena.

The following section explores the historical moments that contributed to the *territorialisation* of the linguistic parameters around gender diversity in the "West,"

which have helped to *assemble* the *gender becomings* of non-binary people both online and offline.

Emergence of Non-binary Thinking

In the early 1990's, trans(gender) studies became a more prominent area within gender studies. During this time, theorists, activists, feminists, and academics began to explore gender diversity by deconstructing the gender binary and outlining the limitations of binary thinking (see, for instance, Whittle, 1996, and Butler, 1990). While the terms genderqueer or non-binary were not commonly used at this time, gender was understood to be socially constructed and, as such, not limited to the gender/sex binary. This new understanding of gender as socially constructed was framed though the lenses of poststructuralist and postmodern theories which rejected "the claims of totality and universality and the presumption of binary structural oppositions that implicitly operate to quell the insistent ambiguity and openness of linguistic and cultural signification" (Butler 1990, p. 40). Gender theorist Judith Butler (1990), for instance, posited that gender was fundamentally *performative* and socially constructed rather than an essential biological fact or reality. In her view, gender was a result of people's behaviours (or *doing*) rather than their internal or intrinsic essence (or *being*). As such, gender was said to be constructed through *discourse* or "practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak" Foucault (1972, p. 49). In postmodern thinking, language and communication were central to the ways in which gender identities were constructed. Furthermore, these theoretical developments contributed to the creation of queer theory, an area of study that challenged *heteronormativity* as well as *cisnormativity* by

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examining the complexity, diversity, and fluidity of sexuality and gender (Jagose, 1996).

Sandy Stone published a canonical text entitled *The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttransexual Manifesto* (1991), as a response to Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (1978). Raymond's book positioned transsexual women as reinforcing traditional gender roles. She also positioned transsexual women as detrimental to cis women's political causes such as women-only spaces and combatting violence against cis women. Stone (1991) argued that Raymond's claims were overly simplistic and misleading. Using a poststructuralist lens, Stone argued that transsexualism was socially co-constructed by medical institutions and trans patients and, as such, trans women were required to overly-perform their desired gender to meet the expectations of the medical gatekeepers. Stone theorised the "territory between" (p. 225), which metaphorically signified any number of potential gendered spaces that transsexual people could inhabit and which existed outside the boundaries of the gender binary. Stone, therefore, encouraged trans people to name their own "territory between," opening up the idea that living outside of the gender binary was a possibility. This non-binary thinking allowed people to "speak from outside the boundaries of gender, beyond the constructed oppositional nodes which have been predefined as the only positions from which discourse is possible" (Stone 1991, p. 351).

Kate Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw: On men, women and the rest of us* (1994) has also been credited as one of the most influential books in the field of trans and queer studies. This book detailed the existence and experiences of genders beyond the gender binary. Ze (Bornstein's pronoun) challenged the binary by providing the reader with a personal postmodern narrative of hir (ze's possessive) life and gender journey. In this

book, Bornstein also focussed on language and categorisation of identities, arguing that rigid labels (particularly binary ones) are unhelpful and that individuals' identities are fluid and in movement. In hir view, people who are genderqueer subvert society's expectations of their gender as they "recognize no borders or rules of gender." (Bornstein, 1994, p. 52). Trans people who "pass" as the "opposite" gender (i.e., transsexual people) do not support the gender deconstructing revolution and are submissive to the oppressive, binary gender norms imposed by society (Finn and Dell, 1999). It is evident, then, that for some genderqueer theorists, refusing to "fit into" binary gender categories as well as refusing to "pass" as male or female were considered crucial for destabilising (deconstructing) the gender order – and that these concepts were central to their gender identity and *linguistic becomings*.

Such a line of thinking has been, consequently, problematised and deemed unhelpful by other trans theorists within academia. For instance, Roen (2002) argues that such divisions create unnecessary hierarchies of transness. These hierarchies are said to create subdivisions within trans communities, which are politically polarising: they create a divide between those who wish to "pass" as male of female (either/or) and those who do not (both/neither). Davy (2019) has argued that such polarisation is unhelpful, as gender identity *becomings* are not limited to the concepts of "passing," but to a myriad of *assemblages* which produce diverse embodied *intensities* and desires among trans people. Nonetheless, while some trans people do not see passing as an end-goal, others do. For them, striving to "pass" is of utmost importance for a variety of reasons, including safety and comfort (Roen, 2002). Richards and Barker (2013) have also argued that genderqueer theorists risk falling into another set of binaries by

depicting trans individuals as either subversive (genderqueer, non-binary, etc.) or conforming (transgender, transsexual, etc.) (see also Davy, 2019).

Poststructuralist queer theories have been the subject of much re-assessment and re-thinking (Prosser, 1998; Namaste, 1996); they have, in a way, enabled a discussion around genderqueer and non-binary gender identities (Yeadon-Lee, 2016). Building on Bornstein (1994) and Halberstam (2002) poststructuralist thinking, Monro (2005), for instance, developed a theory of gender plurality, which conceptualised gender as a "spectrum, a field, or intersecting spectra or continua" (p. 37). In terms of the emergence of linguistic categories, Monro (2005) suggested that, in naming particular spots within this spectrum, non-categories ultimately become categories "which people can inhabit" (p. 37). This theory has been productive in bridging the aforementioned perspectives, as it provides a space where identities can be adopted by individuals seeking an embodied, gendered home after or during transitioning (Prosser, 1998).

According to these perspectives, trans people who did not (want to) conform with the socially prescribed binary requirements for womanhood or manhood could potentially inhabit other social categories of their own which were outside or between these *territories*, thus *queering* (challenging normativities) the gender and linguistic landscapes. The following section will describe the ways in which some of the terminologies around non-binary genders emerged, and how these might have contributed to the *territorialisation* of these identities.

Linguistic Emergence

I have shown the ways in which the theoretical foundation for non-binary thinking was laid by postmodern theorists such as Butler, Bornstein, and Stone. Such

theoretical developments helped to form some of the foundations for queer theory (Gamson, 1995; Halberstam, 2005; Kulick, 2005), which opened up the possibility to name the experiences of those who lived their lives beyond the limiting constraints and hierarchies of the sex/gender/sexuality binaries – the *heterosexual matrix* (Butler, 1990).

In naming these experiences, a variety of identity labels that described these experiences began to emerge. Activist Riki Wilchins, for instance, wrote extensively about the gender binary as an oppressive system (1995). Wilchins has been credited for being one of the first persons to use the term "genderqueer" in their writing and to identify openly as such. Wilchins explained the concept in the spring 1995 newsletter called *In Your Face*: "the fight against gender oppression [is] about all of us who are genderqueer: diesel dykes and stone butches, leatherqueens and radical fairies, nelly fags, crossdressers, intersexed, transsexuals, transvestites, transgendered, transgressively gendered, and those of us whose gender expressions are so complex they haven't even been named yet" (Wilchins, 1995, p. 4). This passage alluded to the emergence and constant development of gender terms within queer communities, as well as the need for new terms to describe bespoke gendered experiences. Wilchins therefore understood the term "genderqueer" as a transgression to gender norms as well as an identity category.

Another influential book includes Carol Queen and Lawrence Schimel's 1997's anthology entitled *PoMoSexuals: Challenging Assumptions About Gender and Sexuality* – which employed a postmodern lens (hence the name). Though a variety of stories from people who experienced their genders and sexualities in diverse ways, this book challenged *heteronormative* and *cisnormative* assumptions around the body,

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language, and gender expressions. A few years later, *GenderQueer: Voices Beyond the Sexual Binary* (2002), an anthology edited by Joan Nestle, Clare Howell, and Riki Wilchins, explicitly told the first-person accounts of people who experienced their genders in a multitude of ways – which extended beyond the gender binary. In this anthology, the term "genderqueer" was further *territorialised* as a term that described the experiences of people who lived their lives between or outside the gender binary. While no single story or description of genders was the same within this book, these narratives were united by the rejection of the gender binary as a hegemonic force. By *queering* gender, this anthology opened up the possibilities for new genders to emerge while also framing "genderqueer" as an umbrella term for gender diversity. Google's Ngram viewer – which visualises the frequency of usage of a given word in published texts – has shown that the term "genderqueer" had a "small increase from nothing in the mid 2000s" (Bergman & Barker, 2017, p. 32), showing the impact of these publications on the lexicon of gender (diversity).

The term non-binary, which has been reported to first be used as an identity category in Haynes' and McKenna's collection *Unseen Genders: Beyond the Binaries* (2001), has in recent years become one of the most common ways to describe the experiences of those who do not identity as exclusively male or female. And it is now considered an umbrella term for a wide range of identity labels describing specific gender "territories." As McKenna and Kessler (2006) noted, the number of categories, identities, and behaviours outside of the binary has increased since the 1990s – and they continue to increase. Stryker (2008) hypothesised that this rise might be a product of the "Internet age," as it is now easier than ever to access information and connect with like-minded people on social media. This project explores this and many other *affective*

assemblages that contribute to the ongoing linguistic negotiation of non-binary gender identities, especially since non-binary has indeed become a social category capable of fuelling social change by decentring binary genders (Monro, 2019).

The following section will outline some of the research that has been conducted on non-binary-identified individuals in recent years. Since I started working on this thesis project in 2016, the number of studies examining non-binary people have steadily increased. A simple Google Scholar search of the terms ""non-binary" AND "gender"" from 2013 to 2016 resulted in about 3,930 articles, whereas a search from 2017 to 2020 resulted in about 11,300. Of course, this is not a perfect method of assessing increase; however, this result demonstrates the ways in which non-binary gender identities have been acknowledged within academic research. Such increase in interest, I argue, has also contributed to the *territorialisation* of non-binary identities and their many meanings.

The following section will outline some of the research that has aimed to identify the prevalence of genderqueer and/or non-binary people in the general population and within LGBTQ+ communities.

Prevalence

While people have been identifying as something other than male or female for a very long time, as suggested in previous sections, this information has not been recorded or measured in many studies, censuses, or historical records. Research participants are rarely given the option to choose a gender other than male or female in most forms, rendering non-binary-identified people invisible in research (Valentine, 2016). Recent studies aiming to estimate the prevalence of non-binary people in the general population have offered some insights regarding the number of people who

might identify as non-binary.

In some studies, the term "gender ambivalent" has been used to operationally define when people identify equally with *both sexes* (Van Caenegem et al., 2015). Van Caenegem et al. (2015) conducted two population-based surveys in Belgium (one among the general population and another among sexual minorities (LGB people) only). The results indicated that, in the general population, 2.2% of AMAB and 1.9% of AFAB were gender ambivalent, meaning that they identified as having two genders. Among sexual minorities, the prevalence for gender ambivalence was almost the same as in the general population for AMAB (1.8% versus 1.9%); however, among AFAB the percentage rose to and 4.1%, meaning that those who were assigned female at birth were more likely than AMAB to identify with two genders. While gender ambivalence might imply gender non-binary, the term non-binary was not used in the study. In a sexual health study among the general Dutch population (N = 8064), it was concluded that 4.6% of AMAB people and 3.2% of AFAB people self-reported as gender ambivalent (Kuyper & Wijsen, 2014).

Another study on the general population (n = 2225) in Israel also found that over a third of people surveyed felt to some extent that they were the 'other' gender, or both male and female, and/or neither; however, they did not explicitly identify themselves as non-binary (Joel et al., 2013). While it is possible that some of these individuals identified as non-binary or genderqueer, the study was mostly about gender experience and expression rather than identity. A study that explored identity in the UK population found that 1 in 250 people (0.4%) currently identifies as non-binary (Titman, 2014).

A few studies have attempted to identify the prevalence of non-binary people among the trans community specifically (Trans Media Watch, 2010; Harrison et al.,

2012; McNeil et al., 2012; Kuper et al., 2012; Government Equalities Office, 2018).

These studies indicate that it is likely that the number of people who identify as non-binary among trans-identified people is larger than in the general population and that it is increasing. For instance, in a survey among 215 transgender people in the UK, Trans Media Watch (2010) reported that 17.9% of respondents identified as androgyne/genderqueer/polygender, while 8.5% identified as being a gender not listed. Similar results were found in a nationwide study of anti-transgender discrimination in the US where 20% of trans people were "part time as one gender, part time as another" and 13% were "a gender not listed" (Harrison et al., 2012, p. 14). Moreover, a study on trans mental health and wellbeing conducted by the Scottish Transgender Alliance – the largest trans-related survey ever conducted in the UK – found that over a quarter of survey participants identified as non-binary (McNeil et al., 2012). Yet, only 65% of participants in this study identified as gender binary (exclusively male or female), suggesting that while the 35% of participants did not identify as non-binary directly, they did not necessarily identify within the gender binary either. Kuper et al. (2012) surveyed a group of transgender individuals online and found that, of the 292 participants surveyed, 55.1% identified themselves as genderqueer, sometimes in addition to another gender, which was reflected in a larger survey in the UK of 14,320 trans people where 42% identified as non-binary (Government Equalities Office, 2018).

Across this research, young(er) trans people represent a significant portion of those who identify as non-binary (Rankin & Beemyn, 2012; Clark et al., 2018; Yeadon-Lee, 2016), signalling a cultural shift wherein information about gender diversity becomes more readily available both offline and online – and young can easily acquire this information. This opens up spaces into which identities narratives and trajectories

can unfold. The following section will show some of the ways in which non-binary

gender identities have become more intelligible in recent years.

(Lack of) Social Awareness

Non-binary gender identities have been garnering a great deal of media attention

in recent years (Richards et al., 2016), as more people claim these genders and speak

out about their identities. For instance, some celebrities such as Asia Kate Dillon, Sam

Smith, and Ruby Rose have all embraced the label non-binary, as an umbrella term, to

describe the ways in which they experience their gender. Many of them have rejected

their assigned pronouns and have been very outspoken about their journeys (or

processes of *becoming*) in the media. Their "coming out" narratives, in some ways,

have facilitated the discussion around gender identity in "Western" societies, promoting

it as an acceptable possibility and informing others about this identity. In January 2017,

National Geographic published a "Gender Revolution" issue wherein many non-binary

identities were showcased. A number of non-binary people were also interviewed for

this issue, along with activists, clinicians, and academics. A documentary by the same

name was also released, furthering the reach of non-binary genders in mainstream

media and aiding with the linguistic *territorialisation* of the term.

This "gender revolution" has not been without considerable opposition, with

some arguing that this is an extreme form of political correctness and purposely

refusing to employ gender-neutral language. Notable examples of this opposition

include Jordan Peterson's rant on YouTube in 2016 where he argues that using gender-

neutral pronouns entails an alignment with "radical left-wing ideologues" (Peterson,

2016, n.p.); Pope Francis' recent statement that gender diversity is "…a global war out

to destroy marriage" (Pullella, 2016); and Piers Morgan's multiple controversial statements about non-binary identities and language, including his position that non-binary identities are a "massive new fad" (Milton, 2019). Such mainstream representation has, nevertheless, opened up myriad, at times polarising, discussions around gender in the media, further politicising non-binary gender identities and the language surrounding them (Airton, 2018).

Despite opposition from conservative and religious figures, some private and public organisations have already recognised that there are more than two genders and are taking steps in including them in their policies. For instance, in 2014, after collaborating with various LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations, the social network Facebook created a new "custom gender option," which allowed users to select from an extensive list of gender identities beyond the traditional categories of male and female. Users are now able to select up to 10 (out of 58) gender options, ranging from "agender" to "two-spirit." People who select a custom gender may also choose the pronoun by which they would like to be referred to publicly: male (he/his), female (she/her) or neutral (they/their) (Zimmer, 2015). Some organisations in the UK such as HSBC and Metro Bank have recently allowed their users to identify as non-binary, making it easier for non-binary customers to access services without being misgendered. And TeenVogue has recently published an online article instructing its readers how to use gender-neutral language (Corcione, 2018). Therefore, the "non-binary movement" has indeed made progress and gained some social representation in these domains, further *territorialising* the language surrounding non-binary gender identities.

Non-binary people, however, are still not protected from discrimination under the Equality Act 2010 in the UK, and most organisations have not yet included non-binary genders in their Equality Index, which means that organisations do not have the legal requirement to be inclusive of non-binary people. And while LGBTQ+ organisations such as Stonewall (a charity in the UK) support the legal right to self-define one's gender, there are still many social and legal rights that non-binary people do not enjoy in the UK. According to the Transgender Equality Report published by The UK House of Commons Women and Equalities Commission (2016), non-binary people are not recognised in UK legislation, and thus are not able to obtain a gender recognition certificate – unless they use a binary gender to be recognised as trans women or men. Similarly, medical procedures are not yet inclusive of non-binary people, despite the increased visibility of non-binary-identified people in clinical settings (Koehler et al. 2018). Indeed, not all non-binary people (want to) access gender-affirming services. But among those who do, there is great diversity in the ways in which they take up gender-affirming interventions such as hormones, surgeries, voice training, etc. (Richards et al., 2015). Nonetheless, Vincent (2018) suggested that some non-binary people often expressed "not feeling trans enough" in health settings due to the existence of historically traditional binary trans narratives (McGuire et al., 2016). As such, many non-binary people in the UK felt obligated to lie about their gender in order to receive the gender-affirming services they needed from the Gender Identity Clinics. The self-determination/declaration model of trans health (Singer, 2006) is therefore required in order to fully depathologise gender-diverse individuals and their experiences (see, for instance, Suess, 2014 and Winter, 2017)

Trans people in countries such as Argentina, Malta, and Ireland can change their gender identities legally solely based on self-determination – without having to go through a psychological diagnosis or medical procedures (O'Toole, 2015). Yet, non-binary genders are still not recognised in these countries. In countries such as Denmark, Australia, India, Canada, Malaysia, and the US (Oregon and California only), people are able to change their gender in their legal documents (driving licences, passports, etc.), which includes non-binary genders (Parsons, 2019). These societal movements exemplify the ways in which a depathologising model of trans health (in the form of self-declaration) is indeed possible – and should be implemented in the UK.

In the UK, trans people are still required to go through various forms of gatekeeping in order to have their (binary) genders legally affirmed. This includes being diagnosed with gender dysphoria (Gender Recognition Act, 2004, section 1). Indeed, there are campaigns in the UK to add non-binary identities unto the Gender Recognition Act (Stonewall, 2019), and fighting to add neutral options in passports, by for example adding an X to traditional gender markers of F and M (Elan-Cane, 2014). However, these campaigns have as yet been unsuccessful.

Overall, the trans-normative belief that all trans people necessarily transition from one gender to another (Nicolazzo, 2016) persists in the medical, psychological, legal, and social arenas. And while it is true that genderqueer and non-binary people are increasingly being recognised in these domains, as their advocacy and activism becomes stronger, there is much to be done as far as social recognition (Taylor, Zalewska, Gates, & Millon, 2018). Such lack of representation can have negative impacts on the mental health and well-being of non-binary people. The following section will outline some of these impacts.

Mental Health Among Non-binary People

Two things that gender-diverse people seem to have in common is the degree to which their identities are marginalised (Nanda, 2000) and the high rates of suicide (ideation). For instance, research has suggested that trans people are four times more likely to commit suicide when they are marginalised (Goldblum et al., 2012), showing the direct link between victimisation and suicide. In the US, the 2014 National Transgender Discrimination Survey found that 44% of AFAB and 38% AMAB trans people has attempted suicide (Haas et al., 2014). A smaller study conducted by Clements-Nolle et al. (2006) concluded that "28% had been in alcohol or drug treatment, 59% had been raped, 62% experienced gender discrimination, 83% experienced verbal gender victimisation, and 36% reported physical gender victimisation" (p. 59). However, none of the aforementioned research mentions non-binary identities explicitly.

Only a few studies have suggested that non-binary people face a significant amount of stigmatisation and prejudice that may be similar to, or even be more dramatic than, the stigmatisation that binary trans people experience (Harrison et al., 2012; McNeil et al., 2012). Harrison et al. (2012), for example, inferred that "gender variant" individuals (those who, in the survey, reported either a non-binary gender or no gender at all; that is, 13% of all the people surveyed) reported higher levels of discrimination and violence than their binary transgender counterparts. The same study found that 40% of non-binary people had attempted suicide in the past, 17% of participants had experienced sexual assault, and 33% had experienced physical assault based on their gender.

Very recent research suggests that non-binary people experience greater risk for negative mental health outcomes than do trans men or women. For instance, Budge, Rossman, and Howard (2014) stated that over half of the non-binary people in their study reported having depression and over one third reported having anxiety. Other research has suggested that non-binary people experience (and assessed themselves as having) more serious psychological distress such as hopelessness and worthlessness (James et al., 2016), disability, illness, and depression than their binary trans counterparts (Burgwal et al., 2019). However, it should not be assumed that these negative experiences are intrinsic to non-binary people's experience. It has also been suggested that these high levels of distress are often due to a lack of societal understanding and the rejection gender-diverse people have endured due to this lack of understanding (Dodge and Sandfort, 2007). Thus, it is discrimination rather than psychopathology that causes distress among gender-diverse people. This has also been termed as minority stress (Meyer, 2003).

Non-binary people have been shown to avoid certain situations in order to diminish their distress. For instance, a 2016 study in the UK found that over 75% of non-binary people avoid social situations because they fear being harassed, misgendered, and/or outed. In the same study, 67% of non-binary people felt as though their genders are never included in services such mental health services, sexual health services, education settings, police interaction, at the GP, etc. and the majority feel unable to be out in their professional or educational settings (ScottishTrans.org, 2016). Such avoidance therefore reflects society's lack of understanding rather than non-binary people's internal sense of self – that is, psychological distress is not inherent to non-binary people.

I have demonstrated here that non-binary people are consistently under-researched within the social sciences and there is much we still do not know about their experiences. Therefore, studying this population is crucial, especially considering that transphobia and non-binary invisibility (as expressed through language) may have serious psychological repercussions on non-binary people (Richards et al., 2016). Such lack of intelligibility poses a variety of social challenges for non-binary people, particularly in the linguistic realm. The following section will outline some of the research relating to the linguistic negotiations of non-binary people – that is, how they manage gender-neutral language in social environments in which binary language is assumed to be the default.

Non-binary Linguistic Negotiations

Negotiating linguistic choices such as gender-neutrality may be challenging for some non-binary people, as a significant proportion of people might not be aware of the mere concept of non-binary gender identities – and some may, knowingly or unknowingly, not acknowledge their existence though discourse. For instance, a recent survey among non-binary people in the UK revealed that 76% of participants did not disclose their gender and pronouns to others because they feared negative reactions such as the ones outlined in the previous section (Government Equalities Office, 2018). Similarly, Baldwin et al. (2018) suggested that non-binary people reported being misgendered in health settings, which had negative impacts on their mental health. Misgendering is therefore a particular concern for non-binary people.

Research on the impacts of gendered language has suggested that prioritising men and assuming people are cisgender can have negative impacts on individuals. For

instance, Weatherall (2005) has suggested that women's comprehension, perception, and memory of texts is affected when the masculine generic is used, as they are typically understood as referring to men only (i.e., chairman, policeman, fireman, mankind, etc.). Ansara and Hegarty (2012) have suggested that this is also the case for trans people whose identities are not represented in mainstream discourse, furthering their sense of exclusion. Barker and Richards (2015) argue that this might also be the case for non-binary people, as their identities are not represented in discourse. Most people are typically referred to as *he* or *she* based on their appearance, a *cisnormative* assumption that delegitimises linguistic gender diversity.

Friedman (2014) argues that social representations of gender cause people to judge others' gender solely based on physical characteristics (regardless of the person's gender identity) unless they consciously attempt to disregard their essentialist notions. Using gender-neutral language, therefore, requires individuals to re-negotiate their binaristic assumptions around language. English, which has a "natural" gender (where gender is only assigned to semantically gendered elements) rather than a grammatical gender such as French or Spanish (e.g., gendered nouns, adjectives, etc., which do not necessarily have a semantic gender), proves to be one of the "easiest" languages in which linguistic gender-neutrality can be achieved. There are, however, limitations and situations in which gender-neutral language needs creativity. For instance, niece/nephew, uncle/aunt, boyfriend/girlfriend, to name a few, do not have a direct (official) neutral word. As a consequence, within some non-binary communities, a great deal of word genesis has taken place. Some have adopted words such as *nibling* for niece and nephew, *pibling* for aunt and uncle, and *date* for girlfriend and boyfriend. But

these words might not become widely used and have not yet filtered through mainstream forms of communication.

Language has been central to the emergence of non-binary gender identities, as challenging *cisnormativity* – the idea that linguistic categories such as man and woman are "normal" or "natural" – is at the heart of non-binary thinking. Zimman (2018) discusses that one of the general principles in non-binary activism is not to assume people's genders – and the language surrounding their gender – based on their appearances. Zimman (2018) argues that this is because people's genders are not always visible – genders are self-determined. Therefore, asking someone about their pronouns along with their name should be a standard practice outside of non-binary circles (Zimman, 2018). This line of thinking has become the subject of much debate, as many have postulated the act of asking others about their pronouns as difficult, excessive, unnatural, and impossible. Airton (2018) has theorised these negative views on gender-neutral language as an *excess-assemblage*, which frames gender-neutral pronoun usage as impossible, an act of excess. Citing Jordan Peterson's 2016 YouTube rant on gender-neutral language, Airton (2018) argues that this *excess-assemblage* only occurs when people "do not conform to cis-normative standards of femininity or masculinity" (p. 798). In other words, it primarily affects non-binary people. Instead, gender-neutral language should be reframed as possible, despite being an *extra effort.* In order to contribute to this process, Airton developed the NBD campaign (from "no big deal") www.nbdcampaign.ca which aims to depoliticise the use of pronouns on college campuses in Canada.

While this thesis explores the ways in which non-binary people navigate language socially, I am also interested in the ways non-binary people negotiate this

linguistic emergence within themselves. Recent research on non-binary and genderqueer people's identity negotiations have alluded to the various ways in which these gender subjectivities emerge. For instance, Moon (2018) suggested that feelings and affective forces – which they referred to as "trans-emotionality" – were decisive in people's decisions to embrace non-binary linguistic markers. Such emotions included gender disorientations and liminality, a feeling of being in-between genders. Moon (2018) argues that it is through these feelings and *affective embodiments* that people are no longer constrained by the linguistic parameters of the gender binary, permitting a flourishing of gender subjectivities to emerge (Bornstein, 1998). Therefore, non-binary linguistic emergences are constantly being (re)imagined and (re)embodied, given that non-binary people themselves are complex, diverse, both static and fluid, and influenced by internal and external factors. This research endeavours to examine some of the ways in which these gender and linguistic possibilities emerge, become *territorialised*, and are constantly transformed.

Concluding Remarks

I have outlined the historical precedence of non-binary gender identities, across the globe and cross-culturally. I have also shown the ways in which non-binary thinking and its linguistic features emerged in the "West," intensifying in the 1990's and early 2000's and becoming increasingly *territorialised* in the second half of the 2010's. Such intensification, in the form of knowledge dissemination online, for instance, has been linked to an increase in the number of non-binary-identified people, as well as linguistic movements such as the push for gender-neutrality and inclusivity. However, non-binary identities have been sensationalised and widely misunderstood, contributing to the high

levels of stigma, victimisation, and discrimination that non-binary people face. Furthermore, all these factors have been shown to contribute to the high rates of psychological distress experienced by non-binary people.

I have also demonstrated the ways in which language is often at the centre of these tensions. Non-binary people, therefore, negotiate the language they use to describe themselves on an ongoing basis. These negotiations are not simply internal, but require a social negotiation with other bodies, entities, histories, sexualities, etc. I have demonstrated some of the ways in which these factors contribute to the emergence of non-binary gender identities and *linguistic becomings* – and this thesis will continue to show the way these and other factors affect and are affected this emergence.

Non-binary gender identities are negotiated in fluid, relational, and unpredictable ways in an ongoing process of emergence and becoming. For instance, Vincent (2016) argues that these negotiations could entail shifting between a binary trans identity to a non-binary one, and vice versa. Some non-binary people reject the notion of attaching a (single) label to themselves, given the complexity of their gender experiences (Richards et al., 2016). Therefore, the present research also investigates the material elements of gender which are part of the *assemblage* of non-binary gender identities online and offline.

3. THEORISING GENDER IN PSYCHOLOGY

Photo by Ayush Gupta. Used with Alok Vaid-Menon's written permission.

"Being non-binary is not just about my gender, but also about rejecting dichotomies and oppositional thinking, affirming my own complexity and simultaneity. Being non-binary isn't just about being defined by my absence (I am not a man or a woman), but also by my abundance (I am far too expansive to be encapsulated by the gender binary). Being non-binary is about embracing my fluidity, my becoming, my journey without fixed destination."

Figure 3. Alok Vaid-Menon, performance artist, poet, and LGBTQ+ rights activist. Interview for the The Huffington Post (Arora, 2018).

This chapter will outline some of the research and theoretical underpinnings that continue to shape the ways in which trans and non-binary people are understood within the field of psychology. The first part of this chapter will examine the historical emergence of research that focussed on gender diversity. Such research endeavours originated within the fields of medicine, sexology, and psychiatry. Most research on the experiences of trans people has failed to acknowledge the existence of non-binary individuals/identities, as it has primarily focussed on 'transsexualism' (Barker & Richards, 2015). Although this is changing, the limited research that exists tends to focus on pathology and diagnosis of trans people, and the gender binary is always at the heart of this research (Nic Rider et al., 2019). The origins of gender dysphoria will be

discussed in this section. The second part of this chapter will examine the ways in which the field of psychology has historically focussed its attention to gender differences, leaving little to no space to the study of non-binary individuals. While this is also changing, the focus on differences is still prevalent in psychological research.

I will then offer an overview of the two main epistemologies of gender within the field of psychology: the positivist and the social constructivist perspectives. While these perspectives are typically understood as oppositional and entirely different from one another, I argue that a *non-binary* perspective is necessary in order to account for the nuances of gender. Drawing from *assemblage theory* (DeLanda, 2006), which employs a materialist ontology, the theoretical perspective of *gender and linguistic becomings* will be developed in this chapter. This theory understands non-binary genders –and their linguistic emergences – as an ongoing *(de/re)territorialisation* of material and linguistic affects. I conclude this chapter by outlining and substantiating the materialist approach employed in this project.

Sexology, Gender Diversity, and Gender Dysphoria

In the first half of the nineteenth century, gender diversity went from being considered a crime and a sin (a perversion) to a sickness (a pathology) (Hird, 2002). This shift occurred as the scientific study of sexuality and gender issues emerged within the field of medicine in Europe (Foucault, 1978). This medical research into "non-normative" genders and sexualities gave birth to the field of sexology, with researchers such as Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing, Magnus Hirschfeld, and Henry Havelock Ellis who, though empirical research, advanced this field of study (Beemyn, 2014).

Foucault (1978) argues that the mere concepts of a sexual and gender identities were devised at this time through a process of naming and labelling. For instance, Ulrichs developed the 'third sex' theory of sexuality, which described individuals who were neither male nor female, but 'urnings' (AMAB) or 'urningins' (AFAB) who experienced a 'migration of the soul' – that is, 'a female soul trapped in a male body' and vice versa (Oosterhuis, 2000). Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing, an influential Austro-German psychiatrist, further developed Ulrichs' ideas and developed the concept of a *sexual invert* (Krafft-Ebing, 1886). This concept described people who displayed cross-gender presentation and identification, as well as same-sex desire. This nomenclature challenged the prevailing view that these individuals were perverted and it allowed for the production of research into this increasingly visible population.

In 1919, Hirschfeld founded the Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin, where one of the earliest gender reassignment surgeries was conducted under his supervision (Meyerowitz, 2002): Lili Elbe, whose story was depicted in the 2015 film *The Danish Girl*. One of the most remarkable contributions at this time was the separation of sexuality (same-sex desires) and gender (cross-sex presentation/identification) (Hirschfeld, 1910; Ellis 1938), as these concepts were typically conflated and studied together. During this time, transsexuality (as an identity) was also distinguished from transvestism (cross-dressing) (Hirschfeld, 1910; Ekins & King, 1996). Much of this research, however, was systematically eliminated by the Nazis in 1933, as they burned the Institute of Sexology in Berlin.

It was not until 1953 that German-American endocrinologist Harry Benjamin re-introduced the concepts of "transsexuality" and "transvestite" in the United States (Benjamin, 1953). In his book, *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, Benjamin (1966)

challenged the prevailing view that cross-gender expression and identification should be seen as illegal or sinful, akin to Krafft-Ebing's, Ellis', and Hirschfeld's advocacy several decades prior. In Benjamin's view, transsexuality was a physical condition rather than a mental condition. As such, he argued that the 'transsexual condition' could be resolved endocrinologically (by taking hormones) and through surgical interventions (Ekins, 2005). Indeed, Benjamin (1966) evidenced this by showing that trans people were better adjusted after transitioning medically – that is, Benjamin "found that among fifty-one of his MTF (male-to-female) patients who underwent surgery, 86 percent had "good" or "satisfactory" lives afterward" (Benjamin, 1966, as cited in Beemyn, 2014, p. 16). The Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (HBIGDA) (now known as The World Professional Association of Transgender Health (WPATH)) was then established, which proposed the 'Standards of Care' for transsexual people (Benjamin, 1966; Coleman et al., 2012). As such, the demand for these services increased, and more than forty gender clinics were opened in the US. Thus, Benjamin's research aided in institutionalising a medical model of the "true transsexual" and setting up inclusion/exclusion parameters around this *medical condition* – that is, being "born in the wrong body" and being attracted to people of their same birth sex (Stryker, 2008).

The field of psychology and psychiatry had different theories about the "causes" of transsexuality, however. The theory of social gender identity development (Money et al., 1957), for instance, understood gender as merely a product of socialisation and, as such, different from a person's biology. These socialisation theories often blamed parents for the gender non-conformity of their children (Green & Money, 1969), as they drew from psychoanalytic doctrines (Freud, 1905). Nevertheless, these theories began

to conceptualise gender as different from sex (Stoller, 1964), thus establishing the view that sex and gender are a result of nature and nurture, respectively. Furthermore, the field of psychiatry became "involved in the assessment and care of transgender people" (Murjan & Bouman, 2017, p. 127.). Around this time, the term "gender dysphoria" was not only devised but widely employed, thus *territorialising* its usage. This term symbolised the sense of misalignment between sex and gender (e.g., being in the "wrong body") and the need to align these two concepts through medical and psychological care (Hines, 2010).

While Harry Benjamin showed that transsexuality was not mental disorder, diagnostic criteria for transsexualism were nonetheless implemented in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-9; WHO, 1978), as well as in the American Psychiatric Association (APA) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III; APA, 1980). In the DSM-III, the diagnostic criteria appeared as 'Gender Identity Disorder', and 'transsexualism' was defined as a disorder causing "a persistent sense of discomfort and inappropriateness about one's anatomic sex and a persistent wish to be rid of one's genitals and to live as a member of the other sex" (p. 261-62). This was due to the widespread belief among psychiatrists that transsexuality was a mental condition. Hines (2010) argues that, during this time, "the site of pathology was thus transferred from the body to the mind" (p.2). Trans people have ever since been required to undergo rigorous psychological evaluations in order to access gender-affirming services – a gatekeeping model which has been criticised for pathologising gender diverse people (Bockting et al., 2010).

Since then, there have been some changes to the ways gender diversity is *diagnosed*; however, the gatekeeping model is still mostly in place. The fifth edition of

the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5; 2013) reconceptualised its controversial and pathologising "Gender Identity Disorder" to "Gender Dysphoria," a "distress that may accompany the incongruence between one's experienced or expressed gender and one's assigned gender" (APA, 2013, p. 451). This new diagnosis explicitly recognises non-binary genders in the use of the word "alternative" gender rather than "opposite" (p. 452) gender. The DSM-5 also asserts that gender dysphoria is not a mental disorder; however, it acknowledges that the element of distress is a core element of this diagnosis (APA, 2013). And while some trans and non-binary people can develop gender dysphoria as the DSM-5 conceptualises it, not all trans and non-binary people do (Davy, 2015; Davy and Toze, 2018).

The fact that "Gender Dysphoria" is still classified within the DSM-5 in and of itself stigmatises trans lives, as it associates their experiences with mental illness, i.e., being *diagnosed* with a psychiatric condition, which is oppressive and problematic (Lev, 2013). Thus, some trans activists from around the world argue that gender dysphoria should be declassified altogether, the same way that homosexuality was declassified in the 70's and it is no longer considered a mental illness (Cabral, 2011; Drescher, 2010; Suess et al., 2014; Winter, 2017). Suess et al. (2014), for instance, argue that gender diversity should instead be recognised as a human right, not a mental disorder. One of the main concerns with declassification is that in some countries a diagnosis is needed in order to receive some (private or public) gender-affirming services as well as legal gender recognition: passports, IDs, licenses, etc. However, some argue that having gender dysphoria as a diagnosis does not make sense, as those who are diagnosed with gender dysphoria have similar levels of psychopathology as the rest of the population (Simon et al., 2011; Hoshiai et al., 2010; Cole et al., 1997;

Mustanski et al., 2010); therefore, trans should not be equated with psychopathology.

Gender dysphoria is therefore not an essential characteristic of trans and non-binary individuals. Instead, poor mental and physical health among trans and non-binary people should be attributed to minority stress (Meyer 2013) and marginalisation stress (Bouman et al., 2010) – that is, the idea that stigma, prejudice, social exclusion, and discrimination (in this case, gender-based) lead to poorer mental and psychical health (Lick et al., 2013). Trans and non-binary people are indeed victims of discrimination and harassment based on their gender identities and expressions (Hendricks & Testa, 2012). As such, they are likely to experience minority stress (Meyer, 2003).

Countries such as Belgium, Sweden and Netherlands have already taken steps to depathologise gender diversity by allowing people to access endocrinological services without a psychiatric diagnosis (Murjan & Bouman, 2017), thereby reducing stigma among trans and non-binary people and allowing them to make decisions about their own bodies (Arcelus & Bouman, 2016). In 2019, the World Health Organisation approved an update to the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-11) in which "gender identity disorders" were re-named "gender incongruence." This new classification is no longer considered a mental disorder, as it is now classified under a chapter on sexual health. However, it still unclear whether subsequent editions of the DSM will declassify gender dysphoria as well.

This section has outlined the emergence gender theorising within the fields of medicine, sexology, and psychology – and some of the ways these disciplines intercepted historically to *assemblage* the "true transsexual" narrative. Gender diversity

has been (and still is) considered a pathology, which further stigmatises and pathologies their experiences. Within the field of psychology, trans and non-binary people have historically been under-researched (Hyde et al., 2018), and, as I have shown, their experiences have been narrated by the psycho-medical institutions and not trans and non-binary people themselves.

In the study of gender issues, the field of psychology has primarily focussed its attention to gender differences between cis men and women. The following section will outline some of the research on gender differences, showing how the gender binary has been privileged and perpetuated within the field of psychology. As a result, non-binary genders have been rendered unintelligible (Nicolazzo, 2017).

(Cis)Gender and Psychology

Within psychology, particularly quantitative research, the study of gender has focussed primarily on doing comparative work that places (cisgender) men and women in separate categories (as independent variables), and often focussing on differences rather than similarities (Barker & Richards, 2015). This type of research has reinforced the notion that there are only two genders (men and women) and that they differ significantly from one another (Richards & Barker, 2015). Psychological gender research has, therefore, mainly focussed on cisgender people, while disregarding the experiences of those who do not identify with or express the gender that they were assigned at birth: trans, non-binary, gender non-conforming, etc. Equally, they have greatly ignored the experiences of intersex people who may or may not fit nicely into the essentialist, binary models of both sex and gender.

Historically, within the field of psychology, biological differences between men and

women, and the way these biological markers (hormones, chromosomes, primary and secondary sex characteristics, etc.) affected – and were related to – behaviour and identity were the focus of early research on gender (or sex). The study of biological differences was grounded in the assumption that these were genetically pre-programmed, apparent at birth with the morphology of the body, and stable (Hyde et al., 2018) – a *cisnormative* assumption. This theoretical approach to gender and sex is sometimes called biological essentialism, as it presupposes that gender is natural, inevitable, and biologically determined (Irvine, 1990).

The research on biological differences – and their effects on psychological traits – became increasingly prevalent after Darwin (1871)'s work *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* was published. Some of this research has focussed on differences among cisgender men and women, including in the areas of sexual behaviour, intelligence, memory, aggression, personality traits, empathy, emotion, mental health, cognitive control, etc. (see McGeeney and Harvey, 2015 for a full review). However, a great deal of this work lacks replicability and the results are often mixed, inconclusive, and/or context-dependent (Hyde, 2005). In light of 46 meta-analyses demonstrating little differences between men and women in a variety of psychological domains, Hyde (2005) proposed the *gender similarities hypothesis,* stating that men and women are more similar than different on most psychological variables and that the small differences are trivial and cannot be definitively associated with biology. Additionally, Hyde (2005) argued that social, cultural, historical, and economic factors are often not considered, making some of the claims hazy. Stereotype threat theory (Spencer et al., 1999), for instance, has posited that when individuals are made aware of stereotypes associated to their gender (i.e., boys are good at math),

perceptions of their own gender-stereotypical abilities intensify – affecting their performance in stereotypical ways (Fine, 2010). As such, gender differences can be re-produced by a variety of factors, including stereotypes and social expectations – and not due to inherit, essential, and/or purely biological forces.

Before the gender similarities hypothesis was proposed, Sandra Bem, one of the first feminist researchers to discuss the problems associated with rigid gender binaries in the "West," developed a ground-breaking theory on gender roles in the early 70's. Bem proposed that gender inequality needed to be dismantled by acknowledging that gender can fall between or beyond the gender binary. The *Bem Sex Role Inventory* (1974) measured stereotypical masculinity and femininity, as well as neutrality (in the form of as neutral filler items), regardless of the respondents' gender. Respondents then scored in both masculinity and femininity measures, which was ground-breaking in that it deviated from the – then unquestionable – view that masculinity and femininity were discrete categories. Participants were classified in one of four categories: sex-typed (high scores on gender assigned at birth), sex-reversed (high scores on the "other sex"), androgynous (high scores on both), or undifferentiated (low scores on both). Additionally, Bem and Lenney (1976) suggested that rigid adherence to a binary gender role is not psychologically healthy and, thus, recommended that gender flexibility – specifically what they termed androgyny – would lead to more positive psychological outcomes. Bem's stance on androgyny evolved later in her career because androgyny assumes that psychological traits such as masculinity and femininity are inherent to the individual rather than contextual. Thus, Bem hypothesised that gender roles are learned through gender schemas rather than being innate forces (Bem, 1981). Her focus on the learned nature of gender schemas, while controversial at the time, opened up multiple

doors for more critical analysis of gender in "Western" societies. Specifically, the possibility that gender can have fluidity, flexibility, and plurality. Bem (1995) later argued that the proliferation of genders (which she expressed as being ideal in order to undo the privilege of *cisnormative* genders) can lead people to create further restrictions and policing, as people struggle to fit into a newly created category. Barker (2013) argues that this proliferation of identities is what we are seeing in the present day with non-binary gender identities. Similar to Bem, Barker argues that this proliferation of identities can create new sets of norms which simultaneously include and exclude people, a trend that is common within marginalised communities.

Despite Bem's work and early assertions about flexibility, the discipline of psychology continues to produce work with essentialist and positivist assumptions concerning gender by focussing on gender differences and by not acknowledging the diverse and expansive articulation of identities evidenced in the research (Hird, 2002). As such, Hyde et al. (2018) call for "scholars [to] recognize that *male* and *female* are insufficient for capturing the full range of identities and [to] acknowledge that gender/sex may be irrelevant to individuals' sense of who they are" (p. 10) and that maintaining such binary classification of gender can produce a "myriad negative consequences of gender stereotyping and prejudice" (p. 18). It is for this reason that a different approach is necessary in order to fully understand the complexity of gender – one that acknowledges not only the contextual nature of gender, but also the ways in which material and linguistic *intensities territorialise* gender identities.

In health psychology, the *biopsychosocial* model (Engel, 1977) has been employed to understand some of the relationships between the biological, psychological, and social elements of health. This approach, while useful, has indeed

been criticised for privileging individuals and portraying bodies as static, simple, and linear (see, for instance, Brown & Stenner, 2009). Similarly, Duff (2014) argues that an *assemblage* occupies all levels of reality, which, in turn, avoids making reductivist claims that often position one level of reality (i.e., biology) as primary and under-privileges or positions the others as secondary or even tertiary (i.e., that biological sex determines gender identity, which in turn determines the way we speak about gendered bodies).

The present thesis conceptualises the biological, psychological, and social elements of the self as non-linear and non-hierarchical. Instead, *assemblages* are made up of all these elements at once, but with various *intensities* depending on a multitude of factors such as history, politics, language, desires, etc. – and a particular juncture in and through time. As such, this thesis does not negate the fact that there are material morphological differences among male- and female-bodied individuals; however, the claim that these material elements have an essential effect – an ultimate ontological truth – on people's behaviours and identities must be understood among all the other affectivities. Nonetheless, the biopsychosocial model is a useful way to delineate some of the main components that make up an *assemblage*, without making simplistic assertions.

Within psychology, a variety of ontological approaches have emerged to dismantle the gender (and sex) binary – that is, the social constructionist approaches such as critical psychology, discursive psychology, and discourse analysis. Some of these new approaches oppose the essentialist notions upon which psychological research on gender has generally relied. However, this has created a new set of research binaries within the psychological research – namely, the essentialist approach versus the

social constructionist approach. This research aims to break through this research binary by proposing a non-binary ontology in which both new materialist and discursive practices are acknowledged in order to provide new insights into non-binary identities, language, embodiment, and social experiences.

I will now outline the "discursive turn" in psychology (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), which is typically positioned as antithetical to essentialist notions of the self. While the present research sees language as an important part in the emergence and negotiation of gender identities, the materiality of the body is theorised to be equally important.

Social Constructionism and Discourse Analysis

Inspired by French philosopher Michael Foucault's (1972) writings on power, discourse, and sexuality – and in an attempt to move away from the essentialist and positivist view of gender – some theorists, activists, and many feminists in the 1990's challenged and aimed to expand the gender binary by examining gender through the lenses of postmodernism and poststructuralism. This movement helped develop what is now known as social constructionism. This epistemological framework posits that knowledge is the outcome of social interaction, wherein language is an intrinsic (and the core) element of knowledge (Burr, 2003). Furthermore, social constructionism claims that language plays a significant role in creating meanings and social identities such as gender (Burr, 2003). This theorisation opposes essentialist notions of the self as it sees knowledge as partial and contextual. As such, this epistemological approach claims that there are no absolute truths about the world or about the self; there are no absolute truths about who we are (e.g., sexuality, gender, etc.), because these identities

are *socially constructed* through the available ways of thinking and speaking – and the discourses surrounding these constructs.

A discourse, according Foucault (1972), is made up of the "practices which systematically form the objects of which they [people] speak to" (p. 49). Therefore, knowledge is constructed via social interaction. Burr (1995) defines discourse as "a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events ... Surrounding any one object, event, person etc., there may be a variety of different discourses, each with a different story to tell about the world, a different way of representing it to the world" (p. 48) It is through discourse that we become subjects; that is, we submit ourselves to the socially constructed gender norms and practices (Butler, 1990).

Within the field of psychology, this approach has been coined as discourse psychology or discourse analysis, which places language not only as a *resource* but as a *central* element in constructing identities, attitudes, and emotions (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Edwards, 1997). Discursive psychologist Jonathan Potter (1996) posited that "language reflects how things are in its descriptions, representations and accounts" (p. 97). As such, language is a construction yard wherein "descriptions and accounts construct the world, or at least versions of the world […, and] are themselves constructed" (Potter, 1996, p. 97). In other words, language enables us to make realities *in situ* to do particular kinds of social business. Celia Kitzinger (2008), for instance, has used discourse research (in the form of Conversation Analysis) to shown how "gender – or sexuality, or power, or oppression – is produced and reproduced in interaction" (p. 136). With respect to gender, discursive psychological approaches focus on how gender is not something we *are* but something we *do* (West &

Zimmerman, 1987). As such, in poststructuralist terms, gender is seen as a form of social and cultural practice.

Butler (1994) argued that gender is "a mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized" (p. 42). Butler (1994) argues that gender cannot be limited to the constraints of the *heterosexual matrix*, wherein people are assumed – and often forced – to be(come) cis, heterosexual men or women. In her influential book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler (1990) sought to destabilise and denaturalise the gender binary by rejecting the view that biology is the main factor influencing gender differences, arguing instead that social practices are pivotal to the gender binary. Butler conceptualised gender in terms of *performativity* (Butler, 1990) – that is, the outcome of linguistic and social practices, not the property of individuals or something we essentially are. In other words, people do not speak a certain way because they *are* that gender, they use language to *perform* their gender identity – which was most likely assigned to them at birth and, as such, interpellated (Butler, 1990).

This view de-essentialises the belief that gender is inherent, biologically-dependent, and solely material. Our social norms structure our understanding of biology, which renders sex a social construct as well (see, for instance, Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Drawing on this theoretical perspective of gender, sex, and sexuality, and including a political critique, queer theory is similarly an area of study which seeks to de-stabilise and de-essentialise these categories and examine their fluidity, complexity, and multiplicity (Jagose, 1996). Queer theory has brought critical research to the areas of *heteronormativity* and *cisnormativity* (Motschenbacher & Stegu, 2013). All these

poststructuralist theories understand gender/sex/sexuality as socially constructed, allowing them to reject the notion that heterosexuality and cisgenderness are the unmarked categories (also known as the *heterosexual matrix*) (Butler, 1990). Queer theory has also critically examined the oppression and discrimination that LGBTQ+ people face due to these notions (Nanda, 2000).

In terms of research within this school of thought, spoken word and written texts have been analysed in order to illustrate the myriad ways in which gender identities are not only socially constructed, but how these identities are maintained, performed, indexed, and interpreted by others. Discourse analysis, for example, aims to identify dominant (powerful) discourses and their influence on the ways people think and talk about things such as gender and sexuality. We are, accordingly, subject to these hegemonic discourses of gender: the way we speak, our gendered actions and behaviours, etc. These hegemonic gender practices and performances, however, are context-dependent and they vary over time, cross-culturally, and individually over the course of our lives. For instance, hegemonic masculinity in the United Kingdom today is not (completely) similar to the hegemonic masculinity in South Korea in the 80s (see, for instance, Seidler, 2006). It is by revealing these discourses that *gendered discourses* (Sunderland, 2004) can be uncovered.

Another important notion in the poststructuralist account of gender is Butler's (1993) concept of (un)intelligibility. She states that anyone who deviates from the hegemonic practices of gender and sexuality (for instance, non-binary people) is seen as socially impossible – or unintelligible. In terms of gender it could be argued that those that "deviate" from the hegemonic gender binary are seen as incoherent and hard to understand, given that there is a lack of general familiarity. Non-binary genders are

therefore seen as unintelligible, rendering them invisible and illegitimate. How then do non-binary people cope and manage being rendered as unintelligible? What mechanisms do non-binary people use to make their genders valid/intelligible? If social constructionist accounts of the self are determined by discourse alone, is there room for agency and self-determination? Where does this leave the bodily experience?

Although social constructionist accounts of gender have demonstrated how gender subjectivities and identities such as masculinities (Kaminer and Dixon, 1995) have been "shaped by socially-contingent systems of thought" (Fox & Alldred, 2015, p. 203) through language, Monro (2000) argues that social constructionism fails to account for the sense of self within social structures. Therefore, conceptualising gender as entirely socially constructed denies the individuals' sense of identity, their bodily experience, and their psychological states, thoughts, and history – the materiality of living. In queer theorising, agency and identity are formed by dominant discourse while the individual is "decentred" – specifically, individuals lack both biological and psychological materiality as well as agency and autonomy. Monro (2000) argues that trans theories should include both a sense of self-construction and self-embodiment and that these theories should be willing to understand the gender experiences of all trans people – their expansion, desires, and fluidity.

While there has indeed been many feminist and constructionist engagements with materiality (See, for instance, Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Haraway, 1991; Harding, 1989), discourse analysis has not been without criticism. According to Brown and Stenner (2009), the discursive turn in psychology often lacks an engagement with embodiment. Similarly, Monro (2005) argues that these theories display "a lack of

attention to lived experience of the body, a denial of the need for gender categorisation, and a lack of political awareness" (p. 3).

The material body, therefore, must be included in the conversation, as it interacts with the rest of the elements: society, language, and the self. A more materialist approach is clearly needed to address these gaps. This thesis offers a more effective analysis of gender as *assemblages*, examining the embodied and linguistic desires of trans selfhood (Crawford, 2008). This thesis is therefore interested in the ways in which particular materialities are activated, formulated, and deployed to produce particular kinds of social business (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010) – and the multiple ways in which these materialities affect and are affected by discursive forces.

The following section will outline the theoretical and ontological perspective this thesis embraces and further develops.

Assemblages: Gender and Linguistic Becomings – Beyond Social Constructionism

I have argued that in conceptualising gender as purely biological or as purely discursive is unhelpful, as these interpretations do not fully account for the complexities and *intensities* of gender identity, and they often perpetuate binary thinking: essentialism/constructivism, nature/nurture, subject/object, mind/body (Duff, 2014). These binaries, nonetheless, continue to frame much of the psychological research on gender (Brown & Stenner, 2009). While my research aims to investigate how language and gender identity among non-binary people are interrelated, it also acknowledges that there is more to identity than language and discourse. I aim to examine the complexities of gender as well as the multitude of relations that affect and create multiple gender ontologies. As such, a theory of gender that incorporates both personal and material embodiment and linguistic performativity – and how these interact with the social world

– is necessary in order to establish a broad picture of the experiences of non-binary people. In an effort to overcome some of the epistemological and ontological limitations of previous research, this thesis will employ a new *materialist* perspective to language, embodiment, and affective desires.

This approach draws from the highly influential work of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, as well as his collaborator Félix Guattari, who developed some of the foundational framework for a new materialist ontology of reality and human activity. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), for instance, Deleuze and Guattari employ the concept of *becoming,* as opposed to *being,* which de-essentialises and de-stabilises the idea that a single force – or *intensity* – is responsible for the emergence or production of subjectivities:

> "Becoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree. Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, "appearing," "being," "equalling," or "producing."" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 239).

Processes of *becoming*, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987) are made up of a multitude of *affects*, referring to the capacity to affect – and be affected by – material and non-material forces. As such, *affects* such as human bodies, society, language, history, the material, and the abstract are all interlinked in non-hierarchical (rhizomatic) ways, as they affect one another constantly. Currier (2003) argues that, in the materialist ontology of *becoming*, human agency is replaced by *affects*, which produce capacities to act, feel, and desire in bodies.

This research will also draw from *assemblage theory* (DeLanda, 2006). *Assemblage theory*, which was inspired by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), and has been

called a "'second wave' of social constructivism […] in which […] non-human actors such as technical artefacts and the like can play an active role…" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010, p. 38-39). Furthermore, materialist ontologies are said to not only be interested in language, discourse, and meaning, but also "objects, materials, and processes by which entities are constructed and maintained" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010, as cited in Price-Robertson & Duff, 2016, p. 2). While *assemblage theory* moves beyond the solely linguistic, it does not disregard its importance and understands it as an *affective intensity*. Indeed, within the field of psychology, the "materialist turn" has been employed by researchers such as Steve Brown and Paul Stenner who have argued that these theoretical developments are powerful tools for research innovation (Brown, 2010; Brown & Stenner, 2009). DeLanda (2006) stresses that "the realist social ontology […] is all about objective processes of assembly: a wide range of social entities, from persons to nation-states, […] constructed through very specific historical processes, processes in which language plays an important but not a constitutive role" (p. 3). In that sense, *assemblage theory* draws from social constructivist theories, the "linguistic turn," but it extends these theoretical commitments by acknowledging the multiple social, material, historical, linguistic, etc. affective forces that are involved in the emergence, production, and overall *assemblage* of this knowledge (Anderson et al., 2012).

Assemblage theory* is therefore employed in this thesis as a way to theorise gender as an *assemblage* of multiple affective forces, including discursive and material forces. A material *assemblage* can include the body, physical contexts, and structures; whereas a discursive *assemblage* may include norms, gender roles, etc. (Duff, 2014). These *assemblages* are, again, not constructed hierarchically, but rather in a chaotic,

rhizomatic and unpredictable fashion. Assemblages can be *territorialised*, *deterritorialised*, or *reterritorialised* through *affective flows* – namely, interactions between the different elements that are part of the territory. Furthermore, a *territorialisation* works to stabilise the *assemblage*'s identity, to solidify it momentarily, whereas a *deterritorialisation* transforms the *assemblage*, forming new functions, capacities, flows, and forms, which results in *reterritorialisations* or boundaries. These concepts are important in the present thesis, as they map out the movements that exists between and within affects. These *territorialisations* are therefore only temporarily stable and never linear.

This theory rejects the essentialist notions of the gender binary while, at the same time, affirming the body's materiality in relation to people's identities. Similar to discourse analysis, this theory is interested in the workings of power, language, discourse, and desire (Williams, 2005), but it also provides a *non-binary model* of the ways linguistic and material forces affect and are affected by one another – and how these interactions aid in the formation of complex concepts and processes of *becoming* – in this case, non-binary gender identities.

This ontological framework has been applied in studying sexualities. For instance, Fox and Alldred (2013) examined the ways in which *sexuality-assemblages* are produced and manifested via the *territorialisation* of desires and bodies. Included in this approach is desire – arousal and conduct – as well as the way in which all of these material factors relate to one another within the *sexuality-assemblage*. This thesis will apply this framework to develop a theory around *gender and linguistic becomings* of non-binary people.

In terms of gender, *assemblage theory* argues that gender is never static, always in a process of *becoming*. I draw upon the concept of *becomings* as a useful metaphor for the experiences of change, transformation, and constant processes of emergence of gender. As such, this research adds to the theorising of gender as *becoming* (Linstead and Pullen, 2006). This is by no means done in an organised fashion; it is messy and complex. This thesis, therefore, understands gender and identity to be always relational, always in a process of *becoming* (a constant journey with no final destination) – *territorialised*, *deterritorialised* and *reterritorialised* through *affective* flows that move through the body, society, language, and other material and abstract elements. When these relations between and within affects develop around actions or events, an *assemblage* or a *territory* is created (Braidotti, 2006). Thus, rather than merely an outcome of the performativity of social practice and social construction, gender is an *assemblage* formed on an ongoing basis through these *affective* flows (Linstead & Pullen, 2006).

This theoretical framework sheds light into the *gender and linguistic becomings* of non-binary people both online and offline by examining the multiple *affective intensities* that make up the *non-binary-assemblage* of study participants. By employing and developing this theory, I will demonstrate the ways in which both linguistic and material affective forces contribute to the emergence of non-binary gender identities in the form of, for example, *linguistic becomings*.

A *linguistic becoming*, in the context of this thesis, refers to the importance that is placed upon language in the processes of *gender becomings* among non-binary people. Such emergence is by no means linear, hierarchical or chronological, but a messy, unpredictable process of gender and linguistic emergence that can be

(de/re)territorialised in multiple ways, thus contributing to the *assemblage* of non-binary gender identities online and offline. This theoretical perspective will therefore be developed throughout this thesis. Brown and Stenner (2009) have argued that this ontological orientation can help rejuvenate psychological inquiry.

Concluding Remarks

Gender from a binary perspective has been discussed *ad nauseum*. This chapter has reviewed some of the predominant ways in which gender has been conceptualised and studied within the field of psychology. Firstly, I have outlined the psychological positions on gender diversity. Transness has historically been understood as pathological, requiring individuals to be diagnosed and treated for their (mental) condition. While this is changing, such stigmatising view is still prevalent within psychology. While the field of psychology has examined trans people, it has failed to account for gender-diverse individuals. Research has typically disregarded the experiences of those living between or outside the gender binary. Such lack of research on gender-diverse people has been due to the belief that there are only two genders (including trans genders) – a *cisgenderist* position.

Secondly, I have demonstrated the ways in which the positivists' perspectives of gender have historically positioned the gender/sex binary as an essential part of the self – one which was unquestioned and had no mobility or capacity for change. As such, cisgender men and women have been traditionally positioned as different rather than similar. Because of this, studies have focussed on drawing out the differences between men and women on a variety of psychological and biological domains. However, these views have been challenged, as few differences actually exist between men and women,

especially when considering the contextual and situational elements that might produce them.

As a response to these positivist theories, critical perspectives such as queer theory and discursive psychology have emerged, challenging binary assumptions such as *heteronormativity* and *cisnormativity*. While these theories have positioned gender/sex/sexuality as socially constructed, they have also assumed that the gender binary is the hegemonic force that allows people to move between masculinity and femininity, arguing that these hegemonic forces ought to be deconstructed. These theories have overemphasised the discursive construction of gender identities, leaving little to no room for the materiality of the body, affective desires, and the capacities these can produce within and between individuals.

Both constructionist and new materialist ontologies examine the power dynamics; however, materialist ontologies like *assemblage theory* do not aim to examine its social construction. Rather, they examine the social production, emergence, and *becoming* of power and subjectivities, thus focussing on materiality rather than discourse (Coole and Frost, 2010). *Assemblage theory* does not assume a hegemonic force exists or that is should be deconstructed. Instead, it argues that some forces become *territorialised* at specific moments in time due to a multitude of affects, but these *intensities* are fluid, messy, and in constant processes of *becoming*.

This thesis therefore draws from these theoretical and analytical developments, furthering their understanding by examining the ways in which gender identities emerge, operate, and are negotiated in a constant process of *becoming*. As such, this thesis posits that language is an important aspect in the emergence of identities; however, it does not position it as the main *intensity* in this emergence. While this

materialist ontology shares constructivists understandings of power and the role of language, it also recognises "a more dynamic interplay within *assemblages* that opens up the possibilities for aggregative forces to be resisted, enabling new capacities and desires to emerge, for bodies to affect and be affected in ways that they have never done before" (Alldred & Fox, 2015, p. 207).

Assemblage theory (DeLanda, 2006) goes beyond social constructionism and discourse analysis and explores how non-linguistic elements such as the body, society, context, and the self all affect and are affected by the processes of *becoming*. *Assemblage theory* is therefore used in this thesis as a tool to understand the different affects that contribute to the *assemblages* and processes of *becoming* non-binary both online and offline. Thus, the experiences of non-binary people can be understood in terms of not only language, but also society, the body, and other material factors – all affects that contribute to this *becoming*. All these materialities, according to *assemblage theory*, are connected, producing an ongoing *becoming*, a journey with no final destination. These materialities are in and of themselves *becoming*. As such, this thesis examines materiality not in terms of what it *is* (its "essence"), but in terms of what it does (its productive capacities) (Fox and Alldred, 2017).

While this theoretical framework sees identity as constantly being negotiated and in the process of *becoming*, it is crucial that the identities of the participants who contributed to this research are respected and validated. DeLanda (2006) argues that, through the study of individual *assemblages*, we can "assert that all these individual entities have an objective existence independently of our minds (or of our conceptions of them) without any commitment to essences or reified generalities" (p. 40). Furthermore, gender, as theorised by *assemblage theory*, is not an essential part of the

self and can be affected by multiple processes of *(de/re)territorialisation*. The fact is that non-binary people self-identify as non-binary and that this identity is significant to them is important to acknowledge, as this research does not aim to erase their identities or impose *cisgenderist* theories upon them. Thus, some non-binary people in this research may continue to identify as non-binary for the rest of their lives while others may not (Twist & de Graaf, 2019). Deconstructing non-binary people's embodied experience would be detrimental as they are currently fighting to find a place in a highly *heteronormative*, *cisnormative* society. The identities of the participants in this study therefore represent a snapshot of their process of *becoming* at a specific time and place. This thesis is interested in their linguistic, material, embodied, and context-dependent experience.

4. METHODOLOGIES

In line with the materialist ontology that I employ in this thesis, I followed Fox and Alldred's (2014; 2015) methodological approach. This materialist approach understands research as an *assemblage* of events, researchers, research tools, ideas, etc. which are used to produce knowledge. As such, research production is in and of itself a material, relational, and interactive *assemblage*, having the potential to affect (and be affected by) other bodies of research, researchers, bodies, social formations, events, praxis, etc. in unpredictable ways.

The present research examines the *gender and linguistic becomings* of non-binary people in three different settings: (a) semi-structured interviews, (b) writing samples, and (c) discourse from an online forum. Combined, the data and subsequent analysis contribute to the knowledge base of non-binary gender identities both offline and online, as a *research-assemblage*.

Methods

a) **Interviews:** A sample of twenty-two non-binary-identified individuals were interviewed either face-to-face or via teleconferencing software. A variety of questions related to *non-binary language* usage, identity, and any instances of discrimination were covered during these semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A for interview schedule). Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was transcribed verbatim.

b) **Writing Samples:** Prior to the interview, participants were asked to write a short story (500 words minimum; 1,000 words maximum) about themselves or about a non-binary person they admired. It was suggested that participants write

a few sentences in the third person (using he, she, they, zie, etc. pronouns or a pseudonym) in order to show the ways in which they would like others to refer to them.

c) **Non-binary forum:** A forum where non-binary people discussed their identities and asked others for advice was scraped and turned into a language corpus for analysis. This non-binary corpus (or NBC) was created and analysed using corpus linguistic tools. These linguistic patterns were used to produce a network of *non-binary language*, which was then analysed qualitatively. This analysis provided a different level of insight into the emergence of non-binary identities and language online.

Overall, the research participants and the research tools that this thesis employs are used as a heuristic device in the production of knowledge. This *research-assemblage*, therefore, uncovers some of the complexity found within non-binary discourses and their material reality, bounded by the time and place this data was collected, the reliability of my research method, the statistical techniques of corpus linguistic and their principles, and the limits of my ability as a researcher and my interpretations. In that sense, my epistemological and ontological frameworks aim to uncover and interpret patterns in the data, but it does not aim to simplify their complexity. Research, as an *assemblage*, produces new capacities for knowledge which are neither stable not essential, but in constant flux and *becoming* (Fox and Alldred, 2015).

This chapter will be divided into two sections. The first section will outline the methodologies employed in the interview and short writing portion of this thesis, while the second section will outline the methodologies employed in the corpus portion. Each

section will outline the technical procedures for data collection, analytical framework, and ethical considerations.

Interviews and Short Writings

Recruitment

The twenty-two participants who took part in the interview and writing portion of the study were all recruited online. An advertisement for the study was placed on my Twitter profile and was shared (*retweeted*) more than 600 times; therefore, this study used snowball sampling as a recruiting mechanism. This advertisement outlined the recruitment criteria, some information about the study, the financial incentive, and finally the researcher's contact information (email and phone number). The requirements for participating in the study were (a) to identity as non-binary, (b) to reside in the UK, (c) and to be over 18 years of age. Participants were told that the study would relate to language use and gender identity. And the incentive for participating in the study was a £20 gift voucher.

Once potential participants contacted the researcher, they were sent an informed consent document providing further information about the study (see Appendix B), as well as the consent forms for both the interview and the short writing portion of the study (see Appendix C). Participants were given the option to only partake in one portion of the study and not the other; however, all participants completed both. They were also given the option to withdraw at any given point during the interview and up to 48 hours after data collection; however, none of the participants withdrew from the study.

I met with the participants face-to-face or via teleconferencing software. Prior to the interview, participants sent to me their short writing samples. However, these were not discussed during the interviews.

Participant Demographics

The table below (Table 1) outlines the demographic information for the twenty-two participants in the interview and short writing portion of this study. All participants were given a random pseudonym in order to protect their privacy and to anonymise their answers. While all participants identified as non-binary (this was an inclusion criteria), many participants employed other identity labels in addition to non-binary. Participants were asked directly about their pronouns. Additionally, all participants mentioned their sex assigned at birth and sexuality during the interviews and/or the short writing samples. Participants were not directly asked about their assigned sex or sexuality; however, this information was frequently relevant to the discussions around gender and language. All of this information is included in the table below.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender identity	Pronouns	Assigned Sex at Birth	Sexuality
Shawn	Agender	they/them	AFAB	Asexual
Blaine	Agender	they	AFAB	Asexual
Charlie	Femme boy	they	AFAB	Bisexual
Ari	Non-binary	they	AFAB	Bisexual
Adrian	Non-binary	they	AFAB	Bisexual
Elliott	Transfeminine	they	AMAB	Bisexual
Ryan	Trans guy	he	AFAB	Bisexual
Carroll	Non-binary	they	AFAB	Gay
Addison	Woman	she, they	AFAB	Gay
Gaby	Non-binary	they	AFAB	Lesbian
Chris	Genderfluid, transmasculine	they	AFAB	N/A

Toby	Agender	they	AMAB	Pansexual
Aspen	Agender	they	AFAB	Pansexual
Jamie	Genderqueer	e/eir/em	AFAB	Pansexual
Tanner	Agender	they	AFAB	Queer
Kennedy	Genderfluid	they	AFAB	Queer
Bay	Genderqueer	they	AMAB	Queer
Brook	Genderqueer woman	she, they	AFAB	Queer
Tyler	Non-binary	they, any	AFAB	Queer
Harper	Trans and genderqueer	they	AFAB	Queer
Rudy	Non-existent	they	AFAB	Queer
Dana	Genderqueer	they	AFAB	Bisexual

In terms of gender identities, only five individuals identified as non-binary alone – that is, they did not employ any other identity label during their interview or the short writing sample. Notably, five individuals identified as agender and five others identified as genderqueer in addition to non-binary, one of which also identified as a woman. Four participants identified as trans: transmasculine, transfeminine, trans guy, and trans (and genderqueer). The remaining three also identified as woman, femme boy, and non-existent. There was, however, some overlap as three participants inhabited more than two categories. Therefore, non-binary, as an umbrella term, encompassed a wide range of gender identities and expressions. Almost 91% (n=20) of all participants employed *they/them* pronouns, although two of them did not exclusively use *they/them*: one used *she/her* and another used any pronoun.

Most participants in the study described their sex assigned at birth as AFAB (n=19; 86%) and only three described themselves as AMAB (14%). Lastly, a majority of participants described their sexuality as queer (n=7; 32%), bisexual (n=5; 23%), or both queer and bisexual (n=1; 5%). Three participants identified as pansexual, two as

asexual, two as gay, and one as lesbian. Only one individual did not comment on their sexuality.

Analytical Process: Interviews and short writings

Participants were asked open-ended questions about their identities (in general terms) – namely, what part of their identity they considered important. They were also asked specific questions about their gender identities and the language surrounding them. Importantly, participants were asked about disclosure or "coming out," navigating social interactions where the gender binary was assumed, and managing gender-neutral language. Participants were also asked about positive, negative, or neutral experiences they might have experienced while navigating social situations in different contexts. Lastly, participants were given the chance to express any points that were not covered during the interview or the short writing. These open-ended questions were asked in order to specify the most significant elements of their identities (McQuillen, Licht, & Licht, 2001), as well as how these identities relate "within assemblages, and the kinds of affective flows that occur between these relations" (Fox and Alldred, 2014, p. 402). This interview schedule was therefore informed by a materialist ontology of *assemblages*, which understands "narration as a performative practice [which] is not about representations of 'reality' or linguistic turn-taking [… but as] a material articulation of the world" (Barad, 2007, p. 139, as cited in Juelskjaer, 2013, p. 759).

The short writing portion did not have a specific prompt, other than using their pronoun in all or part of the writing. This allowed participants to cover any topic they would want to discuss. Combined, these interviews and short writings provided a wide

range of perspectives relating to the *gender and linguistic becomings* of non-binary people in the UK, as well as some of the possible ways in which they negotiate and manage social interactions.

I transcribed, coded, and annotated all twenty-two interviews using NVivo 11 (QSR International Pty Ltd.). The short writing samples were also uploaded to this software and coded along with the interviews. These data were analysed both deductively and inductively, using the interview schedule as an initial framework for the analysis, but branching out rhizomatically as patterns emerged in the data. This involved becoming acquainted with the data in the transcription process, reading and re-reading the interviews, and mapping out the relationships between the different codes. As such, these codes were not assumed to be discrete – they had the potential to affect and be affected by one another. Deleuze suggested that "in *assemblages* you find states of things, bodies, various combinations of bodies, hodgepodges; but you also find utterances, modes of expression, and whole regimes of signs" (2007, p. 177). Therefore, this research does not use strict codes or themes as analytical tools since, ontologically, these themes are related to one another, can possess movement and fluidity, and can divide themselves into something new (Deleuze, 1994). In this materialist methodological approach, networks of meaning – rather than simplistic accounts – were examined. This allowed for non-hierarchical relationships to emerge, accounting for the ways in which knowledge is produced by the *territorialisation* of affects such as the researcher's interpretations, the theoretical framework, the research participant's descriptions, etc. These affects can produce more than one capacity – which makes the knowledge production a rhizomatic process rather than linear one (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988).

Furthermore, the present analysis uses the DeleuzoGuattarian language of "*intensities*" when referring to these affective and relational "themes" or "codes" within the data. The employment of this term is purposeful, as the term *intensity* accounts for movement: something might be less intense or even dormant under certain conditions and in relation to other affects. *Becomings* are therefore formed through the intensifying of affects (Braidotti, 2002).

The first stage of this study served as a guiding basis upon which the subsequent stages of analysis drew. A similar methodological approach was applied in the qualitative portion of the corpus analysis. However, this analysis also employed a quantitative approach in the form of corpus linguistics as a starting point. This methodology will be outlined below.

Ethical Considerations

All three areas of this study were ethically approved by the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences Research Ethics Committee at De Montfort University (References: 1940 and 3115).

All participants were over 18 years of age and consented to the study. Participants were not asked about their age, aside from ensuring they were all over eighteen years of age. They were also not asked about their specific location in the UK, educational level, occupation, or race/ethnicity. However, this information did come up during some (but not all) interviews, as participants contextualised their experiences in relation to their gender identity and linguistic experiences. This potentially represents a limitation of this study, as this information could have been incorporated into the analysis in a more systematic way.

As previously mentioned, participants were provided a participant information sheet about the study and were given two consent forms: one prior to the submission of the short stories and another prior to the interviews. Once participants agreed to and signed the consent forms, they continued with the study. Additionally, the researcher ensured confidentiality and emphasised the fact that their name and personal information will not be shared. Their short stories, the recordings, and the transcriptions are stored in a locked cabinet and a password-protected computer, which is only accessible to the principal investigator and his supervisors. Data will be stored for up to 5 years following publication. This was made clear to participants on the participant information sheet.

Reports of participants being distressed by this kind of research are extremely infrequent. There were no known risks to taking part in the study, and no explicit disadvantages to individuals participating in the study were anticipated. The interview included questions about their personal experiences with discrimination and misgendering, which may be upsetting for some individuals. If, during the interviews, participants became distressed, they were given the opportunity to take a break from the interview, to withdraw from the study, or to avoid areas that caused distress. Participants were reminded that they did not have to participate if they did not want to, and that they could withdraw their data up to 48 hours after participation. Individuals were also referred to relevant support organisations to assist them with their needs. The contact details of these organisations were included in the debrief sheet (Appendix D). These included the CliniQ, an organisation that offers counselling services in the context of sexual health and well-being for trans people, as well GenderedIntelligence, which provides support groups, counselling, and mentoring.

The Non-binary Corpus

This section will outline the technical steps that were employed in the design and construction of the non-binary corpus. I will clearly define the methodology that was used in this part of the thesis and how it will complement the other qualitative methods and findings.

Design and Compilation

This project aimed to not only examine the *gender and linguistic becomings* of non-binary people offline, but also online. Ekins and King (2010) have suggested that the internet has become a place where people are able to find communities based on any type of affinity, no matter how specific or small. The internet, therefore, is a vital source of information, community-building, and support for trans and non-binary people (Stryker, 2008; Yeadon-Lee, 2016). The growth of platforms dedicated to these issues have also been reported to increase the visibility of gender-diverse people (Raun, 2016). For this reason, a forum where non-binary people discussed their identities was chosen for its specificity, as well as its active participation. This forum will remain anonymous in this thesis in order to protect its users. While this forum is not UK-specific, a thorough reading of the forum revealed that a significant number of the participants were based in the UK. However, many forum contributors were also based in the US. Regardless of their location, non-binary people experience similar issues in both countries. As I have suggested in chapter 2, non-binary identities are still not fully recognised, medical-psychological gatekeeping practices are still in place, the marginalisation and victimisation of non-binary people is similar, and the number of non-binary-identified people is increasing.

This section will describe the design and compilation of the non-binary corpus (NBC), a specialised corpus that was designed specifically for this thesis. I will outline the inclusion and exclusion criteria that was employed in the development of this corpus. The following section will outline and substantiate the design of the NBC and its relevance to this *research-assemblage*. I argue that this corpus is well-suited to answer the research questions this thesis poses.

Sampling

This specialised corpus consists of all the written data from an online forum. The name of the forum will not be disclosed in the current thesis due to ethical considerations, which will be further explained in the ethical considerations section. Yet, in order to substantiate the selection of this forum over other online content, I outline some information about the forum in terms of the inclusion and exclusion criteria that were employed.

During the selection process, it was of the utmost importance that the written corpus was consistent with the semi-structured interviews and the short stories in terms of the topics that were discussed. While this forum is not the only online forum that focusses on non-binary issues, it seems to be one of the most popular ones in terms of content volume and user activity – a fact that is mentioned in the forum's description and their statistics, which are both public. The selected forum makes reference to topics related to identity, language, gender expression, discrimination, social status, etc. Such topics were also identified in the interviews; therefore, data from this forum was assessed to be complementary to the dataset and subsequent analysis, as it provides an innovative approach to growing the knowledge base on non-binary people's identities.

Another important feature of this forum is that all forum posts are in English. This is beneficial in that it is consistent with the interviews and the short writing samples that were collected in the first stage of this thesis, which were also in English. While this forum is not UK-specific, many of the issues discussed within it are relevant to the issues non-binary people in the UK face, and some of its users can be identified as British. However, it is not assumed that everyone has the same linguistic competency or that everyone who writes on this forum is located in a similar culture. Some might be located in particular social and economic situations in which their identities may or may not be expressed in the same way. As previously stated, the only thing that they have in common is their gender identity – or their interest in learning more about non-binary issues – and the fact that they are writing and sharing information in English.

One of the benefits of doing online research is that the researcher does not have any influence in generating any of the information included in the corpus – that is, I did not initiate any prompts nor contribute to the forum in any way. In other words, the data occurred naturally without any influence from myself. This is therefore a naturalistic observation of social interaction and the generation of online discourse. Within this forum, non-binary people post about issues related to their identity in the form of threads. Other users are then able to comment on these threads or to create new ones. This allows for a natural interaction between forum posters – and for the development of arguments and different perspectives.

In terms of representativeness, this forum attempts to represent the major discourses surrounding the identities of those who identify as non-binary. However, given the vast amount of information that can be found online regarding non-binary gender identities, it is unlikely that this forum represents all non-binary people on the

internet – it is simply a snapshot of some of the discourses at a given time. That being said, it is true that those who participated in the forum identified as non-binary and were interested in a variety of topics surrounding this identity; therefore, the NBC is relevant to various real-world aspects of non-binary experiences. While this corpus does not intend to portray *non-binary language* as homogenous, by employing computational corpus analysis to this corpus, the most significant discourses emerged, which reflected both the interviews and the short stories. Therefore, this corpus compliments the interviews and the short writing very well, as it provides a different level of insight. Discourses from this corpus – in the form of *affective intensities* – will be explored further in the result chapters.

Downloading and Cleaning

Data was downloaded from this forum using a web scraping tool which allowed me to systematically download the entire forum. The initial dataset produced a corpus of over 16 million words. The data was transferred to Excel, any sensitive information was removed from the corpus, and duplicate lines were removed. These duplicate lines were typically composed of titles and headlines; therefore, in order to avoid repetition, keeping only one of them was deemed reasonable. This step ensured that the results in the statistical analysis were more accurate and not skewed. Additionally, because of the multiple ways in which the word non-binary can be spelled, all forms of the word (non binary, non-binary, nonbinary, NB, and enby) were systematically replaced with the word *nonbinary*, which helped simplify the final results and the discourses surrounding this word.

After this process was completed, the final file yielded a corpus of 2,931,342

words. The NBC contains messages from 45,111 posts in 6,919 threads. This is a medium sized corpus, compared to the English Web 2013 (also known as enTenTen13), a reference corpus containing 19 billion words, which will be used in the keyness analysis. Given the size of the corpus, it is expected that, even if some people within it did not identify as non-binary, their contribution to the corpus was challenged by moderators, thus contributing to the discourses within the corpus, and making these discourses relevant.

Given the sensitive nature of this research, a variety of ethical concerns were carefully considered for both the offline and the online portions of this study. These will be outlined below.

Analytical Process: Corpus-Based Research

This section will outline the rationale behind the building of a corpus of *non-binary language* online, as well as the analytical and theoretical approaches that were employed in its development. This chapter will also outline the specific technical steps that were taken in constructing the corpus from an online forum where non-binary people write and share details about their identity.

The first part of this section will outline some prior relevant research that has been conducted using internet fora, thus supporting the use of this medium in the present thesis. The following section of this will outline the mixed methodologies that are employed to explore the linguistic and material emergence of non-binary gender identities online. I will define what is meant by corpus-assisted analysis – a quantitative and qualitative method – specifying the technical and theoretical decisions that were employed. I will then describe and justify the use of corpus-based analysis techniques, outlining the benefits and some of the potential limitations to this mixed methodology.

Non-binary Genders and the Internet

The present study examines the linguistic and material emergence of non-binary gender identities online, and the ways in which non-binary people have used the internet as a tool to enact their processes of *gender becomings* through discourse – their *linguistic becomings*. This study will focus on one particular forum in which non-binary people write and share information about their gender identity. An online forum is a computer-mediated platform in which users can interact with one another in the form of message chains and share information about a variety of subjects. Some fora are very specific while others are very broad (Largier, 2002). The internet has grown exponentially since the early 1990s, and it is now very common for people to be part of online communities where they share information about specific topics. Still (2008) points out that the internet has been a crucial place for trans people to gain support, information, and become politically active – something that was very difficult to do before the advent of the internet. One of the main advantages of the internet among marginalised communities is the fact that anonymity is typical; therefore, sharing personal information anonymously is often one of the internet's most notorious features. Given this anonymity, it is possible that the information shared online has never been expressed verbally, and with regards to queer people, it is possible that the internet is the only place where they are out to other people. It is for this reason that the content of these fora is so rich and nuanced. In this sense, the internet is a highly beneficial place where people are able to disclose their inner thoughts to people who share similar experiences. It is perhaps possible that people online might pretend to belong to certain communities in order to gain information or be disruptive; however,

the language corpus that was gathered for this thesis is very large, thus diminishing this possibility while making these cases insignificant outliers.

Only one researcher has investigated online spaces where non-binary people discuss their identity. In their study, Yeadon-Lee (2016) explored the online narratives of non-binary people, focussing on the distinct ways in which younger and older generations come to understand their gender identity and in their journeys of self-recognition. Yeadon-Lee (2016) found that analysing online fora had multiple advantages, specifically in relation to understanding trans, intersex, and non-binary people. One of these advantages has to do with the fact that internet blogs and fora are spaces where trans and non-binary people share about their lived experiences (Shapiro, 2015; Marciano, 2014), making it a useful and highly informative source of data. A further advantage to using online data is that it is typically regarded as "naturalistic" – that is, the researcher does not influence the generation of data. Hines (2012) argues that this is also beneficial for trans and non-binary people, as the focus is geared towards the needs of the community, not the often biased questions from a researcher. Online data, therefore, has the potential to be richer than interview data. It might also be difficult or impossible to ask participants to recite some of the same information face-to-face, especially when the researcher might not share the same identity as the participants. Additionally, internet-derived data has been shown to contain authentic and meaningful personal narratives given the anonymity aspect of online fora (Page, 2013; Hookway, 2008).

Corpus-based Analysis

In this section, I will justify why using a corpus-based analysis technique was the most appropriate analytical method for this thesis. In general terms, the purpose of corpus-based analysis is to identify the most salient statistical patterns and themes from a large language corpus – a body of language – using computational techniques. The patterns and themes that emerge from this computational technique are, subsequently, explored in a qualitative way, in the case of this thesis, informed by *assemblage theory*. One of the main benefits of using a corpus-based analysis technique is the mere fact that, given the size of the language corpus (the number of words within it), patterns would otherwise be extremely difficult to examine without the use of linguistic software. Corpus Linguistics was therefore deemed the most useful method for this analysis due to the size of the corpus that was designed and built for this study.

A corpus-based investigation is different from a corpus-driven one in that a corpus-based approach uses a corpus as a source of examples to answer questions about specific hypotheses. A corpus-driven analysis uses a corpus as the only source of data, and it is generally more inductive. This research took a corpus-based approach, given that the corpus portion of this thesis was used to complement the interviews and short story portions of this thesis, thus adding to the *research-assemblage* of this thesis.

Within the field of psychology, discourse analysis has traditionally involved the analysis of small amounts of language data such as interview and focus group transcripts, media reports and counselling sessions. This data, however, has typically been studied manually without the help of computational methods. In recent years, and partly due to the popularity of computational research tools such as corpus linguistics, it is now possible to conduct research that includes large amounts of language data for qualitative analysis using quantitative methods (Baker, 2006). This method allows the

researcher to compile, explore, and extrapolate the most salient patterns in the data, which can then be explored in terms of their significance and representativeness.

Within psychological research, however, corpus-based analysis research is not common, especially within research related to gender and sexuality. Other fields, particularly (queer) linguistics, have employed this method in recent years to investigate a variety of topics related to gender and sexuality (Baker, 2014) – most employing poststructuralist models of discourse analysis. While applying corpus-based research within psychology is still uncommon, this project aims to reveal the potential of this method, as it fits nicely within the tenets of psychological research, especially critical psychology. It is for this reason that corpus-based analysis offers an innovative way of looking at language patters and the ways in which these patterns are related to one another. This method allows researchers to understand the multiple ways in which people come to understand themselves and their gender identity through language – a *linguistic becoming*. The following section will outline the specific methods employed in this approach.

Corpus Techniques

A corpus is a large collection of naturally occurring language data (McEnery and Wilson, 1996). Corpora are typically very large (ranging from thousands to millions of words) and are usually used as representative samples of a specific type of language. For instance, the British National Corpus, a reference corpus that consists of 100 million words – both written and spoken – is said to represent a wide range of genres (spoken, fiction, magazines, newspapers, academic, etc.) of British English from the late twentieth century. The fact that these corpora are encoded online means that they

can be explored systematically using software, which can be used to reveal linguistic patterns that the human eye might not be able to detect through qualitative analysis alone.

While corpus linguistic approaches tend to be quantitative in nature, this does not mean that the outputs must be interpreted using a positivist, essentialist lens. Baker (2006) argues that corpus linguistics can indeed be employed using the social constructivist's commitment to questioning the *status quo* in social sciences in the form of *action research*, a type of research which has the potential for change and intervenes in social issues rather than simply discovering unquestionable facts (see, for instance, Burr, 1995). In this research, discourses are understood to be context-dependent and in constant development – that is, they have the potential to be fluid and in constant processes of *becoming* something else. In other words, they are not static. It is for this reason that corpus linguistics fits in nicely with the theoretical underpinnings of *assemblage theory*, as corpus linguistics is one of the possible ways in which the social world can be understood (e.g., statistically), but not the only one. In this thesis, the researcher becomes an active participant in the creation of knowledge, not simply an observer, thus another element of the creation of *assemblages* (Fox and Alldred, 2014).

Another important point that needs to be highlighted is the context in which the corpus of interest emerged – who the authors are, their intentions, and their audience – given that understanding these elements can add an extra layer of insight into the analysis. Several studies using corpora draw from existing bodies of language such as the British National Corpus to understand specific aspects of language; however, other studies often build their own corpora from scratch, thus creating a *specialised corpus*, a "carefully thought-out collection of texts that are representative of a language variety or

genre" (Baker, 2006, p.26). For the purposes of this thesis a *specialised corpus* was created from an internet forum where it was assumed that the authors of the corpus were non-binary people seeking and writing useful information about their gender identity.

A second advantage to using corpus linguistics is that, given its systematic nature and its replicability, it can help remove some of the biases associated with discourse analysis. Therefore, corpus linguistics tools offer transparency through systematisation, which can limit or delay the effects of such biases (Hunston, 2002). Nonetheless, human intuition and a higher level of analysis are indeed necessary for this analysis, as computers can only explain part of the story – the salient themes require further extrapolation. This thesis takes a bidirectional, non-hierarchical stance to research in which both systematisation and human intuition can be employed to analyse these salient themes, fitting with the theoretical and epistemological framework of *assemblage theory*. In fact, Baker (2006) argues that corpus approaches to discourse analysis can break down the qualitative versus quantitative binary that is present within the social sciences.

Using corpus linguistics does not mean that the discourses found will be the most "dominant," but there is also room to explore "minority" discourses (van Dijk, 2008). Dominant discourses are those that occur more frequently, which are found by investigating the words and linguistic patterns that occur more often. The tendency to investigate dominant discourses is prevalent in qualitative research; however, minority discourses – those that are not highly frequent in the corpus – can also be extremely informative. In fact, the statistical method that corpus linguistics tools use also aims to

find these minority discourses within the corpus by comparing the corpus to a *reference corpus* (see "keyness" section, below).

The benefits of a corpus-based approach to analysis have been outlined in this section, concluding that the use of corpus linguistics methods, as well as qualitative analysis drawing from *assemblage theory*, will add value to the present analysis of non-binary gender identities in the UK. Given that the present thesis collected a large quantity of language data from an online forum, these methods are the most appropriate for the present analysis. These quantitative calculations allowed the researcher to support the more qualitative, theory-driven analysis of such output. Thus, this thesis offers theoretical development, methodological innovation, and the yielding of original data. This thesis offers an original contribution to knowledge by combining these methods and by illuminating the discourses – both dominant and minor – which may otherwise have been overlooked.

The following sections outline the approach to the corpus-based discourse analysis employed in this thesis – namely, the different frequency-based techniques that were applied in the quantitative section: frequency, keyness, collocation, network creation, and concordance lines.

Frequency

Simply stated, in corpus linguistics research, measures of frequency reveal the number of times a single word appears in a corpus. A frequency list typically contains the words featured in the corpus in terms of the number of times they occurred. For the purposes of this research, a frequency list will be generated in the form of an empirical, descriptive result. However, this frequency list will not be analysed, given that a

keyword list (defined below) offers a more comprehensive list of *intense* words than frequency lists. Nevertheless, it is important to outline the principles of frequency lists, as a way to understand the steps taken in this research endeavour.

The frequency list in this study will be organised in a descending order, with the most frequent words in the corpus placed on top of the list. This technique is one of the most central elements of corpus linguistic analysis, as it provides a well-grounded starting point for the more complex methods that will be employed in the analysis, i.e., keyness and collocation.

The theoretical underpinnings behind frequency measures are grounded in the fact that language is not random: there are rules to language. For instance, we can accurately predict the co-occurrence of two words because there are thousands of rules that determine the way that we write or speak – the way that we put words together. Stubbs (1996), on the other hand, argues that the words that we use have ideological positions – they are not neutral. Baker (2006) points out that this is the reason why word frequencies are so important in discourse analysis: unexpected patterns can provide a great deal of insight into people's intentions, the hidden discourses they possess beneath the surface. For instance, Baker (2008) demonstrated that words relating to *homosexuality* were, in fact, more frequent than words relating to *heterosexuality* in the British National Corpus, thus concluding, through the lens of discourse analysis, that heterosexuality was rarely mentioned because it is often considered the unmarked category (also known as *heteronormativity*). The word 'heterosexuality' was, in fact, invented after the word 'homosexuality' in the nineteenth century (Katz, 2007).

It is said that the most frequently occurring words can reveal some of the most

relevant themes in the corpus, thus indicating the presence of significant discourses in the data (Baker, 2010). However, this is the starting point of the analysis, in that only the most "dominant" discourses might appear. Additionally, frequency lists often contain high proportions of function words such as articles, prepositions, pronouns, and conjunctions – words that might not be particularly informative about the actual discourses present in the corpus. It is therefore worth investigating the low frequency words as well, as these words have the potential to reveal useful information about the corpus. This issue will be resolved by means of keyness and collocation analyses outlined in the following sections. Therefore, while a list of the most frequent words will be displayed in the quantitative analysis section, this list will not be used in the qualitative analysis.

Keyness

Using computer software, two corpora (often a reference corpus versus the corpus of interest) can be compared statistically in order to determine how different they are from one another. This is called a keyness analysis, which is used to not only find the most *frequent* words in a corpus but also the most *salient* words. In other words, keywords do not need to be the most frequent, just the ones used more saliently, statistically. These words are given a score based on this statistical measure, a saliency score. This means that some words that are extremely frequent in the reference corpus but not as frequent in the corpus of interest (and vice versa) are worth exploring. Based on this score, these words are then organised in a keyness list, similar to the frequency list, ranging from the most statistically salient word to the least statistically salient

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word. Therefore, keyword analysis offers a powerful and convenient way of analysing large databases such as the NBC, which contains over 2.9 million words.

Keyness analysis relies on probability testing (p-vales) based on either log-likelihood or chi-square tests, which take into account the size of both corpora as well as the relative frequency of each word. Therefore, this statistical measure indicates to what extent keywords occur relatively more (or less) often in the corpus of interest compared to the reference corpus. By comparing a large reference corpus to a smaller one, unique words, clusters, and categories belonging to the smaller corpus appear. This analysis, therefore, goes beyond simple *frequencies* to measuring *saliency* (Baker, 2006).

In the present thesis, the list of keywords was generated using the *Sketch Engine* (Kilgarriff et al. 2004) software. This tool allowed me to uncover keywords (words that were statistically higher and lower in frequency than the reference corpus) using a statistical measure called *simple maths* (Kilgarriff, 2009). According to this measure, higher (or positive) keywords are those that occur more frequently than in the reference corpus, whereas lower (or negative) keywords occur less frequently compared to the reference corpus. Thus, these words have the potential to reveal the words associated with both major and minor discourses in the target corpus – that is, not just the most frequent discourses but also the ones that appear at a lower frequency compared to a reference corpus. Words that appear more frequently (relative to the reference corpus) will have a higher *simple maths* score than words that do not appear that often. However, words that appear significantly less often than in the reference corpus will also have a higher score, showing that these words are "unique" to the corpus.

Simple maths is calculated as follows: "(fpm$_{focus}$ + n / fpm$_{ref}$ + n), where fpm$_{focus}$ is the normalized (per million) frequency of the word in the focus corpus, fpm$_{ref}$ is the normalized (per million) frequency of the word in the reference corpus, n is the *simple maths* parameter (n = 1 is the default value)" (Kilgarriff et al., 2014, p. 3).

The *enTenTen13*, a reference corpus containing 19 billion words, was used for the keyness analysis. In other words, the NBC was compared to the *enTenTen13* corpus in order to generate a list of keywords. A reference corpus serves as a benchmark of the standard measure of "normal language" against which one can draw comparisons – and determine whether a word is in fact salient. It was important to select a reference corpus that would give the most robust returns, especially since the selected reference corpus will influence the keyword list that is obtained. The *enTenTen13* corpus was selected given that, like the corpus created for this thesis, it is composed of online written materials only. Additionally, the *enTenTen13* corpus is the largest reference corpus in *Sketch Engine*. The fact that this corpus was created in – and includes data up to the year – 2013 was a significant deciding factor. It was in 2014 that non-binary genders gained more popularity in social media after Facebook started providing its users with up to 58 possible genders while also adding the pronoun *they* to its list of possible pronouns. This, of course, does not mean that non-binary identities did not exist prior to Facebook's decision to include these options. However, this was a very important milestone for the trans and non-binary community, at least in the online sphere, as it allowed space for these discourses to be discussed in mainstream society. It can therefore be argued that selecting the *enTenTen13* corpus can provide an interesting "before and after" look into the *assemblage* of non-binary gender identities online. The

British National Corpus was also considered as a reference corpus, but it was not chosen given that it is somewhat outdated (complied between 1991-1994).

For the purposes of simplicity, only the first 50 keywords were included in the analysis. This cut-off is by no means a rule that has been established in the corpus linguistics literature, as other studies have included up to 300 words in their analysis and some researchers have considered this cut-off number as arbitrary (see, for instance, Mahlberg and McIntyre, 2011). To include only 50 words was deemed a sufficient amount of keywords for the present study, especially considering that this thesis also includes data from two other empirical sources: interviews and short stories. These keywords will be outlined in the empirical chapter on the non-binary corpus.

Once the keywords were found using *Sketch Engine,* these words were separated by word type – namely content words (verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, etc.) and function words (pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, determiners, etc.). Function words were excluded from this list as they were not deemed relevant to the analysis and due to the focus of this research. These words are ranked in order of keyness, as measured by *simple maths.*

The words that are gathered from this keyness analysis will be the words of interest for further inspection. They are different from the frequency list, although there might be some overlap. Once this list was generated, a collocation analysis was conducted – that is, a list of the words that co-occurred with these 50 keywords was generated. This thesis focusses on the most salient and intense keywords and collocations, as these can begin to show the non-hierarchical nature of the processes of emergence of non-binary people and their linguistic expressions.

Collocation

Collocation refers to the "statically significant co-occurrence of two words" (Baker, 2010, p.107-108). Collocational theory posits that a word's meanings are determined with respect to the words that surround it (Stubbs, 1996) and that a great deal of information can be learned about a word once we understand its company (Firth, 1957). Collocation analysis allows us to decipher the real meaning of a word by comparing its relationship to other words. Therefore, collocation is a method of understanding the context in which a word is written. For instance, it might be that, at first sight, a word such as *kill* could be interpreted in a negative way, but upon further inspection, it is actually used in a comedic way, as in when something is funny (e.g., "You're *killing* me!"). In this case, the word *kill* loses its literal meaning and thus becomes a metaphor for laughing euphorically. The words surrounding these keywords can help the researcher understand the ways in which these linguistic patterns emerge and the ways in which words can affect and be affected by one another. Psychologically, collocation is an interesting concept, given that it can reveal how "meaning is acquired through repeated uses of language" (Baker, 2014, p. 310). In other words, the use of two or more words together has the capacity to reinforce – or *territorialise* – their usage. This analysis will therefore contextualise the keywords and will illuminate some of the discourses surrounding them.

This study employed a technique called *Word Sketch* (Thomas, 2015) using the *Sketch Engine* software. A *Word Sketch* is an automated summary of a word's most salient collocations as well as its grammatical relationship with these collocates (Baker, 2014). Word sketches are extremely informative not only about the words that co-occur (the collocations) but also about the grammatical and contextual environments in which

these keywords exist. Therefore, for each of these keywords, a list of their corresponding collocations (words that are present together) was produced. The list for each word was extrapolated using the Sketch Engine software. Word Sketch uses the *logDice* statistic in order to calculate collocation. *LogDice* is a measure of salience based on the relative frequency of the co-occurrence of the words, and, according to Curran (2004)'s extensive research, *logDice* is the best statistical measure of collocation. *LogDice* is calculated using the following formula: "*logDice* = $14 + \log_2 D = 14 + \log_2 (2 f_{xy} / f_x + f_y)$" (Rychlý, 2008, p. 9) where "f_x = number of occurrences of word X; f_y = number of occurrences of word Y; f_{xy} = number of co-occurrences of words X and Y" (Rychlý, 2008, p. 7).

Typically, *logDice* produces a score which indicates the strength of the collocation. There are no standards for the 'best' score; however, some researchers have used a score of two or more as a good measure of association. In the present study, a score of ten or more was established as the minimum for analysis. By using this strict cut-off, it was assured that the collocation lists represented the most salient words within the corpus. Additionally, based on the scope of this research, only those collocations that had a frequency of ten or more (number of times these words co-occurred) were included in the final analysis. In sum, I only examined words with the following characteristics: *logDice* score = or >10; frequency of co-occurrence = or >10.

Given that this thesis only examines the lexical forms of a given word, I gathered a list of *lemmas* rather than *words* in this analysis. Lemmas are the dictionary form of a given word. For instance, the lemma *work* would include all lexical forms such as *working, worked, works,* etc. This process ensured that all lexical forms of a given word were included within the results and it simplified the findings.

This process yielded a long list of collocates for each of the 50 keywords. This is of course a very long list of words which would be tedious and time-consuming to explore and that goes beyond the scope of this thesis. It is for this reason that I only explored the collocations that were not only of high saliency (as measured by the cut-off points outlined above), but also the collocates (and keywords) that were related to one another. In other words, I excluded words which only appeared once either as a keyword or as a collocate.

This process allowed me to gather enough linguistic data to map out the rhizomatic relationship between words and thus create a network of *non-binary language*. The creation of this network will be outlined in the following section.

Network Creation

Using the software *Gephi* (Bastian et al., 2009), a visual representation of these words (keywords and their interconnected collocates) was generated, demonstrating some of the most intense patterns within the corpus and their relationships to one another. Gephi organises the words in terms of *degrees* – in this case, the number times a word collocates with another words. As such, the network visually represents the most intense words within the network. Once these intense words were identified, ten of these words were used in the subsequent analysis along with ten of the most salient keywords.

Concordance

In order to supplement and contextualise the top ten keywords and the top ten most intense words (as demonstrated by the network), a concordance analysis was

conducted. Concordances are simply longer lines of text in which either a keyword or a collocation can be expanded and explored. This method allows for a more contextualised and qualitative analysis of the results. Baker (2010) argues that collocations can be supplemented with concordances in order to better understand the linguistic environments in which the discourses appear; that is, collocations are often not enough. It is often necessary to read several concordance lines in order to decipher the patterns – the discourses – that emerge from the keywords and the collocations.

Three concordance lines (quotations) were downloaded for each collocation pair, thus building a smaller dataset of intense discourses. This smaller dataset was then coded and analysed using NVivo 11, following the same materialist analysis outlined in previous sections. This corpus linguistic method allowed me to narrow down the NBC and analyse the most intense discourses within it.

In the present study, concordance lines will not be presented, given that they can sometimes be too long and take time to interpret. Instead, representative examples of each *affective intensity* will be included in the form of quotes, sometimes in the form of long paragraphs. These quotes will summarise the discourses and will complement the qualitative analysis. In the results section (chapter 8), keywords will be <u>underlined</u> while collocations will be presented in **bold.** This will allow the reader to understand where the quotations originated from.

Potential Limitations

As with any other research method, corpus-based analysis has not gone without criticism (McEnery and Wilson, 2001). This section will outline some of the critiques and potential limitations related to this methodology while also offering supporting

evidence that this methodology is appropriate for the present research. I will therefore defend this methodology, as it has proven to be useful and insightful in a variety of research contexts.

One of the major critiques of corpus-based analysis is that a collection of language – a corpus – is often decontextualised and sometimes made up of a wide range of genres, e.g., newspapers, books, online content, journals, etc., and these texts have a reflected reality which does not always travel with the text (Widdowson, 2000). However, for the present study, a specialised corpus from a single linguistic context (an internet forum) was built; therefore, it is not composed of a variety of unrelated sources – all of it originates from the same medium. Having a smaller corpus from a single, specialised genre, as with this present study, is considered an advantage since it allows for data to be analysed contextually – it is not too broad (Koester, 2010).

Another common critique is that corpus linguistics research does not provide information about the discourses that are absent (Hunston, 2002) – that is, the meta-linguistic information that is not present in the corpus. These absences can be related to the person's age, race, background, language proficiency, nationality, etc. This research, for instance, assumes that most people writing on the forum are fluent in English. However, it might be that some of the people writing on the forum might not be native speakers or their writing skills are not on a par with some other forum writers. This sample, therefore, does not intend to be a representative sample on any of these domains. In fact, the only commonality that is assumed from the forum is that people identify as non-binary – or that they are questioning this identity. One of the positive aspects of the corpus that was built for this thesis is that it is large enough (2.9 million words) that some of these issues might be normalised given the large sample. This

thesis is also informed by other research methods such as interviews with non-binary people, which, I argue, helps fill in some of these absences. In fact, the corpus section of this thesis is used to complement the other sections and is not intended to be the main area of research. Thus, this thesis uses multiple research methods as a way to ascertain insights. These insights, in turn, inform and complement each other in order to generate a more robust analysis.

Another important point to highlight is that, as Baker (2006) points out, "frequent patterns of language do not always imply mainstream ways of thinking" (p.19), implying that some of the most relevant discourses are often left unspoken. In other words, "'normative mundanity' is typically 'unmarked and unremarkable'" (Bostock, 2002, p. 352, as cited in Harvey et al., 2007, p. 775). As such, analysing (negative) keywords will help mitigate this limitation. However, the corpus technique employed here does not reveal all discourses directly, hence why this is not the only research method employed in this thesis. Employing these corpus linguistics methodologies, however, adds an extra layer of insight into the *gender and linguistic becomings* of non-binary people.

Ethical Considerations

Some ethical concerns were raised, particularly in terms of privacy. In accordance to the The British Psychological Society's (2017) ethical practice in psychological research online, the collection and reporting of this internet-mediated data do not pose threats to privacy over and above those that already exist, as the forum is already publicly available. The forum I accessed was publicly available and I did not use any type of password to access this information. However, in order to protect the

anonymity and diminish the traceability of forum users, usernames were deleted from the corpus. These usernames did not typically correspond to the user's given or chosen name, so traceability is unlikely. And, as previously mentioned, the name of the forum itself will not be disclosed in the analysis, as an extra layer of anonymity. While this thesis does include quotes from the forum, these are difficult to trace back to the original forum, the usernames, and the forum users. Data will be stored for up to 5 years following publication.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter outlined the mixed methodologies that were employed in the analysis of the non-binary gender identities and their *linguistic becomings* both offline and online. This chapter was divided into two main sections, each outlining the ways in which data was collected, the analytical framework, and the ethical considerations.

Through the materialist analysis and interpretation of the interviews, short writings, and the NBC, I will show some of the most intense affective forces that contribute to the *(de/re)territorialisation* of non-binary gender identities offline and online. These methods will be useful in examining the interactions between macro and micro levels of discourse, as well as the space within them (or meso). An *assemblage*, as argued by Fox and Alldred (2014), may "contain different elements from these levels whose relationship is rhizomatic rather than top-down or bottom-up" (p.402). Together, these analyses will show the ways in which these forces come together to *territorialise* a non-binary gender identity and *linguistic assemblage* through this online forum. Of course, these data do not intend to represent the entire complexity of non-binary

identities and their *linguistic becoming*; rather, they are a snapshot into the experiences of non-binary people at that specific time and place.

Careful considerations were taken in studying non-binary people. For instance, I ensured that I was knowledgeable about the linguistic parameters of non-binary people before entering these spaces, ensuring that my interactions were sensible, respectful, and professional. I also outlined the ways in which data was handled, coded, annotated, and analysed following a materialist approach.

In the second portion of this chapter, I outlined the data collection techniques that were carried out in building the NBC. I also outlined the analytical framework that was undertaken in this portion of the study: the quantitative and the qualitative elements of corpus-based research. I demonstrated the fruitfulness of corpus linguistics in uncovering not only the lexical environment of these intense words (keywords and their interconnected collocations), but also in deciphering the most significant – intense – discourses within the NBC. Therefore, I outlined the multiple methodological steps that were taken, including the production of frequencies, keywords, collocations, the network, and concordance lines. These steps allowed me to build a smaller dataset from which a materialist analysis was conducted. I also outlined some of the limitations of this approach, as well as the ways in which I will tackle these limitations within this research. Lastly, I outlined the ethical considerations that were taken in order to ensure anonymity.

The interviews, the short writings, the forum, its participants, and the discourses surrounding them are theorised to be *affected* as well as *affecting* the ways in which non-binary gender is understood in wider society. These methodologies are one part of the *research-assemblage* of this thesis. I argued that these methodologies complement

one another by taking a robust approach to the linguistic and material emergence of non-binary gender identities. Furthermore, the theoretical framework of *gender and linguistic becomings* will be further developed in the following chapters.

5. NON-BINARY GENDER BECOMINGS AND AFFECTIVE INTENSITIES

This chapter outlines the most significant *affective intensities* (hereafter: *intensities*) that influenced the participants in *becoming* non-binary. As such, this chapter expands on the conceptualisation of gender as a *becoming* (Linstead and Pullen, 2006) by exploring the material and the linguistic affects that make up this *assemblage*. Five major *intensities* were identified during the analysis. These important and influential *intensities* included: experiencing discomfort with assigned gender at birth, the social proximity to LGBTQ+ (or queer) people, learning about gender diversity and discovering the language that best describes their relationship with gender, adopting that language (a *linguistic becoming*), and embodiment.

These *intensities* were reflected in the both the qualitative interviews and the participants' short writing samples. Participants were asked a variety of questions regarding the importance of their various identities, their gender(s), language usage, embodied experiences, and social interactions. Thus, the quotes in the current chapter are taken from both the interviews and the writing samples, rather than emerging from a single, straight-forward question. As a reminder, these data were analysed both deductively and inductively, using the interview schedule as an initial framework for the analysis but branching out rhizomatically as patterns emerged in the data. These codes (in the form of *intensities*) were not assumed to be discrete – they had the potential to affect and be affected by one another.

These five *intensities*, I argue, aided in the *territorialisation* of non-binary gender identities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). While these *intensities* appear to be linear, causal, and hierarchical, this thesis theorises them as rhizomatic, "an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system . . . defined solely by the circulation of states"

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 21). Therefore, this analysis pulls apart the *intensities* in order to examine them, but they should be understood as intrinsically interconnected in a meshwork of affects (DeLanda, 1999) which can be de*territorialised* (disrupted) and re*territorialised* (reemerged).

The following sections will explore each of these important *intensities*, providing further support for their pivotal role in the emergence of non-binary gender identities. While each section will be explored separately, these "themes" were pulled apart for the purposes of structure and organisation; however, these *intensities* are again intrinsically relational and affective. They included particular *memories, proximities, realisations*, *discoveries,* and *linguistic and material emergences* which were experienced throughout the participants' lives. These *intensities* affected – and were affected by – one another both before and after participants adopted non-binary as an identity label, showing the continuous, multidimensional and complex processes of *gender becomings* among participants. Some *intensities* had more affect than others and affected each person differently. This is consistent with previous research that suggests that non-binary people are a highly heterogeneous group who experience their gender in a variety of ways – and that this process is ongoing (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). This chapter concludes that non-binary gender identities are continuous, multiple, and influenced by several *affective intensities*, which inevitably evolve over time.

Discomfort with the Binary

All participants expressed having a long-standing and complicated relationship with the gender binary. This was a common in both the interviews and the writing samples. Many expressed feeling as though the gender they were assigned at birth – and

the roles associated to this gender – did not (fully) describe or represent them. For some, this meant having a complicated relationship with their body and/or their gender expression. While some participants were happy expressing a gender that "matched" their assigned gender at birth, others mentioned that indexing an *androgynous* gender through bodily aesthetics was important to them. Yet, most participants questioned the idea that gender identity and gender expression had to "match." Gender expression was therefore modulated by their desire to be comfortable and, in many cases, safe.

One common thread among participants was the feeling that the gender they were assigned at birth did not match their identity entirely or at all, which made them uncomfortable. Moon (2018) theorises these feelings of discomfort as trans-emotionality, an "experience when bodily feelings and required male/female sex-role behaviours are incongruous and naming oneself as either a boy or a girl is far too limiting" (p.11). I found that these feelings – in the form of *affective intensities* – were indeed a common experience among non-binary people in the present study. One of the main ways in which these feelings were expressed was in describing their discomfort with the gender binary from an early age. Most participants in the study challenged gender stereotypes from an early age – some openly, others privately. As such, many participants described instances in which they defied gender roles growing up:

> I kind of always knew in the beginning where I was, like, very young. I honestly didn't know what gender I fell into. Like, I knew that it was a thing that you had to do, and you had to sort of choose. But everyone kind of sort of knew but I didn't. And I actually asked people and they just told me, yeah, you know, you're this, you know – stick to that. And, you know, for a while that was enough for me. But then, you know, when I got older it just sort of became, you know – it became clear, you know, that something was wrong, something didn't match up, something wasn't adding up in my mind. (Adrian, they/them, non-binary, AFAB. Interview)

Adrian commented on their early childhood experiences of being pushed into a binary gender category by the people around them. And while they conformed with these expectations for a while, their discomfort intensified as they grew older. These experienced were reinforced throughout their life, but they were eventually able to challenge the restrictions when they grew up and discovered new ways of describing their identity. Adrian eventually realised that they no longer had to fit into the gender binary. Some participants, therefore, drew from early childhood memories to interrogate and make sense of their discomfort with the gender binary. These early moments of confusion or disjuncture were often marshalled as precursors of gender identity. As such, gender identities were often narrated as continuous, possessing a history, thus *territorialising* the durability of their genders.

Similarly, Shawn recalled feeling as though they did not fit in with the gender they were assigned at birth. This *intensity* (in the form of a memory) helped them realise (later in life) that they could reject the gender binary altogether. This was seen across the interviews and in the writing samples, for example Shawn said:

> Growing up I was considered a tomboy, but I always knew that I didn't fit in with being a cis woman. I didn't feel that was who I was, but at the same time I didn't do any sort of identification with being a boy either. So, throughout most of my life I don't think that there was another option, so I was like, "well, if I'm not a boy, then I guess I must be, you know, a girl". And then when I realised that you don't actually have to fit in with, you know, the categories of man and woman, then I was like, "oh, well, that describes me. I'm non-binary. (Shawn, they/them, agender, AFAB. Interview)

Shawn's memory of their discomfort with their gender assigned at birth was used as an authenticating narrative which, in their view, led them to later realise that non-binary described the ways in which they experienced their gender. It has been suggested that non-binary people rely on stereotyped representations of gender incongruence in describing their childhood in order to legitimise their trans identities

(Garrison, 2019). Furthermore, early experiences were often given a particular gloss, as precursors for their current gender identity, and as something that presaged and prefigured the present identity. According to Garrison (2019), non-binary people do this by demonstrating their lack of interest (and discomfort) with the gender they were assigned at birth and their interest in "cross-gender pursuits and behaviors" (p. 629) from an early age. While the present study also saw a high rate of early-childhood authenticating narratives, these were not the only defining elements in the emergence of non-binary gender identities. As such, these narratives were merely an *intensity* that aided in the *territorialisation* of non-binary identities as a subject category, but they were not the defining factor. Furthermore, non-binary authenticity was not only gained by recalling childhood experiences of gender non-conformity, but also by myriad *affective intensities*, as I will show in the following sections.

Another important aspect within this *intensity* was the fact that some participants had complicated relationships with their appearance (i.e., gender expression and/or gendered body). Brook, for instance, talked about her gender expression, explaining:

> When I was a little girl I didn't really, you know… I sort of was presented with this concept, this binary concept of gender, and I never really felt… Like, I felt like a little girl at the time, and then I got older and realised that some days I wanted to… I felt like… I felt male and so I would dress more masculine. And, you know, not wear makeup as stuff like that. And then on other days, like, most days, I wouldn't feel particularly female but I would still… It became, I guess, my expression became more about what feels comfortable and what makes me feel good. And as I got older the way I dress, the dress I sort of do my makeup and stuff like that has become more femme even though I actually feel less female as I go along, like I feel more androgynous or agender as I go along. (Brook, she/they, genderqueer woman, AFAB. Interview)

Like other participants, Brook expressed her discomfort with her gender assigned at birth from an early age. Book's gender expression (and her dis/comfort

around it) were highly related to the ways in which she expressed her identity linguistically. In other words, her discomfort with her assigned gender led her to experiment with her appearance, which in turn affected the ways in which she employed language to describe herself. However, in Brook's ongoing process of becoming, her embodied dis/comfort is constantly shifting "as [she] go[es] along." While her discomfort with the binary identification affected her embodied expression, all these factors are constantly evolving; they are neither stagnant nor moving in a linear fashion.

Similarly, Ari mentioned how their discomfort with their gender assigned at birth (as an *affective intensity*) related to their body (skin colour and large chest) and gender expression, thus contributing to their gender *becoming*:

> Having huge tits means that I'm always read as female no matter what. I can be wearing the most masculine clothes and I'll still be called ma'am. And sometimes that's a problem and sometimes that isn't. But no matter what I'm wearing or not wearing, I am non-binary. I used to identify as a woman or a girl because I thought that was the only option I had. *I knew I wasn't boy or a man.* But I knew I wasn't a proper girl or a proper woman. Actually, I used to get told I wasn't. And that became… that was a very kind of racialised thing as well. I wasn't just told I'm not a proper woman - I was told I'm not a proper black woman. Or I'm not a proper black girl. And I've had that since I, like, five years old. But I never fully felt that. I just didn't know you had any other options until recently and so, non-binary describes me. […] I thought, because of these… because of my boobs, that I couldn't be non-binary, because I'm not androgynous. I haven't got a flat chest or a flat profile. But I feel non-binary in my brain and inside myself. (Ari, they/them, non-binary, AFAB. Emphasis added. Interview)

Ari's account of their *gender becomings* was unlike many of the rest in that they were one of the few people of colour in the present sample. The ways in which they felt uncomfortable with their assigned gender were not only related to gender stereotypes but also racial stereotypes – that, is they never felt as though they embodied a "proper black woman" subject position. As such, at the intersection of race and gender

(Crenshaw, 1989) or, in DeleuzoGuattarian terms, at the place in which these two concepts *assemble,* a productive capacity emerged – that is, to *become* non-binary. For Ari, however, *becoming* non-binary came with a new set of contradictions. For them, non-binary people were often portrayed as androgynous, white, slim, and middle class (Boldly go, 2012). However, Ari identified as older, poor, disabled (long-term chronic health and mental health issues), and a survivor of childhood and domestic violence. Nonetheless, they saw their gender identity as existing within them (their "brain and inside"), regardless of these stereotypical non-binary embodiments (i.e., androgynous, white, etc.). This was corroborated by their affective "trans-emotional" narrative of always knowing that they were neither a man nor a woman, as well as positioning their place as an outsider within the "proper black woman" subject position which was *assembled* as a warrant for redefining (their) gender.

Overall, participants described having an uncomfortable relationship with the gender binary growing up. Many presented their embodied experiences such as gender expression as significant contributing factors to their trans-emotional narrative of discomfort. As such, their relationship with their bodies and gender presentations were complicated and occurred long before they adopted the label non-binary. While many participants articulated these narratives of gender discomfort from childhood in order to authenticate their non-binary identities, these narratives are just some of the many *affective intensities* that *assembled* together to produce non-binary gender identities among participants. In other words, this *intensity* is not hegemonic or a requirement to *become* non-binary, but simply one of the many ways in which the non-binary-*assemblage* can be formed.

I will now turn to the ways in which social proximities (as an *affective intensity*) to other non-binary people can affect – and be affected by – the *assemblage* of non-binary identities.

Queer Friendships and Social Proximity

This section explores the concept of *social proximity* as an *affective intensity*. I argue that the social proximity to other like-minded, LGBTQ+ people (hereafter: queer), particularly trans and non-binary people, generated a specific *affective intensity* among participants. This *intensity*, in turn, solidified and *territorialised* non-binary gender identities as subject positions.

When asked about their experiences of coming out, and the places (whether offline and online) where they felt most comfortable sharing their identities, many participants recounted the ways in which intimate relations with other queer people were fundamental to their processes of *becoming*. It has been suggested that young non-binary people do not often embrace their gender identities until they are surrounded by other non-binary people who acknowledge their identity. In Saltzburg and Davis' (2010) study, for instance, being in close proximity to other non-binary people allowed young non-binary people to not only embrace their gender identity but also to develop a sense of authenticity. In this section, I will argue that close proximity to other queer people more generally allowed participants to *become* non-binary. As such, close proximity was one of the several *affective intensities* that helped to form a *non-binary-assemblage* among participants, thus producing myriad gendered capacities.

Most participants expressed having close friends, romantic partners, sexual partners, and/or relatives who were part of the queer community. These friendships and

close relationships were typically solid, trustful, and important – a safe space in which issues of gender and sexuality were openly discussed and their *gender and linguistic becomings* were affirmed. In the context of trans people transitioning, Hines (2007) suggests that friendship is a key site of "personal meaning and emotional support, the significance of which can be seen to run alongside or above that of kinship" (p. 159). Echoing these findings, the social proximity to other queer people allowed participants to share their trans-emotional narratives with them – and to *become* socially intelligible. For instance, while discussing their coming out experiences, most participants mentioned how "easy" it was to come out to their close friends, especially when they were queer themselves, given that they did not have to explain themselves:

> I've had very positive reactions of people, just being very affirming and really understanding um. But that's mostly because in London I've surrounded myself with people… with queer and trans people, right? So, like, it's a very particular atmosphere. And, then, the other friends who are not, maybe that knowledgeable of these things and they… they are generally quite… their reactions are generally quite positive, but it does require more explanation and more time to go through things. But so far I haven't had any negative reactions from my friends. (Elliott, they/them, genderqueer woman, AMAB. Interview)

> I think my friends are all happy, you know, some of them are non-binary themselves, so it was less of a "oh my gosh, what does it mean?" But more of a, "oh, okay, cool". You know, now we learned something new about you, you know, and "what are your pronouns?" (Dana, they/them, genderqueer, AFAB. Interview)

> All of my close friends – the majority of them – are something not straight-forward, if that makes sense. So I feel really comfortable saying to them, like, "oh can you use so and so pronouns? or can you not refer to me by x name or whatever? So with friends and family I feel really comfortable. (Tyler, they/any, genderqueer, AFAB. Interview)

One of the major ways in which queer relations *territorialise* non-binary identities is through linguistic validations – that is, actively affirming gender-neutral language or other linguistic shifts. Elliot, Dana, and Tyler all spoke about the importance of having strong bonds with other queer people, particularly as they found

these interactions "easy" to manage linguistically – that is, participants did not have to correct their friends (as often) when they misgendered them. During the interview, Tyler told a story about the day they decided to identify as non-binary. Tyler explained that, at that point, they were already using *they/them* pronouns with some of their queer(-friendly) friends, but it was not until they received an invitation to join a non-binary Facebook group that they adopted the label:

> [A very significant moment in relation to understanding my gender was, while] randomly messaging a friend on Facebook, and they said to me, "oh, do you want me to invite you to this group I made on Facebook for non-binary people?" And I was literally half-way through typing, like, "oh, that's really nice, but I don't think I'm non-binary." And then, I literally got, like, half-way through typing that reply, and I was like, "hang on a second." And then I had to, like, go away and think about it because I hadn't really… Even though I knew the term non-binary, I had friends who were non-binary and I knew what it meant, I hadn't put it to myself. I hadn't labelled myself as that. I just thought I was, like – I don't know. I just didn't feel like I had a name for what I was. Like, I knew that some days I'd wake up and felt like this; I didn't always like being referred to as she/her; I knew that I preferred, like, they. But I hadn't really properly sat down and thought about it for my, like, in relation to myself before. So yeah, I was half-way through typing that and I was, like, I need a minute. So yeah, I went off, thought about it, and I was like, maybe that is the best label 'cause I've been thinking about, like, "am I genderfluid? Is that a better way of doing it?" And then I was like, "I don't feel particularly attached." Like, I'm comfortable with me and how I look physically, but I don't feel particularly attached. And I think that's what made it change from genderfluid, because that to me tended to one of the other or somewhere along the spectrum at least, whereas I felt a lot more like, "I don't have a particular attachment to male or female". Like, it doesn't really matter – gender to me is that kind of social construct, performative roles thing. Like, why do we ever split it open to… it doesn't really make sense. So that was literally, like, my moment of, like, "oh my god, this label, it suits me. I can be this. yay!" (Tyler, they/any, genderqueer, AFAB. Interview)

The *intensity* that was generated by being surrounded by other queer people (the social proximity) allowed Tyler to come to the realisation that non-binary was the correct label for them. Finding out about the term through these interactions and proximities contributed to Tyler's gender *becoming*. These proximities were also beneficial in that they provided a "safe space" in which speaking about their gender,

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labels, pronouns, aesthetics, etc. was acceptable and, in some ways, expected. Bay and

Charlie explained:

> A fair few amount of the friends who I had at school were queer in some way
> whether it was gender-wise or sexuality-wise. So, that was, a kind of a group we
> had. […] Safe spaces aren't really places. It's just, when I was around those
> friends I knew that they backed me up and support me in just in simple ways,
> like, they called me by the name I've chosen, they call me by the pronouns that I
> wanted, and, you know, they wouldn't judge me for my sense of dress or if I
> wear make up of whatever. (Bay, they/them, genderqueer, AMAB. Interview)

> I've been making a lot of queer friends lately, which is really good and
> obviously they're really open, and, like, there are queer safe spaces in which I
> feel very comfortable. And then sometimes people come out of the blue and are
> nice, even though I don't really expect it either. So yeah, it depends where I am
> and with whom. I wouldn't say that I have a specific safe space that is not made
> by people from the LGBT community. (Charlie, they/them, genderfluid, AFAB.
> Interview)

The *intensity* of this proximity to queer people was therefore related to their

level of comfort. In terms of close relationships, a few participants mentioned having

partners or family members who were queer themselves. One participant, Carroll, who

came out as non-binary a month before the interview, mentioned in their writing their

experience being raised by three trans parents:

> It was normal to have three parents as well. They had their non-binary stepmom
> and trans female stepmum - stepmum was from America and it made for easy
> explaining to friends. Then of course they also had their dear birth mum who
> was a trans man - but always held the title "mum" with pride - because if so
> many cis female and male single parents could be referred to as a kid's dad or
> mum respectively for raising them without the other, why couldn't a trans man?
> So the three created and held a healthy polyamorous relationship with each other
> and were as happy as could be, at least that's always the easiest way to explain
> the fun family dynamic, they think. (Carroll, they/them, non-binary, AFAB.
> Short story)

Carroll's exposure to trans gender and sexualities through their family might

have influenced their gender potentialities; however, I argue that this is just one of the

many ways in which a person can arrive at that realisation. Bodies are always *becoming*

in relation to other bodies, but the way these affects *assemble* or come together are dependent upon a myriad of affectivities, which are not always consistent.

In terms of romantic/sexual relationships, eight participants said that they were in a relationship. Out of the eight, three participants were married. Participants mentioned their partners' gender and sexual identities in relation to their own identities. For instance, Gaby's girlfriend was a trans woman (Gaby identified as a lesbian); Adrian's partner was non-binary (Adrian identified as bisexual); Rudy (who identified as queer) and Elliot (who identified as bisexual) had partners whose genders were not specified during the interviews; Addison's girlfriend was a lesbian (Addison identified as gay); Tyler was in a polyamorous relationship with their husband and boyfriend (Tyler identified as queer); Jamie's partner was a cisgender man who used e/eir/em and Mx on occasions (Jamie identified as pansexual); and Harper was married to a non-binary person (Harper identified as queer). In other words, participants *queered* the linguistic parameters of relationships and sexual identities by embracing emergent terminologies to describe them. As a reminder, the majority of participants described their sexuality as queer and/or bisexual, followed by pansexual, asexual, gay, and lesbian. One participant did not comment on their sexuality. As such, participants disrupted and redefined the *hetero-* and *cisnormative* scripts (the *heterosexual matrix*) around romantic/sexual relations and showed agency in describing and enacting their sexual desires, practices, and embodied experiences (Cordoba, 2020).

Interestingly, Harper and their spouse went through a similar process of gender (and sexuality) *becoming*. The *intensity* of their relationship was indeed significant. Harper explained in their writing that both of them started identifying as non-binary simultaneously after a long journey of (embodied and linguistic) emergence:

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> My partner and I used to ID as lesbian, but now we're both trans. Both bisexual (always were, actually, but closeted) both in FtM transition, both non-binary, though I am a little bit more non-binary, and more femme. I describe myself now as queer, bi, non-binary, trans, genderqueer and struggle to find the right words sometimes. (Harper, they/them, genderqueer, AFAB. Interview)

The close proximity to a partner who was also going through a similar process of emergence allowed Harper to also *become* non-binary. Yet, as Harper described, they – and perhaps their partner as well – still struggle to find the correct terminology to describe themselves. As such, their *linguistic becoming* was in constant motion, as it affected and was affected by their proximity to other (queer) bodies.

In general terms, most participants suggested that their romantic/sexual partners were supportive and open to their non-binary genders and sexualities. There were however some notable exceptions. Gaby commented on their girlfriend's reaction to their coming out:

> Actually, I think the biggest challenge I've had was the first time I came out to my girlfriend. Because she has been trans – binary trans –, she kind of has an understanding of gender that's quite different to mine. And I think it actually took quite a long time to get her head around what was going on because her perception of gender is quite different and think kind of getting her to kind of understand that I wasn't going to transition in any way. Like, and I was kind of doing this thing where I was kind of sat in the middle. (Gaby, they/them, bigender, AFAB. Interview)

Gaby understood the tensions that existed between them and their girlfriend as being "sat in the middle," alluding to the idea that non-binary people are "both/neither" male and female, whereas binary trans people are "either" male "or" female (Roen, 2002). Interestingly, it was not until Gaby accompanied their girlfriend to a Mermaids' (a charity for trans youth) appointment during their teens that Gaby discovered non-binary gender identities:

> When I was about fourteen, I started to feel that I wanted to identify as male, and I started to kind of look around the internet, kind of resources about how to do that. So I was looking for stuff, like, "how would I get testosterone?" and

"what does surgery involve?" and all that kind of stuff. And I remember I got to a point where I was reading about um having, like, hysterectomy, and I kind of felt like a really visceral kind of response that that. Like, actually, I don't want that at all. I don't want, like, my insides to change. And so at that point I was, like, "well, okay, I'm definitely not a trans guy." And then kind of what happened was, my girlfriend, she's binary trans, and she was doing a lot of conversations with Mermaids, a charity that do a lot of work with trans children. And I went along, too. She went to, like, a meeting of some kind, and I just kind of went along with her. So I was eighteen or seventeen or something like that at that point, and I was chatting to one of the people from Mermaids, and I said, "oh, I just kind of feel a bit weird 'cause, like, on some days, I definitely feel masculine, like, I definitely want to be a guy. And then some days, like, that's definitely not what I want, and I think it's okay". And they said to me, like, "well, have have you considered?... Yeah, that's perfectly normal. There's this thing called, like, "bigender" And I've never heard of that at all. You know, I never heard it as an idea that people didn't have to be male or female. You can be something completely different, and they sent me loads of resources. And kind of then when I was looking through and looking at all these people talking about their gender identities. I can't remember what the site is called, but there's this one site where they had… they just asked people to write what their gender was, and some people wrote, like, a couple of words, and some people wrote, like, paragraphs, sentences about their gender identity. And at that turning point I was, like, "cool, I don't have to go all the way male if I don't want to. I can kind of find a spot where I feel comfortable in between." (Gaby, they/them, bigender, AFAB. Interview)

It was through their girlfriend that Gaby learned about the possibility of non-binary genders. The *intensities* of these social proximities were, therefore, influential factors contributing to their *gender and linguistic becomings*. Gaby and their girlfriend's *gender becomings* were more similar than different. They are similar in that both of them no longer solely identify with their assigned gender at birth; however, they are different in terms of their embodied and linguistic desires. As such, this thesis begins to question the notion of the binary/non-binary binary, as this framework is unhelpful and can be interpreted as hierarchical. Gender *becomings* cannot be limited to language that is based solely on binarised transitioning narratives. In other words, the linguistic parameters that currently exist are not sufficient in describing the complex, dynamic interplay of *gender and linguistic becomings* – but they are a close

approximation. As language continues to evolve, material and discursive desires (in the form of *affective intensities*) might be more accurately described to account for these complexities.

Overall, the *intensity* generated by being surrounded by other queer people was experienced in the form of validation, support, like-mindedness, and safety. The support systems enabled participants to be out about their non-binary gender identity. This relational *intensity* allowed for gender creativity in the form of (linguistic) experimentation and support. This *intensity*, of course, was related to the mere process of *discovering* gender diversity and gender-neutral language, which will be explored in the next section.

Learning about Gender Diversity and Language

For most participants, one of the most important *moments* that contributed to their understanding of gender diversity was when they learned about the existence of genders beyond the binary. Drawing on Denzin's (1989) notion of epiphanies or "turning point experiences [that] have the capacity to impact individual lives and bring about transformational experiences" (as cited in Denzin, 2010, p. 206), I argue that *discovering* non-binary genders generated an *affective intensity* that led participants to adopt (and/or become fluent in) *non-binary language* – what I term a *linguistic becoming*.

This process was not simple or immediate, but it often culminated in the *realisation* that linguistic shifts were possible. Many participants described these *linguistic becomings* as productive, given that it allowed them to describe their (relationship with) gender more accurately. For instance, when asked about a defining

moment in relation to gender, Dana and Elliott made a connection between reading and

learning about non-binary identities:

> I don't know if there was really one moment. I think it was sort of a slow dawning. I remember reading more and more magazines and blogs over the space of a few years where people talked about being genderqueer. I remember reading this anthology called 'genderqueer' or something like that that came out, maybe in the early 2000's or something like that. And I remember reading that and thinking "this is very interesting" but I feel completely alienated from this, I don't identify with this at all. Um and then years later that slowly changed. (Dana, they/them, genderqueer, AFAB. Interview)

> I think they were a combination of possible moments for a long time. But then, like, maybe two years ago I… I started reading about non-binary identities and it really clicked loads, like, it was at that points that I realised, "oh, this is actually how I understand myself." And reading those articles and reading other people's experiences was really helpful helpful in that sense. (Elliott, they/them, genderqueer woman, AMAB. Interview)

For these participants, learning about the possibilities of genders beyond the

binary was a significant factor contributing to their *gender becomings*. For Dana, this

moment of realisation took some time, but the information they collected contributed to

the *assemblage* of their identity along with other factors such as their embodied

experiences. However, for Elliot, their process of non-binary emergence was "a

combination of possible moments for a long time" which finally *assembled* (or

"clicked") after they read about non-binary identities. Learning about the possibility of

non-binary genders, therefore, affirmed their feelings (and discomfort) with the gender

binary and allowed their identities to *become*. For example, Tanner said that learning

about trans identities (including gender diverse people) through the media (TV and

books) was a significant moment, which ignited their curiosity and motivated them to

continue learning about this topic:

> I remember sort of things when I was, like, a child, like, seeing the, like, street creatures on TV and, like, a man wearing a dress and I was like, "wow, a man can wear a dress?" And then, sort of, I remember learning about… seeing that there was a documentary on TV about trans guys and I was like, "oh wow, that

exists!" and kind of, sort of a series of, I think, becoming aware that transgender people existed, um was a most significant thing, um. It wasn't just one moment; it was kind of a series. And yeah, I can't pinpoint one moment in particular, but kind of a series of dawning awareness, and leading up to actually finding out about non-binary people, which there isn't a sort of academic way in the way that I sort of read things online and I was like, "oh wow, that's interesting" and then I went to my university library and found, like, books in which the author's talking about gender and it was really eye-opening. (Tanner, they/them, agender, AFAB. Interview)

Some participants in this study were well-versed in academic gender theory, which meant that they had acquired the language and information to support their claims that gender is constructed, fluid, multiple, and volatile. For instance, nine participants described gender as "socially constructed" and some quoted Judith Butler's theory of performativity when explaining what gender meant to them. Furthermore, many participants had indeed studied gender theory and were highly knowledgeable about gender theory, terminology, and linguistic practices. Brook and Tyler commented:

> I think that gender only exists socially and only exists as we create it on a societal level and on a personal, individual level as well. So in that way […] gender isn't anything tangible as opposed to something like biological sex or ethnicity. Gender is just a concept – and that means that we get to play with it a lot." (Brook, they/she, genderqueer woman, AFAB. Interview)

> When I was at Uni, I started looking a lot more into, like, feminism and LGBT rights and that sort of thing. And started, like, really getting educated on that subject. And when I was at [university name], I did a dissertation about Miley Cyrus. [laughter] Long story. But that tied in with… I did a lot of reading about, like, how women are supposed to present. […I] discovered, I think it was Judith Butler - wrote a book on gender performativity and that was real kind of, like, eye-opener for me 'cause I was like, "oh my god, it is just this. Gender is a social construct!" And it was really, like, I loved finding out about that. To me, it felt like someone had put into writing all these stuff that I was kind of thinking but not really… it hadn't really come to the surface because I didn't know enough about it or something. So I felt like that majorly helped me in understanding not only me, but like, a lot of society's attitudes as well. (Tyler, they/any, non-binary, AFAB. Interview)

While this was an interesting finding, not all research participants were as well-versed in this academic understanding of gender. However, the common thread among participants was recalling the moment(s) when they learned about the possibility of gender plurality and the (immediate, for some) realisation that this knowledge spoke a truth about their gendered experience.

I argue that the *affective intensity* created by discovering the possibility of existing outside or between the gender binary was a significant (and perhaps one of the most important) factor in the participants' process of emergence. Without knowledge about this possibility, adopting a non-binary label would be impossible. This, of course, does not mean that the participants in the study had a comfortable relationship with gender to begin with. Nor does it mean that other material factors (such as their physical appearance and expression) had a minimal influence on their *gender becomings*. In other words, their embodied experience can exist pre-discursively. The following section will explore the linguistic elements of *gender becomings*; however, it is important to note that the materiality of gender permeates the linguistic elements.

Linguistic Becomings

As I have discussed, discovering gender-neutral terminology such as labels, pronouns, etc. was an important aspect in the research participants' *gender becomings*. In this section, the adoption, reassessment, and ongoing social negotiation of gender-related language will be described as *linguistic becomings*. While not all non-binary people in this study used gender-neutral language exclusively, all participants were aware of neutral language, respected it, and enjoyed the idea of having the option to adopt such language openly.

The number of people who identify as non-binary seems to be increasing (see, for instance, Koehler et al., 2018), and this might be partly due to the spread of information regarding gender diversity. For instance, Bragg, Renold, Ringrose, and Jackson (2018) have suggested that "many young people have […] principled commitments to gender equality, gender diversity and the rights of gender and sexual minorities" (p.1) and that their gender and sexual vocabularies are more expansive than we have seen in previous generations. This was also apparent in the present study: the language non-binary people employed to describe their genders was rich and expansive. Furthermore, discovering, adopting, reassessing, and negotiating gendered language (in the form of *linguistic becomings*) was a significant affective *intensity* that also contributed to participants' *gender becomings* as non-binary. As previously argued, the emergence of *non-binary language* can be attributed to a variety of factors, including the widespread of online communities where identities become accessible, tangible, and real. Whittle (2006) argues that "trans identit[ies are] now accessible almost anywhere, to anyone who does not feel comfortable in the gender role they were attributed to at birth, or has a gender identity at odds with the labels 'man' or 'woman' credited to them by formal authorities" (p. xi). Such widespread of information has allowed more people to feel comfortable embracing trans and non-binary identities, thus *territorialising* some of the ways in which these identities are indexed and spoken about.

This section will explore the *linguistic becomings* of non-binary people in the present study at three different levels: individual (micro), interactional (meso), and societal (macro). While these levels are separated for the purposes of this analysis, I argue that these levels are relational, as *assemblages* work and involve a combination of elements from all these levels (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

Micro Level

At the individual level (micro), adopting *non-binary language* (a *linguistic becoming*) resulted in an important *intensity* that allowed the participants to feel authentic and legitimate. In their process of *gender becomings*, most participants reassessed the binary language that was affectively interpellated (Moon, 2019) to them at birth though performative utterances such as a doctor/nurse claiming that a new-born 'is a boy!' (Butler, 1990). Sinclair-Palm (2017) describes the concept of *deadnaming*, which emerged from the trans community, as the act of calling "trans person by their birth name after they have adopted a new name" (p. 5). I draw from the notion of *deadnaming* more generally to discuss *dead language*, which includes not only names but also labels, pronouns, titles, and other general descriptors such as relationship and family terminology. Outlined below are some of the ways in which non-binary-identified people in the present research reassessed some of this language:

- **Names:** Most participants either changed their name completely or used a gender-neutral version (typically a shortened version) of their given name. The most significant factor was having their older friends and family members adapt to their new names. As previously mentioned, most participants had a strong group of queer(-friendly) friends who supported them in experimenting with new names.

- **Labels:** Due to the lack of terms that describe specific gender and sexual identities, people who challenge the binaries man/woman and straight/gay are beginning to create and adopt new labels that they feel better describe their identities. This proliferation has, in part, been possible, they report, because of

social networking platforms (e.g., Tumblr, Facebook, and Twitter) where people who identify as non-binary are able to create a mutual dialogue about their similar experiences with gender. This dialogue has resulted in a proliferation of labels that describe highly specific genders and sexualities. At the same time, the term non-binary is considered the larger umbrella in that its name clearly specifies that these identities are not confined within the limits of the gender binary. While non-binary is currently considered the larger umbrella term, less than a decade ago, the term genderqueer used to be the main label to describe these identities. As the dialogue continues and the community becomes stronger, some labels have begun to be contested as inconsistent, redundant, or offensive. These linguistic shifts are just a few examples of the ways in which these gender identities and labels are in constant development and reassessment, thus becoming more concrete – and happening at a faster rate because of the internet.

- **Pronouns:** Pronouns are extremely important within the non-binary community. The majority of participants in the current study used the pronouns *they/them*. Most considered these pronouns to be the easiest to remember and for others to articulate. This is because the singular *they/them* pronouns already existed and have been used before in the English language. Most participants have nonetheless experienced some type of distress when people misgendered them by using the pronouns they were assigned at birth (PAB). This will be explored in detail in the following chapter. While most participants used *they/them* as their pronouns and this was extremely important to them, it was more important to them that people refrained from using the binary pronouns they were given at birth, even if this implied not using *they/them* pronouns. In most cases,

"anything but" their PAB was tolerable for them. For instance, an AFAB

participant would rather be addressed as he/his than she/hers when *they/them*

was not possible.

- **Titles:** Most participants used Mx as their title, except for two: one was comfortable with Ms and the other one did not want to use any title for themself.

- **Gender-neutral language:** The largest issue related to language came from family and romantic relationships. The words for relatives such as sibling, child, and nibling (neither nephew nor niece) were some of the most awkward, most difficult to remember for family members. In terms of romantic relationships, couples were very creative, calling themselves words such as date, mate, babe, partner, lover, etc. rather than the typical boyfriend/girlfriend. Only one participant did not mind being called wife by their husband, because, as they perceived it, it did not have a strong gendered connotation.

The importance placed on language – its *affective intensity* – was observed

throughout the interviews. Elliott, for example, commented on their process of

linguistic emergence and its relationship to their embodied gender experience:

> [Learning about non-binary identities was] so important! I think it pushed me
> towards finding new ways of of and expressing my gender identity. And also
> new…it gave me *new words* to understand my sense of self and it gave me a
> drive to take steps towards seeing what feels good and what doesn't feel good,
> and and and what other [language] I want to use about myself and what other
> ways I wanna express my gender. (Elliott, they/them, genderqueer woman,
> AMAB, emphasis added. Interview)

Elliot expressed the ways in which these "new words*"* propelled them to

explore their gender identity and to become comfortable (an *affective intensity*; a

feeling) in their own embodied and linguistic expression. In their short writing, Elliot

also alluded to the ways in which language influenced their embodied expression:

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[T]he only way for us to make sense of our material existence and our relationship to our bodies and identities is through words. Elliot believes that this search for vocabularies is a collective effort to build up new categories, or perhaps to get rid of them altogether. It's clear for them that they are not a gay man, not only because their gender identity is much more complex than being either a man or a woman, but so is their sexuality. Understanding themself as a non-binary transfeminine person is something that makes sense to them within their current material reality and the vocabulary available to them, but they also understand that just like all other identities, it exists in relation to our particular historical moment. Perhaps one day they will find new vocabularies that will fit them better, or perhaps they will feel differently about their bodily experiences and will need to create new words themself to describe and understand their existence better. But right now, they prefer to be called as a non-binary person, addresses as 'they' or their chosen name, and use the title Mx. (Elliott, they/them, genderqueer woman, AMAB. Short story)

Elliot understood their *linguistic becoming* as relational – that is, it only existed in relation to the historical emergence of this terms, their own ability to embrace these terms, as well as their embodied relationship to these terms. Elliot also suggested that the language they employed now to speak about their body might shift and become something else (a *linguistic becoming*) in a few years depending on their embodied experience; however, for the time being, non-binary, transfeminine, genderqueer woman, etc. were linguistic tools that Elliott deployed to make their gender intelligible to themselves and to others. These terms then have fluidity and their meanings can shift over time – both at the individual level and dependent on the social context.

Meso Level

Negotiating language during interaction by, for example, requesting others to use gender-neutral language when referring to them, was a significant part of this *linguistic assemblage*. These negotiations were not easy and were indeed context-dependent. However, once the participants disclosed their chosen language to people, they expected this language to be respected. In the interviews, participants were asked

to comment on the importance of language. Participants reported feeling distressed when their language choices were not employed by those to whom they had communicated their desires (e.g., someone using their *dead language*). On the other hand, when their linguistic choices were affirmed, participants reported feeling euphoric. Most of them mentioned that not being misgendered was very important to them. For instance, Bay and Tyler commented on these negotiations:

> It's quite important, like, I don't usually mention it that much around just general people. But if I've known them for a while or if I know that they're from, like, a LGBT space, so they should, you know. [If] they understand this kind of thing, then I will mention it. And if they get it wrong I will then correct them, you know. And I keep trying to get them to use them because it is important to me, it does just makes me feel better on a daily basis. But I kind of just ignore it when it's in another environment. Like, if it's with people who I will not see again. Like, if it's just a cashier or people in some department of the university, then I won't really have that much interaction with, I won't really mention it because, you know, I won't see them again, really. (Bay, they/them, genderqueer, AMAB. Interview)

> With my close friends and family, I'd say it's pretty important. Like, it shows what a strong relationship or friendship you have with people when they make the effort to respect what you've asked. So, and I think it would be insulting if someone who didn't know didn't, like, didn't make the effort or couldn't be bothered or something. So with friends and family who know about it it's quite important to me. With people who don't know, like, at work and stuff. Like I said, I think I'm so comfortable in me, with people who are not in my very close circle, it doesn't matter half as much. But with, like, yeah, friends, family, like, my husband and stuff, it's really important. Like, I'd be really upset if my husband suddenly started not referring to me like that - which he never would, but you know, it is important to me that the people that I love and the people that I'm close to do it. It's not important to me with strangers or colleagues. (Tyler, they/any, non-binary, AFAB. Interview)

Participants expressed how important it was for people around them to employ the linguistic markers they had requested, especially from close friends and family. Moreover, it was crucial that they were not misgendered by those who they had already told about their pronouns, names, and labels changes. When the "correct" language was

used, participants expressed feeling validated, content, and accepted. Aspen, for instance, commented on how these affirming interactions:

> It feels really good. It feels great. um yeah, hearing my brother talk about his sibling is, like, the best feeling in the world um because I think it… it shows, like… it shows the level of respect. It shows that somebody cares for you and wants to um represent you right, and wants you to make you feel good about yourself. um Yeah, when hear people say - not necessarily in relation to me - but when I hear people use sort of um, you know… "men, women, and nonbinary people" or use gender-neutral language in the broader sense, that feels really good 'cause, like, you can feel… you can feel society sort of changing around you. um and yeah, the… you know, they're not doing it… they're not doing it because they know that you're nonbinary, but you'd be angry if they don't. They're genuinely just doing that because that's… that's right to them. You know, that's really good. (Aspen, they/them, non-binary, AFAB. Interview)

Most participants expressed having extremely positive feelings when their genders were recognised linguistically. Such affirming interactions were not generally common outside of their queer circles, however. In fact, not all participants were out as non-binary to their family, which meant their families unknowingly used *dead language* to refer to them. Given that language was an important *affective intensity* for most forum users, these familial interactions were significantly distressing to these individuals. Nine participants described not being out to their parents, which meant, in some cases, living a "double life" and a double linguistic identity; that is, for part(s) of their lives, they employed different names, titles, pronouns, etc., but for the other part(s) they used *dead language.* Chris, for instance, spoke about the linguistic-related distress that was caused due to not being out to their families:

> I still have to go home to my parents once a week, I'm not out to them. And they still see me as just their daughter. Like, I'm female, they use my birth name, female pronouns and such. And sometimes it will really deeply distress me. Sometimes it will just be a mere annoyance. (Chris, they/them, genderfluid, AFAB. Interview)

This language-related distress will be further explored in chapter 6. However, these examples demonstrate the ways in which non-binary people negotiate their

linguistic becomings among different social proximities, as well as the ways in which these interactions are part of their *gender becomings* more generally.

Macro Level

I have shown how the linguistic emergence of participants' non-binary identities occurs and how they negotiate language use with other individuals. I will now turn to the (macro) societal impact of linguistic emergence. In general, participants hoped that society as a whole will one day recognise their gender and their linguistic diversity.

> I think [language] is very important. You know, we all know about, sort of the impact of slurs and things like that. But, you know, language has such a massive effect on our society and on our culture. Like, when people are referring to sort of an unknown person and they say him or her. It's, like, you can just say they. And it's more accurate, it's more concise, it's, you know, that sort of thing. And sort of talking – stop saying "opposite gender." You want to talk about men and women. Those kind of little things that kind just normalise the idea of non-binary genders and alternative genders. I think it's really important. (Aspen, they/them, non-binary, AFAB. Interview)

> I think it'd be nice if language shifted so that people use "they" as default until they knew people's pronouns. I've been in some queer subcultural spaces where people do that. I'd be nice if that happened generally. I've heard some people say that, "oh, we know, but my pronouns are she, you know, I'm cis and my pronouns are she, and I get offended when people refer to me as they". And, you know, fair enough, that sucks when people don't use your pronouns, but when people are using it in a deliberate, exclusive stance because they don't know what your pronouns are, you know, I don't think you can really get offended. You know, then when they get to know you you can be like, "my pronouns are she her, she and her". And they can say, like, "okay". But if they're calling at somebody at the doctor's office or, you know, in some sort of setting where they just don't know you, and they're using it to be more inclusive, I can't think people can really be offended by that, you know. (Dana, they/them, genderqueer, AFAB. Interview)

Most participants expressed the need for gender-neutral and gender-inclusive language in society. Both Aspen and Dana spoke about the need to incorporate gender-neutral language into all aspects of society in order to be more inclusive. Many participants called for this kind of language to be more widely used and, in fact, to

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become the standard. This was seen as a positive movement that would increase gender equity and allow for a more just and diverse society. Yet, some felt as though gender-neutral language was becoming too linked with non-binary people, which they thought was not entirely appropriate. Participants mentioned that linking non-binary people with gender-neutral language could create new sets of stereotypes about non-binary people. Some participants such as Gaby and Charlie were aware of these correlations and challenged these ideas:

> Non-binary is not gender-neutral. It can be, but isn't for everyone. Ideally, there would be more pronouns than "he/she/they" that are easy to use. There are lots of pronouns out there, but getting people to accept "they" is already a battle and that's a word that is used all the time. Getting the general public to accept something like "ze" is not something that will happen in the next 10 years. We have to sub out "ladies and gentlemen" for "everyone", but wouldn't it be nice to be "ladies, gentlemen and genderqueers". There are so many genders that someone will always be left out and so neutral is the closest there is to inclusive. (Gaby, they/them, bigender, AFAB. Short story)

> I've seen a few articles where gender-neutral data has been use instead of s/he. So, like, if we're stating to use gender-neutral terms in mainstream maybe we'll get used to it. We do get some sort of mild representation. Like, now there's been, like, "Billions" [a television show], where the character has they/them pronouns. And, like, yeah, so I think we need to get more representation. But that representation also needs to be different. Like, you know, people are now approaching the whole non-binary thing with just they/them pronouns, whereas there are a lot more pronouns that are non-binary. And I'm kind of worried because it's, like, yes, we're getting a hint of representation, but it's not, like, various representation. (Charlie, they/them, genderfluid, AFAB. Interview)

Gaby mentioned that gender-neutrality is one of the ways in which societies can become more gender-inclusive. However, Gaby also affirms that gender-neutral language does not necessarily apply to all non-binary people. Some non-binary people, including some in this study, are comfortable employing a variety of linguistic markers including *she/her*, *e/ey*, or *he/his* pronouns, for instance. Therefore, the use of *they/them* pronouns is not universal among non-binary-identified people. Nevertheless, it is clear that non-binary gender identities are starting to be correlated with gender-neutral

language (especially the use of *they/them* pronouns), a *territorialisation* that, in some ways, begins to stipulate who gets to be(come) non-binary, who does not, and under what (linguistic) conditions this manifests. As such, in the process of *deterritorialising* the gender binary linguistically, a *reterritorialisation* of a "third" gender category emerges, taking these stereotypical linguistic forms. These *territorialisation*s can be both productive (solidifying the place of non-binary people in society) and unproductive (essentialising the linguistic *territory* of non-binary identities). Nevertheless, the language of gender diversity is constantly reassessed and renegotiated by people at all levels of social interaction, and it seems as though this linguistic proliferation is only just now getting some momentum – and it might shift in (somewhat) unexpected directions.

While gender identities beyond the binary are gaining more visibility and public awareness is increasing, *cisgenderist* thinking is still prevalent in society, rendering non-binary genders – and the language surrounding these identities – relatively unintelligible. Non-binary people in this study did not think that their identities were yet recognised, respected, or acknowledged in society. As such, the right to self-determine their genders was largely denied by social institutions. Many participants commented on the multiple ways in which society renders their identities invisible:

> The government doesn't even fully recognise non-binary [people] yet. I mean, they can't even institute the laws that are currently in place to protect non-binary people. Like, I found this when I was changing my name and, you know, just being more out in politics. Like, there were people who were telling me that it's not legally recognised, you can't do this, when actually they could. Even through their own ignorance of the law or because they don't want the law to protect non-binary people, so they just spread misinformation. It took me so long to even know that non-binary was even an option. And that was, like, with "LGBT resources," which didn't include non-binary people as part of their education. So I think the fact that I got any kind of education on non-binary people, you know, is an improvement over a few years ago, but it still sucks. Like, really badly. And it's more so than I think people realise […] because

we're a minority within a minority, so they can't be bothered with that 'cause it's just so small. But that causes a lot of problems with people, including me. So, yeah, we've got a long way to go, I think. (Adrian, they/them, non-binary, AFAB. Interview)

Trans women can be trans women, but not women, they say, and then, later, they say non-binary is a fad, there is no specific detriment to inhabiting this identity, enbys [non-binary people] don't need or deserve civil rights. So trans women can be some category outside of "woman" but there will be no recognised categories outside of "woman" other than "man". And while Malta and India and Germany and Australia legislate for the possibility of a 3rd option, UK weds itself to the binary. They rarely talk about assigned-female trans people like me at all, of course. (Harper, they/them, genderqueer, AFAB. Interview)

Both Adrian and Harper alluded to the fact that non-binary genders are typically not recognised in UK law, a fact which renders their identities illegitimate. Such de-legitimisation is presently due to the prevailing cultural schemas which posit gender as a two-and-only-two system (Lucal, 1999), leaving no space for gender identities between or outside of this system. Harper asserts that non-binary genders can indeed become intelligible in the UK, in the same way as other countries that have allowed their citizens to self-determine their "third" gender. This is because most participants asserted that societal recognition was pivotal to their comfort, safety, and (linguistic and material) self-determination. Harper also expressed a desire to establish the durability of their gender, suggesting that their identity should be understood as not a "fad" but an essential identity they should be legally allowed to inhabit, thus alluding to Spivak's (1990) strategic essentialism. Rudy and Harper made the following statements about their fight for recognition:

I'd like to be optimistic here and think that if enough of us are very loud about it, then there will be changes. But if just depends on, like, people being really really loud, and say, like, "this is what we want! we shouldn't be made to keep picking between these two options." Especially when that's not even true and it actually alienates a lot of other people anyway and it's something that could be genuinely useful to a lot of people who aren't even non-binary. So I feel if we manage to make break through in some areas, it would actually benefit a lot of

other people. […] I'm one of those people who'd like to have the option because I'd like the whole thing to become more mainstream. […] So there might be someone that doesn't want to be assumed to be a particular gender on their passport, so they might just have, like, a gender-neutral one, just because, like, that might just be how the prefer it. Like, people should not make assumptions about them being one hundred percent comfortable with themselves. (Rudy, they/them, non-existent, AFAB. Interview)

I just feel there will never be gender liberation, queer liberation or trans liberation if non-binary people are not given legitimacy, and that means legal recognition, but also to be able to tell our stories and have them heard, and that begins and ends with language. (Harper, they/them, genderqueer, AFAB. Interview)

In Rudy's and Harper's view, non-binary gender identities will only become legitimate when non-binary people declare and demand their (linguistic) place in society. Harper asserts that this liberation "begins and ends with language." Rudy and many other participants expressed a strong desire for gender-neutral options to exist and to "go mainstream." For instance, Rudy wished to have the option to have a gender-neutral marker in their legal documents, which they feel will enable non-binary people to feel less alienated. This battle for recognition, therefore, was seen as productive; it would help eradicate the various forms of discrimination that are hidden within language:

I guess, you know, because gender segregation and, you know, transphobia, everything has become so entrenched in our culture and in our language, it's now becoming an issue, and we have to, like, force people to recognise that, like, actually, you know, it is perfectly permissible to use […gender-neutral language…] There is no prejudice within the language, there's prejudice within people – and that's basically what it comes down to. You know, there isn't any barrier in language, there's nothing really to say there. You know, that they/them is not a good pronoun – or any other pronoun is bad to refer to people. It's just people's attitudes towards it. And it just makes me really angry 'cause it's, like, I was even taught this at school. […Gender neutral pronouns] are fine, those were the rules. It's just people are inventing them for their own agendas. (Adrian, they/them, non-binary, AFAB. Interview)

Language for many participants like Adrian was not arbitrary. Language has a productive power as it is "entrenched with culture." As such, language carries

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cisnormative schemas within it that disallow – and push back against – any creative iteration of gender. This, of course, is slowly changing. *They/them* pronouns, for instance, are slowly becoming normalised in public discourse and in writing style guides such as The Washington Post, the Associate Press, National Public Radio, the Modern Language Association, and the American Psychological Association (Nunberg, 2016; Lee, 2019).

In this section, I have suggested that *linguistic becomings*, as an *affective intensity*, was one of the most important factors contributing to the *gender becomings* of non-binary people. This was shown at three different levels: micro, meso, and macro. Yet, these levels *assemble* and overlap and affect one another in multiple ways. For instance, at the micro level, the language that people like Elliot use to describe their embodied experience might shift as they recognise that their embodied desires might also change over time. The language that non-binary people use to describe themselves was also guided by the available linguistic resources that have emerged over time. At the meso level, the language that people employ was shown to have mobility and was context-dependent. For instance, some participants navigated different social contexts such as family interactions where *dead language* was often expected. Language, therefore, was negotiated on a case-by-case basis and was not always consistent with their experiences. At the macro level, participants expressed the need to become socially and linguistically intelligible, and thus expressed the need to implement gender-neutral language in all areas of society. However, participants also recognised that language was constantly shifting and that the linguistic parameters of non-binary identities should be understood as fluid. As such, some participants acknowledged that

the solidification of gender-neutral language as strictly non-binary is not entirely accurate for all.

Linguistic becomings were shown to be in flux at all levels: individual, social, and societal. These forces can indeed affect and are affected by one another. The following section will explore the ways in which embodiment was also an affective force for non-binary people in the present study, but one which was expressed in a multitude of ways.

Embodiment

Where Am I? Harper looks in the mirror. "Where are you? Who are you today?" Their mousey grey hair is growing out and looking more feminine, but the stubble on their chin takes them in the other direction. Nowhere. (Harper, they/them, genderqueer, AFAB. Short story)

Participants expressed having a variety of gender embodiments, including: femme, androgynous, masculine, and genderfuck. However, these definitions varied from person to person, were contextual and situational, and were often modulated by their level of comfort as well as safety. Some participants were on hormone replacement therapy; however, none of the participants had undergone any other type of physical transition at the time of the interviews. While gender embodiments were not the same for all participants, most participants found that this was an important element in their process of becoming. For instance, many participants mentioned that their *gender becomings* emerged from a need to feel comfortable in their own embodied and linguistic experiences and, as such, this was both an individualised as well as a social process. This is because people's perceptions of their body and aesthetics mattered a great deal to them, and participants, generally, did not want other people to assume them to be the gender they were assigned at birth. Such negotiations were not easy, as

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most people in a *cisgenderist* society are accustomed to assuming people's genders based on their looks, voice, gait, etc. According to Kennedy (2013), "the responsibility for determining gender is placed on the observer rather than the individual" (p. 5).

For some participants, the idea of a non-binary gender expression was greatly *territorialised*. For instance, some participants mentioned that their gender expression was androgynous – that is, they made it a point to index a non-binary identity through their aesthetics: clothing, hair styles, and make-up. This was often a conscious decision, as it allowed them to not be mistaken for the gender they were assigned at birth. Shawn commented on their conscious attempt to present more androgynously:

> I think very few people are going to perceive me as being nonbinary [and] very few people perceive me as being a man, even though occasionally I do bind my chest and things like that if I want to… I don't now, if I'm in a situation where I am trying to be more obviously transgender, if that makes any sense. So, like, at the weekend, I'm going to buy a man shirt, so I bind my chest and go to a men's wear shop, I still think people will perceive me as a woman because maybe I have a more feminine face or whatever. So I think, yeah, people don't perceive me as being agender or androgynous, really. (Shawn, they/them, agender, AFAB. Interview)

Although Shawn attempts to look more *transgender* or androgynous by dressing more masculine, people might not perceive their gender as non-binary. In that sense, their gender expression and embodiment were socially unintelligible. Yet, in their process of *gender becoming*, explorations were crucial as they produce new material meanings. Similarly, Charlie, who described their gender expression and overall embodiment as "femme," and was undergoing hormone replacement therapy (HRT) at the time of the interview, said:

> When I say I'm femme, what it means is that I like to wear skirts and dresses. But I also like to have a beard. […] I started HRT just because, like, at some point I hope to be so masculine psychically that I'm not gonna get gendered wrongly when I wear skirts. […] When I try to be more neutral or more androgynous, people will approach me more and make really uncomfortable expression. […] When people still mistake me for a woman, I'm not gonna have

as many problems unless I actively speak out and say I'm not a woman. (Charlie, they/them, genderfluid, AFAB. Interview)

Participants like Charlie described their experiences of negotiating the thin line between authenticity and safety. For many, expressing themselves meant embodying various gender expressions typically associated with masculinity and femininity. However, these embodied configurations often generated negative reactions such as rejection, violence, and harassment, thus affecting the psychological and physical health of participants. For other participants, androgyny provided them with safety, but it was not their ideal expression of their gender. Bay commented on this:

I usually dress pretty masculine and a bit androgynous. I would dress more feminine if I could. If I felt confident enough or safe enough… […] I don't want to risk anything, you know. I don't want to face any backlash from it. And it's a lot of hassle in a professional work space. I mean, yeah, it's difficult because I don't usually express myself in those situations […] it's the fear that keeps me not experiencing it. (Bay, they/them, genderqueer, AMAB. Interview)

Bay felt that their desires to embody their gender were limited by their own fears that, doing so, would have negative repercussions on their career. Bay was not out as non-binary at work and, as such, had not requested their employer to use *they/them* pronouns nor had they been able to express their gender in the ways they desired. Furthermore, Bay feared the rejection from wider society which would deny them the opportunity to express their gender in creative ways. For many non-binary people in this study, fears of (physical and verbal) violence, social ostracism, being unable to make a living were indeed primary concerns.

Many participants rejected the idea that gender expressions ought to line up with their gender identities. In fact, many questioned the idea that a non-binary person needs to necessarily *look* non-binary in order to be non-binary. Chris, for instance, mentioned:

I identity as genderfluid, but I prefer to look male. I know there are nonbinary people who are happy to look female. And I noticed, like, going around in, like,

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online spaces, and finding more nonbinary people and genderqueer people and hearing their stories. A lot of it is to do with um… with, like, "you must be androgynous, you must look androgynous, you must sound androgynous to be nonbinary […and] if you like to dress masculine, but you're genderfluid, that's not okay." Apparently, that means, "oh, you just want to be male." Like, "you want to be a guy and you're just… you're furthering the gender binary. You're still putting that… that gender binary is still in place if you dress as a certain way – whether you're feminine or masculine." […] But people don't seem to realise that you don't have to be nonbinary to dress in a specific way. You can be cisgender and dress feminine. You can be trans and dress feminine or whatever gender you were assigned at birth. Gender expression and gender identity are not the same thing. (Chris, they/them, genderfluid, AFAB. Interview)

The idea that gender identity and gender expression were related, but did not necessarily have to correlate, was common among participants. Most of them indeed questioned this stereotype about non-binary people and saw their gender expression in terms of comfort. Brook, for instance, was AFAB and comfortable presenting in a feminine way:

I present quite femme and identify as genderqueer woman. So biologically I'm female - and that is quite an important part of my identity as well. But that doesn't… I guess my gender doesn't always line up with that. (Brook, she/they, genderqueer woman, AFAB. Interview)

Overall, participants embodied their genders in a variety of ways. As previously stated, some participants found it particularly important to index a so-called non-binary aesthetic in the form androgyny by mixing and matching pre-established gender aesthetics. This was sometimes a tool to gain social legitimacy and visibility. However, for the most part, these presentations were simply a matter of comfort as well as safety, and not necessarily to produce positive social change in the form of gender-inclusivity, although many wished this was the case. As such, many non-binary people questioned the idea that their gender identity had to "match" their gender expressions and embodiment.

While gender embodiments were diverse, these represented a significant *affective intensity*, as social perceptions of their gender determined the ways in which people related to them, as well as the language they employed to refer to them. Gender embodiments were not stable, as people's relationships with their bodies change over time, affecting – and being affected by – the historical and social processes that *assemble* to (in)visibilise non-binary aesthetics.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has explored some of the most significant *affective intensities* which aided in the *territorialisation* of non-binary gender identities among participants. I have argued that some of the most relevant factors in their *gender becomings* relate to: experiencing discomfort with assigned gender at birth, having close friendships and/or relations (partners or relatives) with other LGBTQ+ (queer) people, learning about gender diversity and discovering the language that best describes the relationship with gender, adopting that language (a *linguistic becoming*) and embodiment. These *intensities* were expressed in the form of *memories, proximities, realisations*, and *linguistic and material emergences*. These *affective intensities* are in constant development, reconfiguration, and evolution, as they are *(de/re)territorialised* in multiple ways, at different levels of social interaction. As previously mentioned, these *intensities* are not in any specific order and may not affect all non-binary people in the same way.

Experiencing discomfort with their assigned gender at birth was a common experience among the participants. Such discomfort is here understood as a "trans-emotional" *feeling*. Furthermore, participants shared early childhood memories in

which they expressed the *feelings* of discomfort with the gender binary, as well as the ways in which they had always (attempted to) challenged it. For instance, participants shared how this discomfort led them to express their gender in ways which through which defied the gender binary from an early age. Many of them expressed not having a language to eloquently communicate these desires back then.

Close relations with queer people were salient and provided a safe space in which genders and sexualities beyond the binary could be discussed openly. This was closely related to learning about trans and non-binary identities. When this happened, participants expressed having a sudden "epiphany" in which their complicated relationship with gender finally had a label – a *linguistic becoming*.

Linguistic becomings are constantly adopted, reassessed, negotiated within social interactions. This was demonstrated at three relational different levels: individual (micro), interactional (meso), and societal (macro). Adopting gender-neutral language – their *linguistic becomings* – was found to be one of the most important *intensities* at the time of the interviews. This adoption was negotiated individually, but with a great deal of influence from other factors such as their own embodied experience, as well as the available linguistic resources, which are said to be reassessed over time. Contextual and social interactions were also found to be significant in the linguistic emergence and negotiation of non-binary gender identities. While participants' *linguistic becomings* were not possible at all levels of interaction due to the prevailing *cisgenderist* ideologies, most participants were aware of the context of their linguistic choices.

Other aspects related to *linguistic becomings* included: the need for linguistic recognition, affirmation, and validation, as well as challenging the gender-based discrimination and inequalities embedded in (binary) language. Moreover,

misgendering language proved to be a significant source of distress among participants. These issues will be explored in more depth in the next chapters, as I continue to examine the various linguistic and non-linguistic challenges that non-binary people experience because of their identity.

Lastly, embodiment was explored as an *affective intensity* which affected – and was affected by – research participants in a multitude of ways. While many participants (attempted to) index an androgynous, non-binary expression, this was not a universal goal among participants. Most, in fact, understood their gender identities and their gender expressions as separate, yet intrinsically related. Many regarded their gender expressions and overall embodiment in terms of comfort, wherein mixing stereotypical masculine and feminine expressions were realised depending on their feelings. Yet, many participants struggled to come to terms with their embodied desires, since these were not always fully realised due to safety concerns. Participants emphasised the role of language, which was on the same level as physical security, *communitas*, and livelihood. Many of them wished their identities would be more visible and that people did not assume their genders and the language surrounding them based on their appearance. Overall, participants actively took a stance in naming their own gendered experiences, which allowed them to feel more authentic. These affective practices further advanced their *gender and linguistic becomings* in a variety of domains: individual, interactional, social, and societal.

6. LANGUAGE-RELATED DISTRESS AND SOCIAL PROXIMITIES

In the previous chapter, I argued that *linguistic becomings* is one of the most central *affective intensities* among research participants, thus contributing to the *gender becomings* of these individuals. Language was therefore found to be an important issue among non-binary people. One of the major issues surrounding *non-binary language* is misgendering – that is, the linguistic misrepresentation of a person's gender. Within research that focusses on non-binary people, little attention has been paid to the language-related issues that emerge from navigating the world as a non-binary person. Ansara and Hegarty (2012) suggested that the use of *cisgenderist* language impacts the sense of exclusion of trans people; however, no research has investigated whether this is true among non-binary people. Therefore, this chapter focusses on language, particularly the issues that emerge from adopting a language that is not yet broadly accepted in English-speaking societies. Specifically, this chapter explores the ways in which non-binary people navigate the world using *non-binary language*, the distress that originates from social interactions in which their language is not affirmed, and the various ways in which non-binary people manage these situations.

Participants in this study indeed expressed that misgendering was a major source of pain and distress. However, the data also revealed that there was a degree of context-dependency associated to this distress. I found that the levels of distress depended upon the levels of *proximity*, as well as the (perceived) *intention* (whether intentionally or unintentionally) of the individual who misgendered them. This is consistent with *assemblage theory* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), as the *intensity* of distress branches out from different intersections, with different *affective intensities*, and in very different ways. Such *intensities* are not linear but rather they are influenced

by different *affects* – in this case: *proximities* and *intentions*. This chapter maps the social topography of the ways in which non-binary people *assemble* their social worlds and manage social divisions linguistically.

I also argue that the prevailing assumption that gender is a two-and-only-two system affects the social invisibility of non-binary people (Lucal, 1999). Therefore, *cisnormativity* is at the heart of non-binary erasure, and it is expressed linguistically through misgendering – whether purposeful or not. Furthermore, this chapter unpacks the concept of misgendering, asserting that misgendering is a multidimensional concept – that is, misgendering is not always intentional; it does not always have the same negative effects on people; and when distress does emerge, it does not hold the same *intensity* for each person. Yet, the language-related distress that misgendering generates can build up over time, thus producing long-lasting psychological repercussions on these research participants. This chapter outlines some of these psychological repercussions, including distress, distancing, and isolation. However, I argue that the emergence of non-binary communities (both online and offline) is an important protective factor against these negative repercussions. These communities can therefore produce connectivity, belonging, and social representation which can counter language-based discrimination.

Social Proximities

In the present thesis, proximity refers to not only the social, physical proximity to other individuals, but also to the level of emotional importance of a social interaction. In that sense, bodies can *become* in relation to other bodies, but only to the extent that they produce an intense, affective response. For instance, an interaction with a significant other is likely more emotionally charged than an interaction with a stranger.

Similarly, it is likely that an interaction with one's parents is more emotionally charged than an interaction with a distant relative. However, if a stranger or a distant relative becomes violent or aggressive, this interaction can become intense and emotionally charged. Additionally, proximity does not have to be physical, as a person might be miles away but still affect an individual, e.g. cyberbullying or arguing with a troll on Twitter. The important aspect of this *intensity* (the proximity) is, therefore, its connection to emotionality – that is, some interactions are more emotionally laden than others. Nonetheless, social proximity (in physical form) is generally a good indicator of the ways in which bodies can affect one another, as these close proximities can generate emotional responses in individuals. Therefore, mapping out levels of physical and social proximity is useful, albeit imperfect.

I found that the emotional distress that misgendering generated on research participants was mediated by the social proximity to other individuals; it was context-dependent. For instance, those who were in close proximity to the individual were expected to affirm their gender linguistically, but this was not expected for those who were not in close proximity. As such, this chapter maps out these social proximities and the levels of emotional distress that these interactions generated on these individuals. This social proximity also influenced (but did not necessarily determine) whether participants came out as non-binary and/or disclose their *linguistic becomings* to others. These findings were consistent with recent research on "proximal stress experiences" which suggested that trans and gender non-conforming individuals expect rejection (or felt stigma) in "intense and often life-threatening; upsetting and disparaging; and an expected part of their existence" (Rood et al., 2016, p. 160), consistent with minority stress model (Meyer, 2003).

Intentions

When asked about the ways in which misgendering – and language more generally – affected their mental health, most participants asserted that it depended on the situation. Sometimes these interactions were more distressing than others, as participants were focussed on – and were constantly interpreting – the meanings behind others' language usage. In other words, they were keenly aware of – and plaid close attention to – the intentions behind misgendering, depending on the context and the level of social proximity. I will outline below when intentional and unintentional misgendering was likely to occur. This is, however, not a strict binary. *Linguistic becomings* are constantly negotiated at the individual, interpersonal, and social levels. These affect one another and constantly create new *becomings*.

Intentional Misgendering

Intentional misgendering occurred when participants perceived that others misgendered purposely. Therefore, intentional misgendering only occurred when the interlocutor was aware that the participant used, for example, gender-neutral language, but refused to use it. According to the participants in this thesis, intentional misgendering occurred for a variety of reasons, including: hurting the person, refusing to use gender-neutral language because it is "ungrammatical," or claiming that it was too difficult or excessive. Furthermore, those who intentionally misgendered participants (as perceived by participants) were most likely within close proximity to them. For instance, close friends, close family members (i.e., parents and siblings), colleagues, and classmates, to name a few.

Unintentional Misgendering

On the other hand, according to the participants, unintentional misgendering occurred primarily for two reasons: being unaware of gender-neutral language, thus gendering the person based on their appearance; or accidentally calling them by their *dead language* out of habit or lack of practice.

Participants suggested that people's perceptions and assumptions about their gender were often based on their gender presentation or bodily aesthetics. These perceptions were described as some of the biggest challenges in navigating the world as a non-binary person. Thus, participants were well-aware that the way they expressed their gender (clothing, hair style, gait, etc.) and their bodily aesthetics (facial structure, chest size, curves, etc.) were some of the key reasons why they were misgendered by others, particularly strangers. In other words, people's assumption of their presentation and bodily aesthetic rendered their non-binary genders unintelligible (Butler, 1993). Indeed, Tee and Hegarty (2006) suggest that people's beliefs about the hegemonic gender binary are a reliable predictor of whether a person will reject and invalidate the gender of a person. Likewise, Israel (2005) argues that the difficulty to affirm someone's gender may be related to the cognitive effort it takes to re-evaluate the gender presentation of a person. However, this thesis did not measure the speaker's intent and the aforementioned categories are based on the participants' perceptions of why they were misgendered and made unintelligible. It is therefore possible that some forms of misgendering could involve other motivations not studied.

Strangers, acquaintances, and extended family were among those who were most likely to unintentionally misgender non-binary people in the present study. These individuals were the least likely to be in close (emotional) proximity to the participants;

therefore, the *intensity* of the language-related distress was lower than among those in close proximity.

Social Topography: Mapping out proximity and intentions

Based on the participants' accounts, I mapped out the social topography of the language-related distress that misgendering caused them. This distress was affectively related to the levels of social proximity as well as the intentions; therefore, these factors were accounted for in mapping out this *affective intensity*. Figure 4 (below) illustrates the *intensity* of language-related distress caused by misgendering, as it relates to the level of social proximity and the intentions.

Figure 4. Language-related Distress: Social Proximity and Intentions
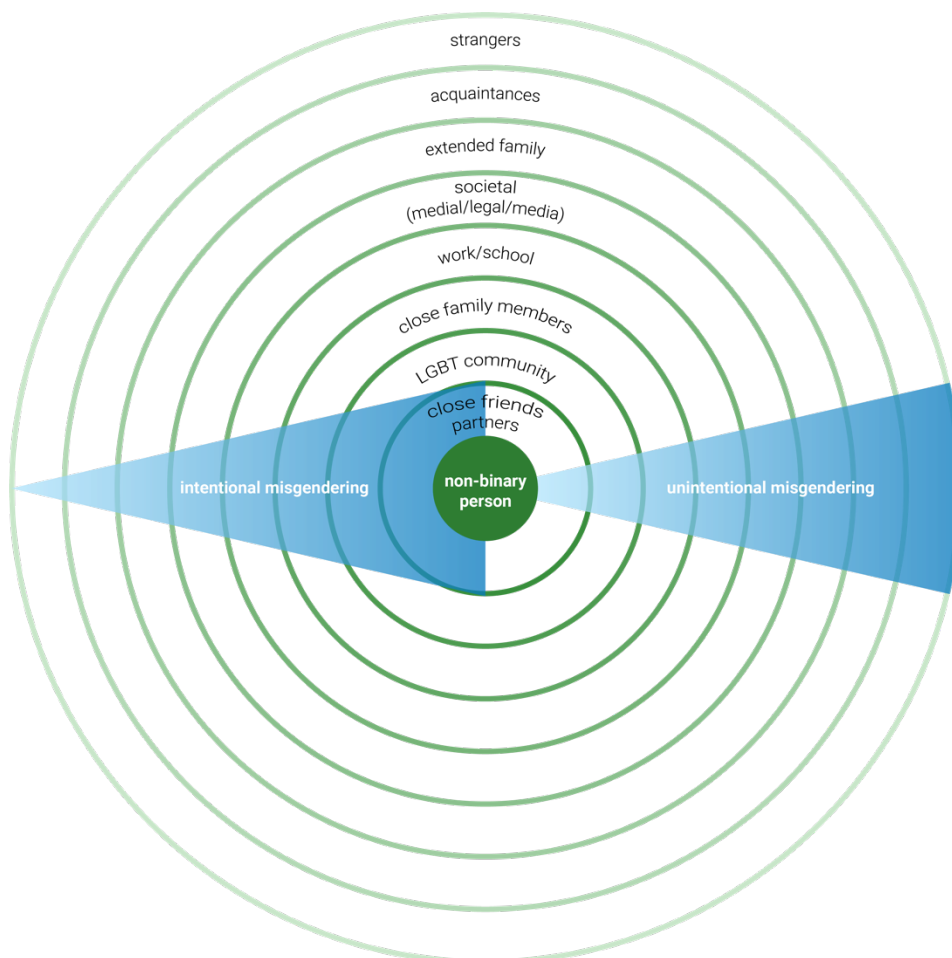
Figure 4. Intensity of distress, levels of social proximity, and intentions.

In this figure, the circles represent the level of *social proximity* to the participants. While this model is neither perfect nor static, participants mentioned that close friends and partners represented the most important proximity, as it was the most emotionally affective. This was followed by members of the LGBTQ+ community, as this was found to be an important proximity that frequently offered a safe space for non-binary people. The next circle represents close family members (parents and siblings), as these relationships are particularly emotional. These social proximities were then followed by work/school environments, societal (medical/legal/media), extended family, acquaintances and, lastly, strangers (least emotional).

Intentions are represented in this figure by the two shaded areas. The one on the left-hand side represents the intentional misgendering, while the one on the right-hand-side represents the unintentional misgendering. The size of the area they cover within each of the levels of social proximity represent the *intensity* of the language-related distress these interactions were likely to generate. For instance, in the inner circle (close friends/partners), intentional misgendering was likely to cause a great deal of distress, as shown by the size of the shaded area, whereas unintentional misgendering (perhaps in the form of an occasional mishap), was not considered as distressful. It is therefore argued that intentional misgendering is generally more distressful than unintentional misgendering, but this is mediated by the level of social proximity.

It is also important to mention that, while the misgendering occurring within the outer circles of social proximity is potentially less painful, it can accumulate over time, generating distress that is equally intense as the distress experienced within the inner circles. It is for this reason that the shaded area of unintentional misgendering is large in

places social proximities like acquaintances and strangers. Moreover, the fact that the non-binary (NB) person is in the middle does not imply that they do not have the capacity to move around the outer circles, meaning that sometimes those interactions can be extremely intense, i.e., experiences of outright discrimination and violence.

The following sections will provide further evidence for the language-related stress at each of the proposed proximities: close friends and partners, members of the LGBTQ+ community, close family members, work/school, societal (medical/legal/media), extended family, acquaintances, and strangers. I will therefore show how the intentions within each of these proximities play an affective role in the *intensity* of this language-related distress.

Close friends and partners

Close friends and partners were typically closest in proximity to the participants, and represented one of the most socially important groups. Participants were more likely to inform their close friends and partners about their *gender and linguistic becomings*. As such, close friends and partners were (expected to be) the most supportive and affirming. Participants were also likely to spend more (meaningful and emotional) time with this group than any other group – either online or offline. For instance, Shawn commented on the importance of language in their polyamorous relationships with both their husband and boyfriend:

> They asked me, "what would you like us to say? 'cause I don't wanna start calling you my girlfriend to people 'cause if that's gonna make you feel uncomfortable… So, my husband calls me his wife, which I like because, to me, it's like, we are married, so, like, I do like using that term. […] it's never had any particularly feminine connotations to me. But he'll use my pronouns in conjunction with that, which makes me feel better about it. So, it would be something like, "oh that's my wife, do you want to meet them?" So, it's a feminine gendered title, but like I said, he'll use my pronouns to negate that a

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bit, kind of. And my boyfriend tends to just, like, make up whatever at the time. He calls me various things, like, "my lover, my lover, my partner, my special friend". He'll make up, like, different things, 'cause I'm not comfortable with girlfriend […] has a lot of, like, specific gender connotations. And not even just to do with gender. I think it kind of has expectations attached to it as well. Like, if you say girlfriend people think of you in a certain role. And it's always been more like that, as supposed to wife. You know, like, wife, I don't really associate with feminine or a certain way of acting. But girlfriend, I really do. So I'd be really uncomfortable of anyone started referring to me using that. […] Everyone has their own things that they're comfortable with. But for me, that's what it is. (Shawn, they/them, agender, AFAB. Interview)

Close friends and partners were therefore less likely to misgender participants intentionally, as they were generally supportive. For Shawn, language was context-dependent and highly related to their comfort level. This language had to be negotiated with their significant others, who were supportive and open to experiment with language. When unintentional misgendering did occur, close friends and partners were reported to correct themselves almost immediately, making the participants feel validated and accepted. However, these experiences were also reported as painful. Tanner, for instance, drew a distinction between intentional and unintentional misgendering and their effects:

"If a friend [misgenders me] it's, like, it feels, like, "oh". Even though *I know that they're not doing it on purpose*, it still hurts me. It hurts me." (Tanner, they/them, agender, AFAB. Emphasis added. Interview)

For Tanner, these interactions were painful; however, Tanner interpreted and perceived their friend's intentions – they "knew" that their friends did not intend to hurt them. Close friends were a great source of support and affirmation. Tyler mentioned about their experience being non-binary around supportive friends:

All of my friends were very very accepting. I'm lucky to have the most chilled out, malleable group of friends ever. We're really close and the minority of us are actually straight, cisgender people. Like, there's not many of them at all. Everyone is *something*, so they were all just like: "yeah, totally fine. I'll try and remember." I had a couple of people message me being like, "remind me of your pronouns," or "I'm really sorry that I kept calling you this. I'll try not to do

it again." We learn together and make mistakes, and experiment with it and stuff. (Tyler, they/any, non-binary, AFAB. Emphasis added. Interview)

Like Tyler, most participants described having very strong friendships and relationships with other queer and non-binary people, or as "something," as Tyler described it. Coming out to them was very easy, as some already had the language to validate their identity. Among these friends, it was also common to disclose one's name and pronouns while introducing oneself, a practice that is becoming more widespread in queer groups (Richards & Barker, 2013). As such, among these groups, participants often experimented with names, pronouns, titles, etc. These friends were in very close proximity to the participants – either in person or online – which allowed the participants to have a strong support group to whom they could share experiences, commiserate about similar issues, and exchange useful information that pertains to their gender. Participants suggested that people within these communities spoke the "same language" – that is, these communities were *fluent* in *non-binary language*: the labels, pronouns, and other gender-inclusive and affirming language. The data also suggested that these linguistic practices were extremely important to non-binary people in this study, given that they helped to build spaces where non-binary gender identities could be expressed safely and effortlessly, without experiencing any form of sexism, transphobia, misogyny – and where *cis-* and *heteronormativity* were not the dominant tendencies.

Although intentional misgendering from close friends and partners rarely occurred, when it did happen, the *intensity* of the language-related distress was greater. This distress is here theorised as being due to the level of close proximity, the emotionality of the interaction, and the high expectation that misgendering should not occur within these groups. The participants speculated that this type of intentional

misgendering was done in order to hurt their feelings. Blaine discussed how this type of misgendering made them feel:

> [The importance of language] really depends on who it is. If it's somebody who knows that I'm agender and who had offered to use gender-neutral pronouns for me, it's very important that they [don't] screw it up or anything. I have a bunch of friends who have known me since I was, like, seven, and it's totally fine if they accidentally use *that*. If they were to deliberately refer to me as female either to *hurt my feelings* or just because they didn't think it was hugely important, that would hurt. I have one friend who insists on introducing me to his mates as a female, as a girl gamer. And that one is really annoying just because I've talked to him about it before and he still does it, so that one is just kind of rude. (Blaine, they/them, agender, AFAB. Emphasis added. Interview)

Blaine makes it clear that, for them, it is hugely important that their close friends use and validate their language; yet, Blaine does not expect those to whom they have not disclosed this information to do so. Therefore, it is clear that there are certain expectations related to disclosing *gender and linguistic becomings* to close friends and partners. When these expectations were not fulfilled, non-binary people in this research were disappointed. These disappointing interactions sometimes led them to distance themselves from those relationships. Kennedy wrote about a friend who they were sure would not understand their *gender and linguistic becomings* as non-binary:

> They've (Kennedy) seriously considered ending this friendship because they're so sure she just Would. Not. Get. It. But they think about how heartbroken she would be if you ended things. After all, in her mind, you two are still friends and nothing bad has happened between them two from memory. (Kennedy, they/them, genderfluid, AFAB. Short story)

This evidence supports Saltzburg and Davis' (2010) work that found that young non-binary people found it difficult to have a sense of authenticity without having their identities acknowledged by those around them, especially by those in close proximity. Participants in this study also had a hard time embracing their own identities without being surrounded by people who affirmed their identities. Most non-binary people in this study held close relations with other non-binary people, because they were the ones

who were more likely to "speak the same language," and to validate and accept their identities linguistically.

LGBTQ+ (queer) Community

In the previous chapter, I argued that in the process *gender and linguistic becomings*, having close relationships with other LGBTQ+ (or queer) people was a significant *affective intensity*. This *intensity* allowed non-binary people in this study to feel comfortable and validated. However, understanding about the *gender and linguistic becomings* of non-binary people was not always consistent within the queer community. Many participants expressed that some queer groups were at times resistant to their identity and language use, particularly cisgender lesbian women and gay men. The participants described experiences of linguistic rejection and intentional misgendering coming from within the queer community. Harper and Adrian, for instance, commented on the language-based discrimination they experienced from within the queer community:

> There's horrible stuff online all the time, and the lesbian community I used to be a part of can be quite anti-trans, as can the gay community. The worst has been a local LGBT organisation that relentless bullied me until I left, it started with misgendering but got worse and worse. And I was asked in a job interview how my gender identity affected the clients I work with, that was pretty blatant discrimination, and they looked at me like I was a piece of shit, something I never experienced even as an out lesbian. (Harper, they/them, trans and genderqueer, femme, AFAB. Interview)

> [T]hey get told that they are letting down the LGBT community by not identifying as male or female. (Adrian, they/them, non-binary, AFAB. Short story)

Others described experiences of rejection emerging from some (binary) trans people who claimed that they did not understand non-binary identities – or saw these identities "not trans enough." Furthermore, participants described how difficult it was to

be openly non-binary, even in spaces where they thought their identities would be affirmed:

> The trans masculine [group I go to] can be kind of weird, because, apart from the fact that they have really gendered things, you can see how they relate differently from people who are passing as a man, and people who decide not to fall into all the stereotypes that come with it. People who are just as transphobic as cis people who say there's two genders [or who say] you can't wear skirts if you're a transgender man and things like. At some point I've had a phase where I have to pass otherwise I'm not really transgender. I think it's a lot of insecurities and I'm wanting to feel real or trans enough, but it shouldn't be like that. (Charlie, they/them, genderfluid, AFAB. Interview)

Participants stated that some of these tensions emerged due to the lack of awareness regarding non-binary identities – that is, most people are not aware that non-binary genders are a possibility. Others related these tensions to the privileges that some queer people, particularly gay men, have gained in recent years (representation, legal rights, etc.). Participants saw non-binary identities as lacking any privileges and being at the bottom of the hierarchy. Kennedy commented on this:

> I'm not expecting nonbinary people to be represented on the same level as binary trans people and I'm not expecting binary trans people to be necessarily on the same level as cis gay and or cis lesbian people. There will still be that hierarchy I just described, but the gaps between binary trans people and cis queer people will be much smaller. (Kennedy, they/them, genderfluid, AFAB. Interview)

Given the highly emotional proximity of these interactions, participants had expectation that their identities would or should be affirmed within these communities. These expectations quickly turned into disappointment and distress. Kennedy described hierarchy of privilege within the queer community. In this hierarchy, binary sexualities such as gay and lesbian are at the top, followed by binary trans genders such as men and women, followed by non-binary sexualities (such as bisexuality, pansexuality, asexuality, etc.) and, lastly, non-binary genders. As such, non-binary people expressed feeling as though they were a minority within a minority. This minority status, which

was reinforced by microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2012) within the LGBTQ+ community, significantly contributed to the language-related distress that these participants experienced.

Non-binary people, however, formed their own communities – either online or offline – which positively contributed to their *gender and linguistic becomings*. Most of the participants in this study had a consistent group of friends and/or partners who were supportive and affirming of their gender expression, histories, and identities. Therefore, when extremely painful or distressing circumstances occurred, many had a community to rely on or someone with whom to commiserate. Kennedy and Bay commented on the positive effects of their non-binary communities:

> I turn to my friends for support and usually my non-binary friends for the understanding that they have. (Kennedy, they/them, genderfluid, AFAB. Interview)

> I just ignore [misgendering] because it's a temporary thing. Like, I know I'll be around non-binary people who will respect my pronouns and gender soon enough, because I live in a house with people who do. So that's nice and reassuring. Generally, I would just ignore it and move on. (Bay, they/them, genderqueer, AMAB. Interview)

The construction of community through language, therefore, was a critical element in countering the negative effects of misgendering, even then these occurred from within the LGBTQ+ community. Forming their own communities was considered a protective factor against the language-related distress that originated from these interactions.

Close Family Members

About half of the participants were out to their close family members (parents and siblings). However, it was not always easy for those who were out. Some family

members – especially parents – had a very difficult time getting used to the language. Some parents simply refused to address their adult children using this language. This generated a considerable amount of distress on the participants, given that this type of misgendering was generally perceived as being intentional. Adrian explained how distressful it was to be misgendered by their family:

> [Language] is important to me because I don't feel genuine, and I would like people to refer to me by my pronouns – especially don't use she her pronouns. That's not always the case, though. Especially with my family. They do not get it or understand it, and they just flat out refuse to call me by my pronouns. They only call me by my legal name now, because I legally changed it. So they have to legally refer to me as that. (Adrian, they/them, non-binary, AFAB. Interview)

Adrian stated that when they were misgendered they did not feel genuine or authentic about themselves; therefore, these interactions with unsupportive family members made them feel devalued, erased, and rendered unintelligible. This, in turn, affected Adrian's self-esteem. Psychological research has found that priming people to focus on their gender causes them to have lower confidence and self-esteem (Fine, 2010). Barker and Richards (2015) suggested that it is perhaps non-binary erasure, discrimination, and lack of visibility that is responsible for the higher rates in mental health issues among non-binary people. Moreover, Harrison, Grant and Herman (2012) found that over 40% of non-binary people had attempted suicide at some point. The present study supports these research findings, adding that intentional misgendering from people in close emotional proximity is one of the most significant factors for this distress. Unintentional misgendering, while painful, was less distressing for participants.

Some family members, however, were supportive their children's *gender and linguistic becomings*. Shawn, for instance, who recently came out to their parents,

explained how their parents reacted to their coming out and how they negotiated this

linguistic becoming:

> I came out to [my parents] last Christmas and they found that quite confusing at first, but they're quite supportive and they've gotten a lot better at switching pronouns and things like that. I do have to keep reminding them. […] I kind of came out to them by mentioning another friend of mine who is non-binary 'cause they were getting their pronouns wrong, so I was like, "oh, this person uses they them pronouns", and they were like, "what?" I had to explain that, and then I was like, "and I would also like you to do that for me 'cause I'm also non-binary." (Shawn, they/them, agender, AFAB. Interview)

Shawn's coming out to their parents was not dissimilar to other participants'.

These participants commented on the challenges they faced in ensuring their families

would validate their identities linguistically. For most participants, this process was

ongoing since family members were accustomed to naming them by their *dead*

language. As such, when family members used this type of language, participants

understood – and were keen to perceive and make interpretations about – the intentions

behind it.

In order to make their identities intelligible to their parents, some participants

found it easier to explain their *gender and linguistic becomings* using examples. By

drawing from visible concepts or people they knew, participants made their identities

not only more concrete, but more digestible for their families. For instance, Shawn

mentioned that they came out to their parents by pointing out that their friend (a person

they knew) was non-binary. Similarly, for Charlie, mentioned that using a concept their

parents knew about (transgender) made it easier for Charlie to come out to their parents.

Charlie, who spoke Italian with their parents, commented:

> I couldn't explain what it means to be non-binary, I just said that I'm transgender and that I'm gonna transition. […] But I think they're finally getting used to it, even though they still refuse to use my name and pronouns, or even address me. In Italian we don't have the neutral – everything is gendered. They're generally used to me as a woman instead the masculine, although

sometimes my mom and I are having a conversation and she will try and talk in dialect because, in my slang, the last letter of the word is generally cut. The last letter of the words is the one that uses gender. She tried to speak in dialect, even though I know she doesn't like it, just so that she can not gender me – which is kind of cute. (Charlie, they/them, genderfluid, AFAB. Interview)

In Charlie's case, explaining to their parents that they identified as transgender (understood here as a trans man) rather than non-binary allowed them to be out and, in fact, worked to their advantage. Italian has grammatical gender, which makes it harder to convey gender-neutrality linguistically. However, their mother used gender-neutral language in the form of an Italian dialect to refer to them, without realising that this was their desired language. However, while Charlie was pleased with this outcome, it could also be interpreted as a microaggression (a subtle, covert form of discrimination) in that Charlie's mother would rather use ambiguous language than to refer to Charlie as male. Charlie's case exemplifies the complexity of *linguistic becomings* as well as the context-dependency of misgendering. Sometimes the language-related distress was more intense than others. These *intensities*, I argue, are often modulated by the emotional proximity as well as the intentions of the interlocutor.

About a half of the participants were not out to their family members. These participants reported feeling uncomfortable around their families, as they felt as though they were living a double life – one in which their linguistic choices were affirmed and another one in which these were non-existent. Chris wrote on the unintentional misgendering they endured from their family, which they understood as temporary:

Chris still has to go back home to their parents every Sunday (to look after their pets, who are their responsibility), and be called by their birth name and female pronouns, but Chris could cope with that only once a week, as long as they could go back to their university life, where they are happy and comfortable. (Chris, they/them, genderfluid, AFAB. Short story)

Chris started to resent their family, so spending time with them became increasingly difficult:

> Hiding my gender identity and experimenting with my gender was extremely difficult while I was living with my parents. It was very stressful – which is why I was so glad when I moved out. I was able to be free to express myself how I wanted to, and I live my life how I wanted to. I'm here [at university] six days a week, and only at my home [with parents] one day a week. I can kind of deal with that one day a week where my parents don't know anything and that I'm still closeted. But it's okay 'cause it's just one day a week and then I know I can always go back and *be myself again*. So it's kind of half and half – mixed emotions. (Chris, they/them, genderfluid, AFAB. Emphasis added. Interview)

Some of these participants were not too distressed by this misgendering; they did not expect their family to validate their gender. In an extreme case, Adrian narrated how they did not expect their mother to employ their language due to her memory issues:

> It is a different situation with my mom… she has short term memory, so… I don't think she'll ever be able to call me what I want and really recognise what's going on. She gets bits and pieces, but, she won't actually remember it, I don't think, and really understand it. So I cut her some more slack for that. (Adrian, they/them, non-binary, AFAB. Interview)

Unintentional and intentional misgendering from family members caused different *intensities* of distress. For the most part, intentional misgendering was said to be more distressing than unintentional misgendering. However, for some participants, living a "double life" was difficult and, in many ways, equally distressful as intentional misgendering. Yet, participants typically understood the intentions behind misgendering, especially coming from family members, as processes of adapting to their new linguistic choices were slow, complex, and mediated by affects. For instance, parents are accustomed to employing the language they help select for their children (e.g., names, nicknames, pronouns, etc.). Furthermore, some participants sometimes did

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not mind this type of language around their families, as they understood this language as what they themselves were also accustomed to in these contexts. Tanner explained:

> I definitely don't like it when people use female pronouns to refer to me. I mean, although I put up with it, if it's just people I don't know or whatever. But um it definitely um feels wrong. For other gender words I'm not so bothered, um, like, I don't really. Well, I don't… I don't really like girl or woman, I wouldn't, like, I don't like that. But I don't really mind being called a daughter or a granddaughter. I don't know why, but um so… Although my auntie calls me her nibling, which I quite like, I think that's nice. But um it doesn't particularly bother me, like, some. yeah, some gendered words definitely bother me more than others. um but yeah… but also, yeah, it becomes more important the closer I am to someone. (Tanner, they/them, agender, AFAB. Interview)

Misgendering from close family members was therefore highly contextual, and unpredictable, relating to the ways in which the linguistic processes of becoming are always emerging and transforming as they are affected by multiple *affective intensities*.

Work/School

Occupational environments such as work and school were in the inner circles given that participants tended to spend a great deal of time in these spaces. Thus, there was a great deal of exposure and proximity. Out of twenty-two participants, fifteen currently had jobs, one was unemployed, and five were university students at the time of the interview. Out of the fifteen participants that were employed, seven were out as non-binary to their employers, although one of them, Toby, had not informed their employer about their pronouns, and another, Ryan, told his employers that he was a trans man rather than a non-binary person. And although these seven participants were mostly happy that they had come out to their employers, four of them regretted doing so. This was due to issues related to language and discrimination that they had faced at work since coming out. For instance, Rudy came out at work and they said:

I had to deal with so many really rude questions – from one blonde girl in particular. There was one night out where they kept misgendering me and they ended up getting really nasty towards me at the end of the night when I called them out on it. And the worst thing was that, because they'd been drinking a lot, they did not remember. Other people who saw what happened didn't actually take my side and, in fact, no one took my side in that incident. They all took her side. And, it really really stuck because I had to go back into work the next few days and pretend that I was okay. And I really really wasn't and I just had no support. And I eventually got called into the office and was told I wasn't wearing makeup. (Rudy, they/them, non-existent, AFAB. Interview)

Rudy was eventually dismissed from their job. Rudy thought that the main reason they were let go was because they did not embody a stereotypical "retail girl" persona; they also suspected that it had to do with the fact that none of their colleagues were willing to employ their pronoun. Now Rudy thinks it is best to not talk about their gender identity at work, especially in retail jobs, because of the negative repercussions that they have previously endured. Similarly, for Charlie, coming out at work was very difficult and distressful. Charlie described being harassed and threatened at work by their former workmates:

There is a really thin line between being too visible and being unsafe, because the people at my job have attempted to punch me in the face if I say that I'm not a woman again. (Charlie, they/them, genderfluid, AFAB. Interview)

Safety, therefore, was a big issue for non-binary people in this study. Participants had to navigate workplace environments in which binary gender stereotypes are still highly prevalent. In many cases, language became a very distressful issue, given that the misgendering that they experienced tended to be intentional. In addition, the threat of psychical and verbal violence became imminent when they stood up for their *gender and linguistic becomings*. In many cases, this led participants to avoiding social situations in which their identities were not linguistically affirmed. These findings resemble ScottishTrans.org's (2016) findings which suggest that over three quarters of non-binary people avoid situations for fear of being misgendered,

outed, or harassed. Additionally, ScottishTrans.org. found that only 6% of non-binary people in the survey felt confident being out at work, whereas 55% never felt comfortable. In other research, 80% of the sample thought that they had to pass as male or female in order to be accepted at their workplace (Valentine, 2016). In the present study, eight participants that had not come out to their employers. These participants expressed their fears of being out at work. For instance, Adrian and Dana explain:

> I just don't want [come out at work]. I work in a university, but not in some sort of faculty where they are more conservative, so I just don't feel like dealing that pushback. Some people at work know, but they are people who work in HR, or in the equality team. So in talking to them about this sort of stuff, I sort of let thing slip or made little comments and that's fine. (Dana, they/them, genderqueer, AFAB. Interview)

> I've never been out at work for anything, because I've just sort of had this fear. And now I still have that fear of being rejected and questioned. I do feel like I could've gotten other [job] opportunities. And either I didn't take them or I wasn't offered because of this sort of layer of "we don't want you here [because of your gender]." I've had some bad experiences. (Adrian, they/them, non-binary, AFAB. Interview)

Both Adrian and Dana have similar concerns about being out at work. Primarily, they thought that most employers have *cisnormative* expectations (Worthen, 2016) about their employees. Participants reported that employers typically expect their employees to be cisgender and to fit within the hegemonic gender binary. These employers might not have any type of diversity training, and neither Adrian nor Dana, I argue, had the emotional energy to negotiate their *gender and linguistic becomings* with their employers. Others were strategic about not coming out, as doing so represented a burden to them. In these situations, therefore, the misgendering is unintentional. As previously argued, however, this does not mean that it is not painful. As Dana themself mentioned:

> Sometimes it hurts more than others when people use language to refer to you that is misgendering. But even when you sort of blow it off, like I said, most of

the time at work, it's just fine. But sometimes it just feels like *a thousand paper cuts*. And you know, by the end of the day you're like, "how many times has someone misgendered me today?" It's really difficult to speak about someone without using a pronoun, particularly when you're not aware that's a problem. And so, sometimes by the end of the day you just feel like, you've just been *robbed raw* and you're like, "how many billions of times did someone refer to me as she and Mss today? (Dana, they/them, genderqueer, AFAB, Emphasis added. Interview)

The use of the metaphor "a thousand paper cuts" encapsulates the feelings of the non-binary participants who are constantly misgendered (both intentionally and unintentionally) at work. There is a clear trade-off between being out and safety – that is, for some, it is simply not possible to be out as non-binary at work for fear that they will be removed from their jobs, intentionally misgendered, harassed, or threatened. Therefore, even though the misgendering might be unintentional for those who are not out, to them, it is just a reminder that they are unable to express their gender – both visually and linguistically. I argue that this, in turn, can become distressing, causing psychological harm.

The few participants that did not regret coming out as non-binary in their workplaces were in fact working in areas such as education and sexual health which they considered to be more progressive towards gender diversity. Therefore, they were able to inform and teach others about their *gender and linguistic becomings* and share their experience as non-binary:

I came out to my employer, as part of doing talks about, like, "this is what gender is and this is what non-binary is and, by the way, this is how I present myself as well." So because it kind of came with this kind of front load of information, it was quite straightforward. (Gaby, they/them, bigender, AFAB. Interview)

Similarly, the participants who were students expressed being more comfortable being out at university:

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I think most certainly at universities there's possibly more progress than other sections of society. In our Uni anyway, there's a lot of push for gender-neutral toilets um and there's certainly a few speaks from specific members of staff. Like, "can you use these pronouns for me?" and they're very accommodating most of the time. So, I think that's a good thing, but there are still lots of problems such as computer systems not having the right box to tick or whatever. (Shawn, they/them, agender, AFAB. Interview)

Being out at work or school, therefore, was not easy. Many employers and higher education institutions are unaware about the existence of non-binary people and the language surrounding these identities – or have not taken any action to implement gender-affirming policies. Participants in this study suggested that these interactions were significant, as they spend a great deal of time in these settings. Those who were out at work sometimes risked losing their jobs due to the view that their linguistic choices required an *excessive* amount of work (Airton, 2018). Many participants decided that coming out at work was simply too difficult at the time of the interviews. Furthermore, the distress that these interactions caused was largely mediated by the level of social proximity as well as the intentions. The fact that participants spent such a great deal of time in these settings, however, suggests that the amount of distress was similar whether the misgendering was intentional or unintentional.

Societal (medical/legal/media):

In terms of the societal interactions (i.e., the medical, legal, and media arenas), the distress that linguistic misgendering caused on the participants was severe. Linguistic invalidations in society were seen as invisibilising non-binary people's gender experience on a daily basis. Participants commented on some of the ways society is changing its views on gender diversity; however, they suggested that this is happening at a very slow pace. The misgendering emerging from these social

institutions can be both intentional or unintentional, depending on the individual or the organisation. For instance, a bank that refuses to allow its customers to use Mx might be doing this intentionally, whereas a doctor who is unaware of gender diversity might misgender a non-binary person unintentionally.

Similar to the issues of disclosure in the workplace, some non-binary people did not feel comfortable disclosing their gender to their doctor. Some did not think it was relevant information and did not want to deal with it. Others, more purposely, feared that doing so would complicate the process of receiving gender-affirming services. For instance, Charlie was in the process of acquiring hormones from a gender clinic in the UK; however, they did not disclose that they were non-binary to the gender clinic because they feared that doing so would delay the process:

> I read horrible experiences people have had with [gender clinics]. People have to wait longer for having what they wanted, and considering that is already between one and five years, I didn't want risk having to wait even longer, which is really stressful. […] To be fair, it's not like I lied. They just told me to say my gender, so when they said, "are you a woman?" I just said, "no." And they just assume that I was a man. So, like, yeah, they wrote down on the form that I was pretending to be really masculine because I was wearing trousers and a jumper. And for them that's masculine, that's fair enough. They just assumed I was gonna use he/him pronouns, but I use they/them pronouns. They just assumed that I was a trans man. So, it works with me because I was gonna [take hormones] anyway. (Charlie, they/them, genderfluid, AFAB. Interview)

Similarly, Dana was able to get a hysterectomy due to a health issue; however, Dana was careful not to mention anything about their gender because they suspected that disclosing would delay their treatment:

> I know that, if I did want to think about any sort of medical transitioning, it is difficult for non-binary people. About a year and a half ago, I had a hysterectomy, because I had a long-standing health problem. And from a gender standpoint, I was pleased to get a hysterectomy anyway. I was also pleased from a gender standpoint because I thought "ha-ha, you don't know I'm non-binary, but you're giving me a surgery that I would possibly want anyway." But the whole time I was jumping through the hoops to get this hysterectomy, which took about two years, I was so careful never to say anything about gender

because I thought if I did then that they would say the only reason you're pushing for this is because you think you have this gender issue. (Dana, they/them, genderqueer, AFAB. Interview)

Both Charlie and Dana feared disclosing their gender to their doctors due to their fear that it would delay treatment. In a sense, both Charlie and Dana inferred that the medical establishment foregrounds physical issues as more legitimate than gender identity issues. Research by Vince (2016) suggested that, in order to be medically legitimised, transgender people are expected to conform to the binary medical models of gender/sex, as discussed in previous chapters. Within this model of trans health, non-binary people are often required to be diagnosed with gender dysphoria in order to receive gender-affirming services. Moreover, participants suggested that when these parameters were disrupted (e.g., not fitting binary models, not displaying dysphoria, etc.), they risked being rejected or delayed for services. This generated a distress similar to the one experienced in the workplace, as their identities were rendered as illegitimate or not "trans enough." I argue that the misgendering in these cases was also unintentional. Yet, the secrecy had to be maintained in order to receive the appropriate services, which added to the distress of these (highly distressful) interactions generated. Shawn agreed that non-binary people were typically forced to fit into a (binary) trans narrative:

If you're non-binary and want to have some type of medical transition, you basically have to lie to the doctors to be able to get what you want or what you need and you have to fit in more with the kind of standard trans narratives of, you know, "I'm a man trapped in a woman's body kind of thing, which is very outdated. (Shawn, they/them, agender, AFAB. Interview)

This is immediately related to legal and societal recognition. In the UK, The Gender Recognition Act requires evidence of a person having been diagnosed with gender dysphoria. (Gender Recognition Act, 2004, section 1); however, in order to

receive this certificate, the person needs to identify as either a man or a woman for at least two years. Therefore, anyone who identifies with a non-binary gender is not recognised. This, in turn, creates a lack of societal recognition, delegitimising non-binary identities. Shawn commented on a variety of societal circumstances in which non-binary genders are intentionally delegitimised:

> I think that legally there's very little legal support for non-binary people. There's no protection under the law. Also, just getting things like a title change in a bank card. You can't really legally contest things without having a documents to back you up, even though technically you don't need one. It's just like a title change. There's a lot of gate-keeping and paperwork and it's just very hard to do things like that. There's very precedence as well. In the Jack Monroe's case against Katie Hopkins – in the judge's judgment, their [Jack's] pronouns had to be written down as she/her. And even though they use the title Mx, they had to be written down as Ms. just because the legal system is not able to accommodate non-binary people. (Shawn, they/them, agender, AFAB. Interview)

Jack Monroe's case was brought up because it was relevant to non-binary people being delegitimised in society, particularly in the UK. While there have been some movements in the UK to allow people to use X on identity documents (Elan-Cane, 2014), these have been largely unsuccessful. However, a court of appeal in the UK has recently ruled that not recognising non-binary genders is unlawful, arguing that it is a human rights issue (Bowcott, 2019). Many participants in this study, like Shawn, saw this as an example for the intentional delegitimisation of their identities in society. This erasure, in turn, produced an *affective intensity* of distress, as their minority status was not recognised (Meyer, 2003).

In terms of social representation in the media, non-binary identities, and the discourses around them such as language usage, are beginning to gain more attention and are becoming more prevalent in public discourse. However, a great deal of this information has been portrayed in a negative light by media outlets such as The Daily

Mail. For instance, Tanner and Harper discussed the media representation of non-binary people in the UK:

> I think the media is incredibly varied and some part of it are incredibly hostile to anyone who's gender non-conforming, like the Daily Mail. But there's definitely articles about "look, these people are non-binary" - sort of profiles and that kind of thing. (Tanner, they/them, agender, AFAB. Interview)

> This week has been shittier than most. Lots of TERF [trans-exclusionary radical feminist] stuff in the media, and then an opportunity that can't be. There's an amazing training for trans activists Ess would love to go on, but it's in Spain, and they would need a passport. To get a passport, someone must either be an M or an F. Ess doesn't feel they can legitimately tick either of those boxes, will raise suspicion at passport control either way. If Ess could have an X, their complicated face and body would have an answer in their documentation. An "Ah, I see" that might require less interrogation. (Harper, they/them, trans and genderqueer, femme, AFAB. Short story)

Media representation of non-binary people is shifting, as more stories are being told in the news and in pop culture. However, Tanner and Harper asserted that representation can sometimes be hostile and inaccurate, showing outright anti-trans sentiments and rhetoric. As such, non-binary and binary trans people are intentionally misgendered in these platforms, contributing to the language-related distress. These representations are often difficult to avoid and, as such, are said to be in close (emotional) proximity to participants.

Extended family

Due to the lack of proximity with extended family, most participants had not disclosed their *gender and linguistic becomings* with extended family members. Many of their extended family members lived far away or had different religious or political views, which meant that coming out to them was difficult and, in some cases, undesirable. For instance, Adrian and Toby described their experience with extended family members:

I haven't told the rest of my family, which is my aunts and my cousins, and stuff, because […] I'm not as close to them, and they're pretty heavy on the Christianity, so I'm not entirely sure whether I should come out to them or not. (Adrian, they/them, non-binary, AFAB. Interview)

The world of the extended family is a very binary kind of place. I suppose I have been accepted by those people and it feels like unconditional love, but at the same time I think that I'd actually feel uncomfortable having certain discussions about my gender [with them] (Toby, they/them, non-binary, AMAB. Interview)

When extended family members were around, participants were often misgendered. However, this misgendering was generally interpreted to be unintentional, as these family members were mostly unaware about their *gender and linguistic becomings* of these participants. The distress that emerges from these interactions was, therefore, minimal. Yet, like the rest of unintentional misgenderings, the distress can intensify over time. Dana, for instance, spoke about the discomfort they often feel around their extended family:

Around extended family, my family in general, but particularly my extended family um, so I think some of this actually connects to being mixed-race because um so like I said I have a haircut and an aesthetic but sometimes people read as queer, and you know, certainly not traditionally as feminine. And as somebody who is mixed-race, I often felt like I was in valid as, you know, a Filipina or whatever. And, you know, a lot of my cousins are very traditionally feminine, with great, flowing long hair and perfect make up and stuff. They speak Tagalog and do Filipino things that I was a raised to do or I'm not familiar with. And then the fact that I fail at gender, I fail at, you know, being a proper Filipina or something. So when I'm around my extended family, um, and this is true as a well for the Finnish part of my family, um, you know, the ways that I don't fit, um, so I think when I feel like I *fail at gender* that makes me feel even more vulnerable round them. (Dana, they/them, genderqueer, AFAB. Emphasis added. Interview)

Many participants, like Dana, expressed feeling vulnerable and uncomfortable around extended family since, in many cases, there were familial expectations to *perform* a traditional gender role. This was especially true as most non-binary people in this study described not being out to their extended families. While these interactions

were mostly negative and distressing, they were also described as temporary – and therefore not as emotionally intense as close family members. Participants, in many ways, placed their extended families at a safe, emotional distance, thus discounting the emotional *intensities* of these interactions. I argue that this was done in order to protect themselves from potential distress, and to escape the dominant discourses and expectations around gender which are often embedded in traditional family interactions.

Acquaintances

Given that acquaintances were also not in close social proximity to non-binary people in this study, the *intensity* of distress was very similar to the one experienced by extended family, although slightly less. Similar to extended family, not all acquaintances were informed about the *linguistic becomings* of the individual. Therefore, most of the misgendering was unintentional. Blaine and Aspen stated how unimportant it was for them to come out to acquaintances, given the lack of emotionality:

> It's not important [to disclose my gender to acquaintances] in that I do not have the energy to have conversations like that with many people. (Blaine, they/them, agender, AFAB. Interview)

> Day-to-day and sort of acquaintances and stuff like that, it's not that important, 'cause otherwise I have to be explaining it forever and you can't. You don't have the energy to explain it to every single person that you meet or interact with. (Aspen, they/them, non-binary, AFAB. Interview)

Most participants found that it was not necessary to disclose their *gender and linguistic becomings* to acquaintances. Both Blaine and Aspen mentioned that they did not have the "emotional energy" to come out to acquaintances, inferring that it would be impossible to disclose this to every single person they met. There was no emotional attachment. Therefore, misgendering was often unintentional, not as distressful, and in

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some cases, expected. Ari, however, did make it a point to come out to everyone they met:

> It's never a one-time thing. But, because I know I get misgendered left, right, and centre, that if I don't say something then it's just gonna be worse. […] I won't just say my name, but also my pronouns are they and them. And that's very important for me. And sometimes I wonder: does it make a difference? should I even bother? But it is important to me because this is who I am. [Yet,] if I'm on my own with just, like, one person I've just met, sometimes I feel uncomfortable with people I don't know very well. (Ari, they/them, non-binary, AFAB. Interview)

For Ari, it was important to disclose their *gender and linguistic becomings* to acquaintances (in this case, during an evening class they were taking). Not doing so, in their view, implied that they were constantly misgendered. Thus, by coming out, they attempted to avoid future misgendering, pain, and distress. Nevertheless, Ari later emphasised that they only disclose their gender and pronouns when they feel safe doing so:

> I've had had some bad reactions in the past, not even talking about myself but mentioning trans people. You have to be aware of personal, physical safety. Being a survivor or a lot of violence, I don't want to be closeted about it but I also don't wanna bring up stuff that might make things more – not every battle I have to fight. (Ari, they/them, non-binary, AFAB. Interview)

Safety is, again, a very important issue to consider here. There were situations in which coming out and requiring people to use gender-neutral language was simply impossible and were therefore avoided:

> Not everybody has the same opportunities to use this language because it will put them in danger – sometimes even violence. If they use a certain type of pronoun and someone doesn't like that, and decides to escalate it, it can get pretty deadly. I don't think many people are sympathetic to non-binary people or really understand that fully. They get the language to refer to them, this, that, and the other. But they don't really understand that people's choices might be shaped because we live in pretty violent and horrible society. So there are people who will escalate things beyond reason. And that doesn't negate anyone's identity, and we have to deal with that aspect of it as well as the language. It's not enough to just use my pronouns, you have to sort of be willing to create a society where I feel safe enough to use it - where it's just normal to

use those pronouns, where I don't have to go around wearing a little badge. (Adrian, they/them, non-binary, AFAB. Interview)

Adrian's comment about safety and violence alluded to an important issue regarding language among the non-binary community in the UK: privilege. Who gets to be out as non-binary and who has the cultural capital to do it safely? As mentioned earlier, those who were students or worked in trans-affirming jobs did not have as many issues coming out and requesting others to use their pronouns as much as those who worked in more conservative environments, or those who worked in "blue-collar" jobs such as customer service or retail. It can be argued that those participants who held trans-affirming jobs might have made considerable efforts to get themselves into a position where could be out as non-binary. It is also true that the majority of the participants were of white British descent and masculine-of-centre in terms of gender expression. Arguably, these categories come with pre-established societal privileges, which others might not enjoy, e.g., Ari, an older black, bisexual, disabled person. Furthermore, safety was a major concern in coming out to acquaintances. Participants understood the context-dependency of these interactions and made decisions about disclosure based on these assessments.

Strangers

Misgendering originating from strangers was almost certainly unintentional, as interpreted by participants. Most individuals make assessments of people's genders based on context cues such as gender presentation, voice, and gait. Strangers were, therefore, very likely to misgender the participants in this study. Brook, for instance, mentioned the ways in which they appearance resulted in assumptions about their gender from strangers:

Most people that I've encountered, especially, you know, strangers on the street or people who I might not have told I'm genderqueer, um, unless is one of the days where I feel female and I'm identifying as female, then they'll be assuming that I am female. And it's sort of something that I've started to think about in the last year because I just sort of had a moment one day where I was like, "oh, no one else knows I'm genderqueer unless I tell them or make it obvious through my self-expression". So that means that most people are misgendering anytime I go out. um and I stood there in a weird moment because, ultimately, it only matters to me when it's someone that I would expect… when it's something that's in my life and important in my life. (Brook, she/they, genderqueer woman, AFAB. Interview)

While these interactions and misgendering were, for the most part, tolerable, they still generated uneasy feelings among the participants. As argued previously, these interactions have the potential to build up over time and can create irreparable damage to non-binary individuals. These is also the potential for verbal and physical violence from strangers, especially when the participants' gender expressions were "too feminine" (particularly for AMAB participants) or "unclear" to strangers:

It feels like the more feminine I express my gender identity, or the most things I wear that are read as feminine, the more street harassment I get. People walking behind me for long periods of time, and following me. People taking video, people yelling comments. And, the interesting thing is that they often conflate homophobic abuse and transphobic abuse to a singular thing. And one really interesting example was when I was at a bus stop coming back from a pub a month ago, this person came to me and my friend and started threatening. […] He also yelled homophobic slurs while also saying that he hates "bangers" like me. So it's really interesting mixture of homophobia and transphobia and how people conceive these things - and that you can see though street harassment. (Elliott, they/them, genderqueer woman, AMAB. Interview)

Elliott's experience related to Julia Serano's idea of *trans-misogyny*. Serano (2007) argues that transphobia is a strongly linked to misogyny in that those who present feminine traits can be seen as inferior to cis men, and thus experience both types of prejudice. Therefore, safety was also a crucial issue for non-binary people. Charlie also mentioned:

Sometimes people shout at me things like, "I don't even understand if you're a man or a woman!" "Thanks, I guess." Sometimes if people think I'm a gender

and they feel the need to tell me. I've had people be like, "I really thought you were a girl." I was on a bus and this person said, "I really thought you were a man. Are you a man?" And I was like, "maybe?" And started shouting at me – he really thought I was a man. When I got off, this person followed me. (Charlie, they/them, genderfluid, AFAB. Interview)

For some, Charlie's gender expression is unintelligible or "unclear," which posed risks such as street harassment and discrimination. Charlie described themself as femme in terms of gender expression, which, as argued before, might make them a target of both transphobia and misogyny. It is important to note that recent reports have shown that 69% of non-binary people in a UK survey did not feel comfortable sharing their non-binary identity with the police, which is likely to prevent non-binary people from reporting hate crimes (Valentine, 2016). This is particularly troubling, as non-binary people who present femininely or are on the trans-feminine spectrum are frequent targets of harassment and discrimination. Jamie, who does not present femininely, has a very different experience with street harassment:

> Actually I think being genderqueer (as a woman, at least) may have reduced some of the discrimination I would otherwise have suffered as a result of being female. So intersectionality plays a part, e.g. because I don't wear skirts and makeup, some men don't see me as a woman, at least not enough to harass me on the street. (Jamie, e/eir/em, genderqueer, AFAB. Interview)

Jamie argues that e has not been a victim of harassment due to eir androgynous gender expression. Jamie believed that this gave em an advantage, because e escaped the sort of harassment that e believes female-presenting people typically receive. Eir point is also related to Serano's *trans-misogyny*, given that distancing emself from femininity can act as a protective factor. However, Jamie also does not present in a highly masculine way and is therefore not typically read as trans.

Overall, it can be said when strangers misgendered participants, the *intensity* of distress was minimal, as the level of emotional proximity was small. The (emotional)

intensity of these interactions was also safeguarded by non-disclosure – that is, participants were not expected to come out to strangers, and everyone simply moved on. However, when gender expressions were unintelligible, interactions with strangers could potentially become violent (verbally and/or physically). As such, interactions with strangers could potentially become greatly distressing. It can also be argued that being a masculine-of-centre non-binary person can be a protective factor for some types of street harassment (verbal and physical), but this too would be an oversimplification.

While strangers fall in the outer circle of social proximity and the *intensity* of the distress is theorised to be minimal, this section has also demonstrated that interactions with strangers in which misgendering occurs can cumulatively generate similar levels of distress as those within the inner circles. Therefore, unintentional misgendering can also produce a great deal of distress.

Concluding Remarks

> I think gender becomes very prominent when you are constantly being misgendered, and living with dysphoria. I don't necessarily want it to be important, but it is in the way I guess an *injury* is important, in that you have to be careful with it, pay it more mind than a non-injured part. […] I really wish it didn't have to be, wish it wasn't enshrined in our language that people's gender is the most important thing and the first thing we need to know, even for a casual "hello."" (Harper, they/them, trans and genderqueer, femme, AFAB. Emphasis added. Interview)

This chapter has demonstrated the ways in which social proximities and intentions related (affected and were affected by) the concept of misgendering and its psychological consequences (distress) among non-binary people in this study. A topography of social interaction was therefore mapped out, wherein the *intensity* of distress was shown to be dependent upon these *affective intensities* (proximities and intentions).

I found that misgendering emerging from close (emotional) proximities often resulted in more intense distress; however, the perceived intentions behind such utterances often diminished this effect. In (emotionally) distant interactions such as extended family, acquaintances, or strangers, the distress caused by misgendering was found to be less intense. However, this distress could accumulate over time. In other words, this chapter showed that the amount of emotional energy participants "invested" in helping people understand their *linguistic becomings* was a significant *affective intensity*. While this model is not perfect, it is a close approximation to the different *intensities* that non-binary people experience in different contexts.

Levels of safety and the ability to disclose were not uniform for all non-binary people in this study. There were indeed several intersections (or *assemblages*) that would allow or disallow someone to be out as non-binary safely: class, education, race, presentation, etc. For instance, in regards to education, it can be stated that those who have the cultural capital, education, and the language to come out as non-binary have a societal advantage over those who are not as educated or as involved in non-binary discourses regarding identities and language. Many of the participants in the present study were, as argued in the previous chapter, well-versed in gender theory and discourse; therefore, this research may not fully represent the voices of those who experience other forms of oppression (homelessness, domestic violence, poverty, etc.) and who might not be out to anyone at all. As such, most participants have used the knowledge accumulated through the *affective intensity* of "learning about gender diversity" in order to craft their own narrative and define and discount prospective opponents.

The prevalence of societal *cisnormativity* was found to be expressed linguistically in a variety of social contexts. This ideology was expressed through linguistic erasure in the form of intentional and unintentional misgendering. Their effects on non-binary people, particularly poor mental health outcomes (e.g., distress, isolation, low self-esteem) were evident in this chapter. Regardless of the context and social proximity, non-binary people in this study hoped that their identities would, one day, be (linguistically) recognised more widely:

> They wish people in society would just accept our existence as we are and believe that we exist and understand our own selves enough and stop questioning the validity of our genders, stop making jokes about our existences and stop having the power to try and prove whether or not we are the gender we say we are. (Charlie, they/them, genderfluid, AFAB. Short story)

7. NON-BINARY CORPUS (NETWORK) – A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

This chapter offers a quantitative, descriptive overview of the linguistic patterns that emerged from the non-binary corpus. As described in chapter 4, the NBC was composed of 2.9 million words from an online forum where non-binary people discussed their identities, asked for support, and shared information pertaining to non-binary identities and discourses. This large dataset would be almost impossible to examine manually; therefore, corpus linguistics tools were employed in order to explore this data in a more systematic way. The NBC was analysed using the online software *Sketch Engine* (Kilgarriff et al., 2004). This software was used to produce frequency, keyness, collocation, and concordance analyses of the NBC. A network map of the language used in the NBC was also created using *Gephi* (Bastian et al., 2009). While these analyses aided in identifying the most saliently intense words within the forum, they were simply a mechanism used to narrow down the NBC (a large data-set) and turn it into a more manageable sub-sample of concordances, which were then analysed qualitatively.

The first step in the analysis was the production of a list of the fifty most frequently occurring words in the corpus, which allowed me to have an overview of some the most common words in the corpus. This frequency analysis was then followed by a keywords analysis, which compared the NBC to a reference corpus (the enTenTen13). This keyness analysis produced a list of fifty keywords containing some of the most statistically salient words in the corpus. A list of collocations (co-occurring words) for each keyword was then generated. The keywords and collocations were then used to create a network of *non-binary language* using the *Gephi* software (Bastian et al., 2009). This network allowed for the visualisation of the NBC and further

examination of some of the most interrelated and intense keywords and collocations

(fifteen of them) in the form of concordance lines. Finally, a sample of concordance

lines (keywords and collocations in context) was also gathered in a systematic way by

downloading three quotations from each of the most salient collocations in the corpus.

The following sections will outline the results for each of these analyses:

frequency, keyword, collocation, network, and concordance lines.

Frequency Analysis

The fifty most frequent words in the NBC are listed below (Table 2) In order to

contextualise these frequent words, I have also included the fifty most frequent words in

the enTenTen13 reference corpus. The words that are not common between the two

corpora have been highlighted.

Table 2. The 50 most frequent words in the NBC and the enTenTen13

NBC		enTenTen13	
Word	**Freq**	**Word**	**Freq**
I	503534	the	964787346
the	453616	to	558301035
to	423720	and	553532182
and	381507	of	516717484
a	308900	a	427921752
of	261580	in	318494241
that	228086	is	245015015
it	222190	that	215149066
is	209183	for	195970779
in	172401	I	174347982
you	139935	you	160428344
n't	118902	with	149250264
my	118250	it	138417245
are	113169	on	138409664
on	111754	are	125108605
be	110093	The	120204565
have	109206	be	119613102

for	109024	as	119300060
by	103780	was	100497282
me	96145	have	97328322
as	96014	or	89181343
do	95944	this	85899632
with	94398	at	82939458
they	94097	not	82625892
but	92791	your	82027624
not	87829	from	81389534
or	86447	by	76204657
was	76636	will	73924331
this	69494	can	71664613
like	65871	an	67319888
just	65637	they	58495383
so	57754	but	57048661
can	56511	we	56708475
them	55807	has	55665374
all	54085	all	55179592
about	53642	their	53900633
we	53356	n't	51985913
what	51574	more	49907525
more	49835	do	48091201
people	49424	he	47909142
out	49144	one	46813651
at	49096	his	46399792
if	48182	my	45206844
your	46536	about	44655633
will	46028	which	44645342
one	44980	out	40610952
It	44424	up	40045592

It can be immediately observed from this frequency list that function words
(pronouns, prepositions, articles, conjunctions, and auxiliary verbs) are the most
common in both corpora. Function words account for over 50% of the words people use
to communicate (Rochon, Saffran, Berndt, & Schwartz, 2000); therefore, these findings
were to be expected, and show that the NBC was "normal" with regards to these
frequencies. The only evident difference between the two corpora was the frequent use

of the personal pronouns *I* and *my* and the inclusion of *me* in the NBC. This was an expected finding, as the NBC was built from a forum where non-binary-identified people wrote about their own identities from a personal perspective. Aside from these obvious findings, there are not many differences in terms of frequency between these two corpora.

A keyness analysis, which takes into account the overall size of the corpus and the relative frequency of each independent word, resulted in a more nuanced overview of the ways in which the NBC differed from the enTenTen13. The results of the keyness analysis will be outlined below.

Keyword Analysis

As previously mentioned, a keyword analysis helped uncover the most statistically salient words in a target corpus (in this case, the NBC) by comparing it to a reference corpus (in this case, enTenTen13). This analysis used a statistical measure called *simple maths* (Kilgarriff, 2009), which helped to uncover the most statistically salient words within the NBC. The top fifty content keywords are listed below (Table 3). Supplemental information such as overall frequencies in both corpora are also included.

Table 3. Top 50 keywords in the NBC ranked in order of keyness when compared against the enTenTen13 corpus

Rank	Keyword	NBC freq	enTenTen13 freq	Score (simple maths)
1	gender	9293	570531	23
2	trans	6194	87112	18.8
3	transgender	5230	56056	16.3
4	nonbinary	4581	79	14.7
5	female	4255	1722127	7.8

6	male	3431	1669870	6.5
7	dysphoria	1771	3157	6.3
8	binary	1585	181135	5.3
9	identity	2199	1025927	5.2
10	transition	1974	761551	5.2
11	feminine	1332	190422	4.6
12	hate	1853	1255106	4.2
13	LGBT	985	106948	3.8
14	feel	8011	13056662	3.7
15	gay	1340	814159	3.7
16	self	1680	1689015	3.5
17	hormone	1102	565441	3.4
18	masculine	845	96952	3.4
19	bathroom	1201	822578	3.4
20	HRT	803	22097	3.4
21	cis	792	35320	3.3
22	sex	1849	2202787	3.3
23	pronoun	786	29328	3.3
24	woman	5642	10324834	3.2
25	hell	1184	994708	3.2
26	MTF	689	5295	3.1
27	fuck	1007	871365	2.9
28	transsexual	624	21570	2.8
29	feeling	1487	2269803	2.7
30	surgery	1209	1590397	2.7
31	hurt	1072	1297230	2.7
32	hair	1836	3298871	2.7
33	girl	2269	4454291	2.6
34	guy	2048	4165848	2.5
35	discrimination	612	316639	2.5
36	accept	1535	2865530	2.5
37	transitioning	509	52067	2.5
38	lesbian	574	232810	2.5
39	fear	1300	2294491	2.4
40	queer	500	73398	2.4
41	people	11528	31466725	2.4
42	restroom	490	83445	2.4
43	androgyne	461	941	2.4
44	genderqueer	460	1622	2.4
45	happy	1658	3520820	2.3
46	androgynous	445	7874	2.3

47	love	4778	12713320	2.3
48	truth	1241	2360542	2.3
49	wear	1653	3635717	2.3
50	society	1489	3148931	2.3

It is immediately evident that words which refer to trans and non-binary genders – and observed discourses – were highly prevalent in the NBC. For example, the words *gender, trans, transgender,* and *nonbinary* were the four most salient words in the corpus. This implies that these words were not as common in the EnTenTen13 corpus, compared to the NBC. In fact, the word *nonbinary* only occurred 79 times in the EnTenTen13 corpus, showing that this identity category had not been widely discussed online at the time of its construction. This was not a surprising finding, as the word non-binary (as it pertains to gender identity discourses) did not gain a great deal of traction until 2014 when Facebook allowed its users to self-select their own gender, while the EnTenTen13 corpus only originated in 2013.

While keyword analysis is a useful tool in demonstrating some of the most salient words found within the NBC, collocation analysis can also show the ways in which these keywords are employed throughout. A word, therefore, might be used in a variety of ways, depending on its context. A list of words which co-occurred with each keyword was generated in order to further understand the ways in which language was used within the corpus. These collocations are outlined below.

Collocational Analysis: Word Sketches

While keywords are a very important part of the corpus linguistics research, it is also crucial to extrapolate the contextual environments in which these keywords exist. For this reason, a collocational analysis was conducted, which allowed me to further

contextualise the NBC and find the linguistic patterns within it. A number of *Word Sketches* were therefore created for each of the fifty keywords. These collocations had to appear at least 10 times and have a *logDice* score of at least 10.

Each of the fifty keywords yielded an average of 8 collocations, ranging from 0 collocates (for example: *hate*, *fuck*, *genderqueer*) to 28 collocates (*gender*), producing a total of 385 collocates. Table 4 (below) presents the collocations for the top ten keywords, demonstrating the ways in which these keywords were gathered for subsequent analysis. The complete list of collocations can be found in Appendix E.

Table 4. Collocations for the top 10 keywords

gender	trans	transgender	nonbinary	female
fine	cis	androgyne	bigendered	male
construct	woman	christian	transition	declare
identity	women	people	entering	presentation
certificate		transsexuals	binary	human
difference		woman	enter	body
identify		bigender	identify	present
confuse		student	transitioned	mostly
neutral		black	mtf	biologically
birth		being	gender	prefer
sex		community		bear
do				fully
fluid				identify
sexuality				
live				
confusing				
role				
think				
dysphoria				
more				
talk				
nonbinary				
expression				
perception				
non-conforming				

male	dysphoria	binary	identity	transition
female	suffer	nonbinary	research	begin
body	body	trans	gender	option
birth	trigger	system	consistent	want
everything	cowardice	transfolk	expression	full
present	alleviate		orientation	nonbinary
identify	depression		person	concentration
neither	power		struggle	to
bear	deal		clinic	hormone
	gender		base	go
	spike		did	change
			sense	
			basis	
			disorder	
			crisis	
			woman	
			sexuality	

In order to further synthesise the keywords and collocations, I excluded words which only appeared once either as a keyword or as a collocate. This was done in order to generate an interconnected, relational network, which guided the subsequent analysis. This process resulted in a total of 173 collocation pairs (212 fewer words than the original analysis), averaging to 4 words per keyword. After eliminating words which only appeared once, six of the original keywords (*hate, fuck, transsexual, transitioning, queer,* and *genderqueer*) were found not to co-collocate with any of the other words; therefore, they were removed from the final analysis. This reduced the number of keywords to 44 and the number of unique words to 85 (44 keywords and 41 interrelated collocations). As such, these 85 words represent not only the most salient words within the NBC, but also the ways in which these words are connected to one

another: their *intensities* (in DeleuzoGuattarian terms). Table 5 shows the top ten keywords and their collocations after elimination of words which did not co-collocate. A full list of these interconnected co-collocates can be found in Appendix F.

Table 5. Co-collocations for the top ten keywords

gender	trans	transgender	nonbinary	female
identity	cis	androgyne	transition	male
identify	woman	people	binary	body
neutral		woman	identify	present
birth		community	mtf	bear
sex			gender	identify
do				
sexuality				
live				
think				
dysphoria				
more				
talk				
nonbinary				
expression				
perception				

male	dysphoria	binary	identity	transition
female	body	nonbinary	gender	full
body	deal	trans	expression	nonbinary
birth	gender		base	hormone
present			sense	go
identify			basis	
bear			woman	
			sexuality	

Keywords were then re-arranged in order of "most intense" words – that is, the keywords that contained the highest number of co-collocations and were, therefore, the most relational. The keywords *woman* and *gender*, for instance, contained the most co-collocates, 17 and 15 respectively. As such, these words were deemed highly relevant,

central, relational, and therefore *intense*. The ten most intense words (interconnected keywords and collocations) are listed below (Table 6).

Table 6. Collocations for the 10 most intense keywords

woman	gender	people	identity	sex
man	identity	color	gender	birth
color	identify	discrimination	expression	sexuality
trans	neutral	lot	base	basis
live	birth	talk	sense	gender
room	sex	life	basis	birth
restroom	do	transgender	woman	base
clothes	sexuality	trans	sexuality	good
dress	live	perception		
cis	think	do		
look	dysphoria	deal		
transgender	more	general		
identify	talk	be		
top	nonbinary			
feel	expression			
girl	perception			
life				
identity				

guy	male	restroom	nonbinary	female
hair	female	room	transition	male
girl	body	restroom	binary	body
present	birth	public	identify	present
clothes	present	woman	mtf	bear
guy	identify	man	gender	identify
more	bear	use		
gay				

Reducing the number of collocates ensured that the words of interest were not only intense in terms of keyness, but also in terms of their relationship to other words. This analysis, therefore, begins to show the relational and productive ways in which language was used within the NBC. These *intensities* will be further illustrated by generating a network of *non-binary language* in the following section.

Non-binary Language Network

Using the software *Gephi* (Bastian et al., 2009), a visual representation of these keywords and co-collocations was generated. Gephi allowed the visualisation of some of the most intense linguistic patterns within the corpus, as well as their relationship to one another. Figure 5 presents the collocational network for the NBC.

Figure 5. NBC's Collocational Network
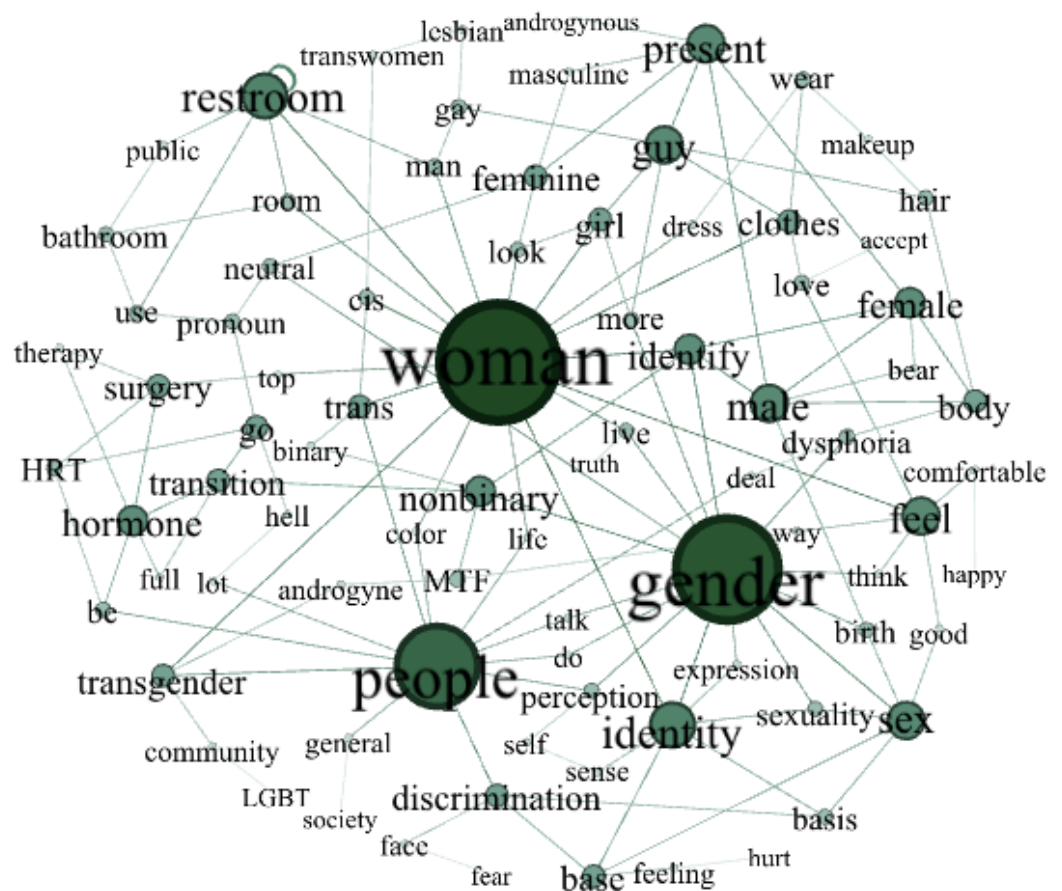
As shown in Figure 5, the most intense keywords appear as larger circles, thus showing the *intensity* of these words within the NBC. This figure reflects the most intense words (listed in Table 6); it shows, for example, that words such as *woman, gender, people, identity,* and *sex* were intense within the corpus. For instance, the

(key)word *woman* collocated with 17 different words, making it the most *intense* word

within the network. Figure 6 shows the type collocations that branched out

rhizomatically from the keyword *woman*.

Figure 6. Co-collocations for the keyword woman

The word *woman* collocated with the words *man, color, trans, live, room,*

restroom, clothes, dress, cis, look, transgender, identify, top, feel, girl, life, and *identify.*

These words were, in turn, connected to other intense words, showing the ways in

which the discourses within the forum were connected to one another.
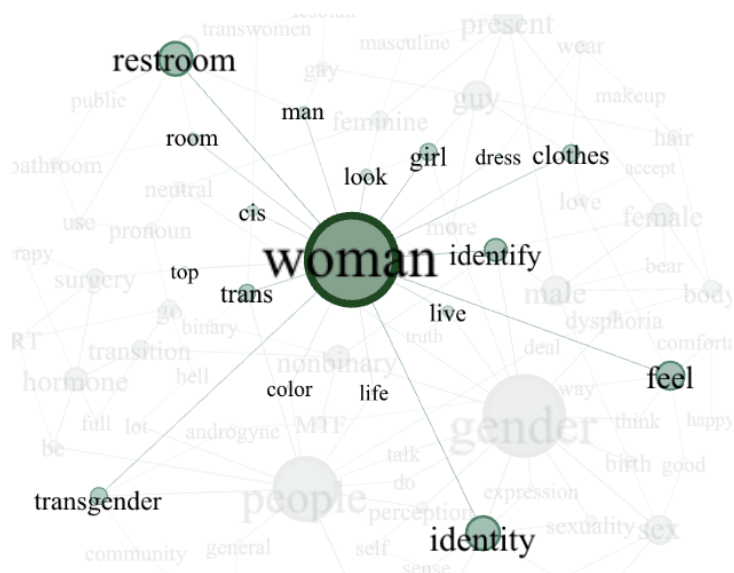
In order to examine the most important *affective intensities* from the NBC

embedded in these intense words, a concordance analysis was conducted. These intense

words and their collocations, therefore, were used in order to further narrow down the

corpus into a more manageable sample. This process will be described below.

Concordance Lines

The analysis thus far has shown the quantitative findings for the NBC without

examining the expanding on the contextual environments of these words. In order to

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create a more manageable sample of *non-binary language* which will be analysed

qualitatively, the top ten keywords (Table 5) and the top ten most intense keywords

(Table 6) were combined, resulting in a list of fifteen words of interest (Table 7).

Table 7. Words of interest

TOP 10		15 WORDS OF INTEREST		
keywords	**intense**	**common**	**keywords**	**intense**
gender	woman	gender	trans	woman
trans	gender	identity	transgender	people
transgender	people	male	dysphoria	sex
nonbinary	identity	nonbinary	binary	guy
female	sex	female	transition	restroom
male	guy			
dysphoria	male			
binary	restroom			
identity	nonbinary			
transition	female			

These fifteen words of interest – and their interrelated collocations – will be

further explored via concordance lines. Below I have listed the fifteen words of interest,

their collocations, as well as the number of times the collation occurred within the

NBC. These words of interest – and their interconnectivity – can be seen easily

visualised in the collocational network above (Figure 5).

1. **Gender**
    *   Identify with ___ gender (n=20)
    *   Identify as gender (n=17)
    *   Gender dysphoria (n=246)
    *   Think about gender (n=19)
    *   (Assigned) gender at birth (n=15)
    *   Gender and/or sex (n=82)
        *   Gender or sex (n=19)
        *   Gender and sex are (not) the same thing (n=13)
    *   Gender and/or sexuality (n=59)
    *   Gender expression (n=165)
    *   Gender identity (n=877)
    *   Talk about gender (n=25)

- Gender is non-binary (n=95)
- Live as gender (n=13)
- Gender neutral (n=18)
- More than two genders (n=22)

2. **Identity**
   - Gender identity (n=877)
   - Sexuality and identity (n=23)
   - Discrimination on the basis (or based) of gender identity (n=31)
   - Sense of identity (n=20)
   - Identity as a woman (n=11)

3. **Sex**
   - Sex and/or gender (n=82)
   - Birth sex (n=50)
   - Discrimination on the basis of sex (n=15)
   - Based on sex (n=24)
   - Sex and/or sexuality (n=42)

4. **Male**
   - Present male (n=29)
   - Male and female (n=581)
     - both (n=64)
     - neither (n=29)
     - between (n=47)
     - either (n=39)
   - Born male (n=16)
   - Male body (n=103)
   - Assigned male at birth (n=10)
   - Identify as male (n=26)

5. **Female**
   - Both/neither/between/either male and female (n=581)
   - Identify as female (n=21)
   - Present(ing) (as) female (n=19)
   - A female body (n=112)
   - Born female (n=20)

6. **Dysphoria**
   - Gender dysphoria (n=246)
   - Body dysphoria (n=161)
   - Deal with dysphoria (n=20)

7. **Nonbinary**
   - Gender is non-binary (n=95)
   - Identify as nonbinary (n=41)
   - (I am) MTF nonbinary (n=19)
   - Binary and/or nonbinary (n=53)

8. **Binary**
   - Binary and/or nonbinary (n=53)
   - Binary trans (n=66)

9. **Transition**

- Full transition (n=114)
- Transition hormones (n=33)

10. Trans
- Trans people (n=530)
- Binary trans (n=66)
- Trans women (n=620)

11. Transgender
- Transgender women (n=310)
- Transgender people (n=684)
- Transgender people +bathroom/restroom (n=57)
- The transgender community (n=155)

12. Woman
- Identity as a woman (n=11)
- Transgender women (n=310)
- Trans women (n=620)
- Woman and girls (n=39)
- Dress as a woman (n=19)
- Wear women's clothes (n=22)
- Identify as a woman (n=34)
- Feel like a woman (n=23)
- Live as a woman (n=37)
- Life as a woman (n=12)
- Women of color (n=39)
- Women's top (n=13)
- Cis woman (n=175)
- Use the women's (rest)room (n=56)
- (Between/both) men and/or women (n=333)
- Look like a woman (n=20)

13. People
- Transgender people (n=684)
- Trans people (n=530)
- People of color (n=39)
- Deal with people (n=23)
- Talk to people (n=51)
- People + do (n=404)
- People's perceptions (n=11)
- Discrimination against trans(gender) people (n=17)
- People in general (n=15)

14. Guy
- Present as a guy (n=16)
- Guy with long/short hair (n=16)
- Guy's clothes (n=39)
- Guy and/or girl (n=65)
- Gay guy (n=47)

15. Restroom
- Men's/women's restroom (n=40)

- Restroom and/or rooms (n=34)
- Use the restroom (n=124)
- Public restroom (n=66)

Three concordance lines for each of these collocations were downloaded from the corpus and analysed using NVivo 11 (QSR International Pty Ltd.). While this analysis only examined these fifteen words of interest and their collocations, the concordance lines were shown to include a wide range of keywords and collocations. These extracts were found to reflect all aspects of the NBC, as all keywords and collocations were found within them, reflecting the interconnectedness of the language that was used in the NBC.

On the surface, these quantitative findings begin to indicate some of the most intense *affective intensities* within the NBC. For instance, the prevalence and centrality of the keyword *woman* indicates that issues surrounding womanhood – as a subject category – were greatly discussed throughout the corpus, especially in terms of what it means to be a *trans(gender) woman* (n=930), *a cis woman* (n=175), as well as *living* (n=37), *feeling* (n=23), *dressing* (n=19), *identifying* (n=34), *looking* (n=20), etc. as a woman. However, it is difficult to assess the context of these collocations without analysing them qualitatively – that is, it is difficult to know whether forum users discussed "womanhood" because they found it problematic (i.e., a critique of sex role stereotypes), as something they wanted to move towards (i.e., desiring to live or dress as a woman), or something else altogether.

Gender identity (n=877) was one of the most intense and frequent collocations throughout the corpus. This was not a surprising finding, as this was the forum's focus. Yet, discussions around *gender and/or sex* (n=59) seem to be of interest in the corpus, particularly as the collocation *gender and sex are not the same* (n=13) was also

prevalent within it. It is likely that these issues (separating gender and sex) were discussed at length within the corpus, reflecting the psychological models of transness (Stoller, 1968). Relatedly, the collocation *gender dysphoria* (n=246) and *body dysphoria* (n=161) were highly frequent throughout the NBC. The concept of *body dysphoria* has only recently been discussed and theorised in the academic literature (Pulice-Farrow et al., 2019); therefore, the discussion of this term in the forum demonstrates that this community has had an engagement with this term for a long time – and that this term may have originated from online communities such as this one.

Male and female (n=581) was also one of the most frequent collocations. Within it, male and female were discussed in terms of *both* (n=64), *neither* (n=29), *between* (n=47), and *either* (n=39), thus reflecting some of the ways in which non-binary gender identities have been conceptualised within non-binary discourse, activism, and academia (Barker and Richards, 2015). Similarly, (*between/both) men and/or women* (n=333) also reflected the way in which some non-binary people describe their identities.

These concordance lines – and others – will therefore be analysed in chapter 8. The network of *non-binary language* was taken into consideration during the analytical process, as it reflected the ways in which language was employed in complex (rather than simplistic) ways.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter presented the quantitative findings of the NBC in terms of frequencies, keywords, collocations, the network of *non-binary language*, and

concordance lines. These quantitative findings will help guide the qualitative interpretations which will be presented in chapter 8.

The top fifty frequency words and keywords were identified using *Sketch Engine*. A list of collocations (words that co-occur) was yielded for each of these fifty keywords. In order to narrow down the words of interest, keywords and collocations that only occurred once were removed from the final list, which resulted in a list of 85 interrelated words: 44 keywords and 41 collocations. These words were then uploaded into *Gephi*, and a collocational network was created, allowing for the visualisation of the NBC as well as qualitative inferences about language usage. This network, therefore, exemplifies the non-linear and complex nature of identity, showing that non-binary gender identities and the discourses surrounding these identities are composed of multiple material and discursive elements that come together to form a *non-binary-assemblage*. Lastly, concordance lines emerging from fifteen words of interest (a result of the ten most salient keywords and the ten more intense keywords) – and their interrelated collocations – were systematically downloaded from the NBC. Three concordances (in the form of short paragraphs) were downloaded for each of the 173 collocation pairs, thus forming a subsample of the language used within the NBC. This subsample was therefore more manageable and, after following this rigorous process, I argue that it closely represents the emerging discourses and *affective intensities* within the NBC. As such, these concordance lines will be analysed qualitatively in Chapter 8, taking into account their non-hierarchical nature and the ways in which they relate to one another, affectively producing and reflecting non-binary *gender and linguistic becomings*.

In the following chapter, the NBC will be analysed through the lens of *assemblage theory* (DeLanda, 2006) by examining the material and discursive elements within the corpus. This theory emphasises the fluid, non-linear, and non-hierarchical relationships between both material and discursive components of gender (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010). As such, the language used within the NBC can be mapped onto an *assemblage* of non-binary *gender and linguistic becomings*. I will extrapolate some of the most important *intensities* within the corpus using the collocational network as a guiding compass.

8. NON-BINARY CORPUS – A LINGUISTIC AND MATERIAL ASSEMBLAGE

This chapter presents a qualitative analysis of the NBC. It explores a variety of keywords and collocations in their contextual environments. In the analytic process, a number of *affective intensities* were identified and were artificially pulled apart for the purposes of clarity. However, I will show the ways in which these *affective intensities* are interconnected and relational, as shown by the network of *non-binary language* (see chapter 7, figure 5). These *intensities* reflected the linguistic as well as the material forces that make up the *gender becomings* of the forum users within the NBC. Combined, these discursive (*linguistic becomings*) and material *intensities* (*affective embodiment*) are part of the *non-binary-assemblage* online. I will also show how these *intensities* come together to *territorialise* multiple versions of non-binary gender identities – both linguistically and materially. These different versions can appear to be both fixed and fluid at the same time, but they are not always consistent. Instead, they are in an ongoing *process of becoming*. Furthermore, I will show how these *intensities* are interconnected in non-hierarchical ways, as they affect and are affected by one another. This interconnectedness can be observed in the NBC network (see figure 5 above), wherein the keywords and collocations used in the forum are interrelated in a rhizomatic ways – with "multiple, shifting and increasingly internal and external connections" (Bonta and Protevi, 2004, p.10).

In this chapter, I will show some of the ways in which these *affective intensities* come together (in complex, dynamic, and often messy ways), thus allowing forum users to *become* non-binary as they negotiate this online environment. Multiple versions of non-binary gender identities appeared within the forum at the time this data was

collected. It is important to note that the NBC is used here as a heuristic devise to investigate the *gender becomings* of non-binary people at a specific place and time – that is, within this online forum and when the data was collected. Therefore, this analysis is not intended to be a comprehensive representation of a global *non-binary-assemblage* online, but rather a snapshot of non-binary genders within these parameters. Additionally, while certain portions of this analysis might read as linear and causal, these interpretations are not intended to be read as essentialised notions of non-binary identities. Instead, this analysis illustrates the diverse ways in which non-binary gender identities are *assembled* in complex and unexpected ways.

In order to show this intrinsic connectivity and further visualise it, all keywords will be <u>underlined</u> while all concordances will be in **bold.**

Linguistic Becomings

As explored in previous chapters, and in the context of this thesis, *linguistic becomings* are characterised as the ongoing adoption, reassessment, and negotiation of a given language shift pertaining to gender. For instance, a *linguistic becoming* can be enacted when an individual learns about, and consequently decides to embrace, a new label, pronoun, or title, which more closely reflects or resembles their gender identity, e.g., a person who embraces the *agender* label and uses *they/them* pronouns as well as the *Mx.* honorific. This process is not simple or linear; but involves a continuous negotiation of affects and then reconfiguration – creating the conditions for this linguistic possibility. These affects are therefore *territorialised* through discourse, context, and material forces.

The *intensities* that will be explored in this section were salient in the context of keywords and collocations such as *sense of identity* (n=20), *gender identity* (n=877), *identify as male/female* (n=47), *gender neutral* (n=18), among many others (see chapter 7 for collocation's frequencies). In a general sense, the *linguistic becomings* that were identified within the forum appeared within specific sections of the forum with titles such as "Forum's policies," "New Member Introductions," and "Defining Concepts." Within these sections, forum users discussed the reasons why they joined the forum, reflected on their own gender identity and their journeys, asked for guidance, and sought authenticity. Forum members also shared some of their experiences with gendered language, gender expressions, and body modifications, and shared tips about navigating the world as non-binary persons.

This section will focus on the myriad ways in which *linguistic becomings* become *territorialised* within the forum, thus forming a *non-binary-assemblage* (within this online context). The first section explores the forum as a community in which linguistic authenticity is sought after. Next, I will explore the ways in which forum users, particularly new ones, used the forum to gain information (and validation) about their *linguistic becomings*. I will then show how forum users justified their *linguistic becomings* by telling stories about their discomfort with the gender binary and other material *intensities*. I will also show how these *linguistic becomings* were *(de/re)territorialised* within the forum by setting up the linguistic parameters of non-binary genders. For instance, by defining who is included and who is excluded within these subject categories. Lastly, based on these definitions, I will show how these meanings were actively reassessed within the forum, which allowed forum users to either embrace or reject certain labels.

This section will therefore show some of the *intensities* that contributed to the *assemblages* of *linguistic becomings* within the corpus, including: seeking authenticity, identifying as non-binary, exploring gender-neutral language, adopting gender-neutral language, (re)defining linguistic parameters; and *territorialising* meanings. These findings mirrored the interview and short writing results outlined in chapters 5 and 6.

Seeking Authenticity

Many forum users expressed a desire to belong to a community of like-minded people who understood gender in similar ways. Interacting with other individuals who shared similar experiences around their gender identity was seen as positive and productive by many forum users. This was particularly important for forum users who found that their identities were invisibilised elsewhere, even among LGBTQ+ online communities. For instance, many expressed that some queer communities disregarded their experiences as non-binary and deemed them to be illegitimate. Furthermore, many forum users complained that their voices were not being heard in these spaces and, as such, felt alienated from these communities. This desire motivated many of them to find this forum, which proclaimed to be "a safe place for those who **identify as nonbinary** to speak with one another," according to its founder. One forum user shared about their experience in transmasculine spaces:

> "Way back in the early stages of my gender questioning, I used to join ftm [female-to-male] spaces and talk about how I wanted a more masculine body. See if anyone there was like me. Despite the fact that I made it clear I was gender questioning (therefore possibly still female or another gender) and despite the fact that they told me that was fine...ftms would vent in these spaces how they hated dealing with women who wanted to go on T or get top surgery. That being trans wasn't a game, that women like this mocked their situation, and women like this brought out all their insecurities. At first I sat in on these kinds of conversations and let them vent thinking "Well I can't hold it against them for just saying what they feel. Its not a personal attack against me, and I can see how gender nonconforming women could make a transguy feel uncomfortable."

And I tried to let it go. But I couldn't. They were talking about me. It made me realize that if I ever told them I identified as <u>female</u> they'd be directing these kinds of <u>feelings</u> at me. And I just felt so guilty and awful I couldn't bring myself to visit those spaces anymore, or even talk to the friends I'd made there. It was around that time that I quit going to any <u>trans</u> support group for a while. I felt awful about myself and <u>hated</u> that I'd been stupid enough to question my **gender identity** when I clearly wasn't like so many **trans people**. But over time, the <u>feelings</u> came back. Less strong but they're there, and I still have urges to be more <u>male</u> sometimes. I couldn't **talk to** any <u>cis</u> **people** about this, couldn't afford a therapist. So I came back to online support groups. I still don't talk to most of my old friends in the <u>trans</u> community. I'm still embarrassed."

The affective desire to belong to a community of non-binary people online was therefore related to authenticity. As such, having their identities (linguistically) validated by other like-minded individuals was deemed important by many forum users. The forum was conceptualised as a place where non-binary identities and the messiness of gender could be openly discussed without judgement. This affective desire to share, to learn, and to be listened to (all linguistic forms of interaction) enabled their capacity to *become* non-binary while being supported by others. Open, honest, and respectful communication was expected within the forum, as this was clearly articulated in the forum's guidelines and "golden rule" policies. These affective desires were a common thread within the forum, resulting in the *territorialisation* of an online community where identities could be "spoken into existence." In fact, this forum was created as a reaction to transgender-focussed forums that either did not consider non-binary identities at all, or undermined their existence. According to the forum creator:

"This forum was originally created to be a safe space for <u>nonbinary</u> folks to discuss matters as our voices were silenced due to military moderators on (transgender forum) who believed <u>binary</u> **transgender** **people** were superior, more important to NBs. There was also the issue of acceptance of NB folks and their diversity in which they <u>transition</u> or may not <u>transition</u>. A select few <u>binary transgender</u> folks over at (transgender forum) began to "encourage" NB folks to pursue full-transition, at the cost of their life and losing their family. […] There is already a severe lack of Non-Binary support forums just solely supporting NB folks."

Forum users, therefore, shared a need to express their non-binary identities in an online environment in which they did not feel pressured to undergo binary transition paths or use binary language to describe themselves. Anyone who joined this forum was encouraged to share things about themselves (including their label, pronouns, title, etc.), to ask questions about gender, to share their stories and experiences, and (if they desired) to debate controversial issues related to gender. Their introductions included a great deal of information about the ways in which they "arrived" to the forum and about their relationship with gender:

> "My name is [name] and I have literally never knowingly talked to another nonbinary person in my entire life, and for some reason it only just occurred to me to go looking for a forum, so here I am! (It took me over years to discover the nonbinary label that abruptly allowed me to make **sense of** my whole **identity**, so clearly I'm not always too quick on the uptake: smile:). So yes, I'm here to talk a little bit and listen a lot and continue the learning process that I've started by reading a bunch of different nonbinary blogs. I'm AFAB, trying to present as masculine as possible (which is difficult, since I'm only out to one person in real life) and hoping to soon start physically transitioning (top surgery and low-dose HRT). I've lived in small towns in conservative areas my whole life, so I'm really excited to be part of a community where there are people like me!"

For forum users, their sense of authenticity as non-binary – which they had already embraced before joining the forum – was reinforced by finding a place where this language was commonly accepted, seen as normal and, in some ways, expected. Online spaces and the information contained within them are herein conceptualised as *territories* that individuals can (temporally) inhabit and where their *linguistic becomings* could be enacted. Placing themselves in this *terrain* allowed them to absorb the linguistic parameters of this community, which enabled them to produce a *gender and linguistic becoming* of their own.

The lexicon of non-binary genders that was used to describe identities, sexed bodies, and gender expression was generally very similar within the forum, even among those who were new to it. For instance, it was common for forum users to use expressions such as AFAB (assigned female at birth) or AMAB (assigned male at birth) to describe themselves. These acronyms were primarily employed in sections where forum users introduced themselves, but were also seen throughout the posts. These acronyms were typically used without defining them, indicating an assumption that the readers were well-versed in these terminologies. This was the case in the previous excerpt, for instance. While this individual had never met another non-binary person, they were well-versed in the *linguistic becomings* and the linguistic parameters that existed within trans discourse online. This is shown by their seamless use and understanding of concepts such as HRT and AFAB. This shows that some forum users were indeed well-read and well-informed about the linguistic parameters of non-binary identities and the language of gender transitioning, even without belonging to an online or offline community. This was consistent with the qualitative findings presented in chapter 5, wherein many participants were well-versed in gender theory. Nonetheless, some forum users arrived at the forum with many questions. These individuals typically desired to learn more about non-binary identities in order to make sense of their gendered experiences.

Identifying as Non-binary

Many forum users described their desires to *become* a different gender both linguistically and materially. Linguistically, these forum users wanted to know, for

example, which labels they should embrace, given their specific experiences with (the)

gender (binary), as well as, in many cases, their sexuality:

"I've been looking for a place to hang out and chat through the confusion that is
in my head about my gender, or lack there-of. I guess I've known I don't really
identify as female since I was tiny, way before I realised I was gay. Now I am
just beginning to work out who I think I am and who I want to be. But I think I
probably have lots of questions to ask along the way. I think I probably fall in
the nonbinary bracket, I've always been happiest with short hair, dressing
androgynously and am often really unhappy with the fact I have breasts. But in
saying that I don't want to be a man, I just feel like I am neither. Some days I
feel more one than the other but always somewhere in the middle in a way that
just isn't easy for me to manage day-to-day."

Although some forum users arrived to the forum seeking assistance about

language (e.g., whether they should embrace non-binary as their identity label), their

narratives were often rich in details about the materiality of their gender experiences:

embodiment, expression, and desires. These affects extended beyond the linguistic to

the material realm: "I think I probably fall in the nonbinary bracket, I've always been

happiest with short hair, dressing androgynously and am often really unhappy with the

fact I have breasts." The materiality of the body is evident in this excerpt, but also the

need to categorise affective desires linguistically – to *become*.

These types of posts (which typically came from new forum users) were always

received with enthusiasm from other forum users. For example, longstanding forum

users shared their gendered experiences and offered some reassurance and guidance.

Seeing, for example, one reply to the previous post reassured them that their identity

was valid and authentic:

"Feel free to hang out, comment, question, reflect, challenge, query etc. We are
a pretty diverse and friendly group who have found each other by chance and it
works! Mutual respect is pretty much the only rule applied. Many interesting
threads and some very interesting links and resources. Our lived experiences,
sense of identity, narratives and journeys differ but we are here for each other.
Understanding, accepting, expressing and celebrating yourself as authentically
as possible may be a fairly simple, linear process or one that is far from linear,

simple or quick. The important thing is that this is your life, your sense of self and your journey. […] There is no right way or no wrong way, only your way. Most of us have found a good gender counsellor and later a good endo very useful, but each of us have found support and acceptance critical. That is why we are here."

In their response, this forum user emphasised the plurality of experiences among non-binary-identified individuals, as well as the non-linearity of subjective experiences of *becoming* non-binary. Authenticity was developed within these interactions, as forum users exemplified the endless possibilities that can exist within the emergence of gender identities. This response in particular contains several *productive* qualities to it. First, it reaffirmed to the previous forum user that their *gender and linguistic becomings* (their "sense of self and journey") were normal and accepted within this forum's *territory*. They also reassured them that "working out" their gender was a normal part of the "journey" to *become* non-binary. Secondly, their response also served as a guide that produced – and *assembled* – one of many gendered possibilities through material embodiments, i.e., finding "a good endo[crinologist]," which they deemed as a normative experience in their use of the expression "most of us." In that sense, a material parameter of non-binary was *territorialised* – that is, the idea that "most" non-binary people might end up desiring some type of hormonal treatment. Yet, this was ultimately framed as a possibility and not a rule that had to be followed. It was unclear whether the individual who asked the question ultimately adopted the non-binary label/bracket or not. However, the positive and validating environment of this forum could have propelled these kind of gender-questioning individuals to embrace non-binary as their identity label, albeit temporarily. These interactions, I argue, contributed to the production of multiple *non-binary-assemblages* within the forum.

Exploring Gender-neutral Language

Similar to the previous example, other forum users used the forum as a safe space to ask questions related to gender which allowed them to make sense of their linguistic and material experiences. Some of these questions related directly to language usage, particularly gender-neutral language (labels, pronouns, titles, etc.). As such, some forum users sought advice about navigating the world using gender-neutral language since they were unsure about the mechanics of this *linguistic becoming*. For instance, a new forum user who was also actively questioning their gender identity posted some of these questions:

> "I'm new here, searching for my identity and one that I have difficulty identifying. […] I was born female, I feel female and I always liked, and still do, being female. I never had any problems seeing my body as female, I really like it. I never questioned my **gender identity** up to now. […] I'm thinking of how cool would it be to have male genitals. […] Is that a non stereotypical cis female identity? Is it nonbinary female? is it genderqueer? Gender-whatever? Have searched for a while but you can find a lot of meanings to a single word."

In their search for the most appropriate language for themselves, this forum user encountered a variety of labels that may have different meanings depending on the context in which they are employed. The affective relationship between language and their body was also evident in their desire to have male genitals. Despite all of their research, this forum user inferred that, because they were comfortable with their female body, certain labels such as 'nonbinary female' might be more appropriate than simply non-binary. There were two assumptions embedded in the questions this forum user posited. The first assumption was that a label describing their gendered experience *existed* – that it was nameable and classifiable. The second assumption was that, if this label did indeed exist, they could embrace it for themselves because it was "correct" or "appropriate" to do so. Questions like this one were typically answered by other forum

members, particularly those who were more active (frequent posters). One of these active forum users replied:

> "I think that you can come up with a number of labels for yourself if you wish but more and more we are finding out that the labels tend to box us in and it's so much better to just be you and live in the moment. Many of us consider ourselves to be nonbinary internally, meaning **neither** fully **male or** fully **female** but a composite expression of both genders. So let me extend a warm welcome you because you obviously belong here with us."

As shown in previous replies, forum users often problematised the fixity of identity while simultaneously welcoming forum users to their community. In other words, forum users shared a common identity as non-binary, but this identity in and of itself was not bound by a fixed set of characteristics other than the rejection of one's assigned gender/sex at birth. As such, non-binary gender identity was discussed as both fluid ("labels tend to box us") as well as fixed ("non-binary internally"). It defied definition while simultaneously defining it. Therefore, the linguistic and material parameters of non-binary gender identities can be understood as complex processes of emergence and subjectification.

Other forum users had more specific queries about gender-neutral language such as pronouns. These questions were shared and answered within the forum's *territory*. Many users wanted to gauge how others enacted these pronouns (e.g., asked their family and friends to use them) in their day-to-day, given that they imagined this to be challenging. One forum user asked:

> "I'm coming here to get an idea about nonbinary pronouns. I identify as a gay female but I've always been more comfortable in **guy's clothes** and accessories. I have always just been [gender neutral name] and not very feminine and a not masculine. I don't feel the need to transition to a male so I figured I am nonbinary or genderqueer. I am soon to be married and my future wife and I are also adopting a new-born. I don't feel like wife or mom are fitting terms. Does anyone have any suggestions?"

This individual's gender expression (guy's clothes; neither feminine nor masculine), as well as their lack of desire to transition medically to male, were presented as one of the main *intensities* that allowed them to determine that they identified as non-binary. Yet, when it came to pronouns and gendered language (especially that which related to family relationships), they were still unsure how this *linguistic becoming* would fit into their life. This was particularly the case in relation to parenting and marriage (their inner social circle, closer in proximity). One active forum user replied to their question:

> "If you're seeking for a proper way to call yourself, then you can call yourself whatever you like, and that would perfectly be fine. This can be changing over time, but nevertheless you are who you are. If you are looking for the way your child could name/refer to you, you could follow the exact name approach, where you would be referred by your preferred name. Actually our child is referring to his grands by there names, and that's totally fine. […] If on the other hand you are worried about external acceptance from the outside world, that depends on the exact surroundings, and also on how you want to appear to anyone beyond your world."

Once again, forum users' replies conveyed the ways in which "trajectories, connections, and future relations remain unpredictable" (Grosz, 1994, p.174) in that there is no right or wrong way to *become* non-binary and convey this *becoming* linguistically. However, these *linguistic becomings* could be different depending on the context or situation. The contextual and situational nature of *gender and linguistic becomings* were therefore acknowledged in these interactions, as forum users provided tips on how to negotiate with different levels of social proximity and conceptuality. A different forum user replied with a more specific direction, thus *territorialising* some forms of non-binary *linguistic becomings* while simultaneously offering some conditions of possibility:

> "I think they/them is the easiest one for other <u>people</u> to accept and start actually using since the singular "they" exists outside of queer theory and it's also

probably the most common <u>nonbinary</u> <u>pronoun</u> (followed by xir and then hir). Just because you're <u>genderqueer</u> doesn't mean you need to adopt new <u>pronouns</u> though. My roommate is <u>genderqueer</u> and butch, verging on transmasc, but she/her <u>pronouns</u> don't really bother her so she chooses to use them out of convenience. "Spouse" and "parent" are totally viable words to substitute for "wife" or "mom". They're also innocuous enough that people probably won't ask questions if you use those terms to identify yourself."

Whether the original poster decided to embrace *they/them* pronouns or any other type of gender-neutral terminology was unclear, as there was no follow-up on this specific thread. However, this example is just one of many instances in which individuals actively used to forum as a source of information pertaining to *linguistic becomings*. These interactions helped *territorialise* prominent versions of non-binary *linguistic becomings* such as the use of *they/them* as the most popular pronoun as well as overall linguistic gender-neutrality (e.g., parent rather than father/mother). It also reassured forum users about the contextual and situational elements of gender-neutral language, making them aware that gender-neutrality might not always be possible. Nevertheless, these interactions within the forum helped to produce more authentic versions of non-binary genders which extended beyond the online realm.

Non-binary people within the forum understood their gender in ways that were not only linguistic but also material, contextual, temporary, and situational. As such, gender identity labels were understood by some forum users as fluid and playful rather than static and serious categorisations of reality. *Linguistic becomings* are therefore not a static; rather, they fluctuate and transcend parameters. Forum users recognised this fluidity and understood language as a mechanism of authenticity rather than a fixed reality. Ontologically, this was an important recognition of gender fluidity which extended to the linguistic and material realms, as I will continue to demonstrate later in this chapter.

Adopting Gender-neutral Language

Many forum users embraced what has been *territorialised* as gender-neutral language, even if only in certain (online) contexts. These forum users supported these *linguistic becomings* by providing anecdotes about their discomfort with (binary) gendered language from an early age, consistent with the findings in chapter 5 on *trans-emotionality* (Moon, 2019). As such, discomfort – as an *affective intensity* – allowed or motivated people to embrace *non-binary language*. One forum user narrated their story:

> "I'm so <u>happy</u> to have found a forum for <u>nonbinary people</u>! I'm [name] and I'm an AFAB <u>androgyne</u> who's out at my boarding high school, but not at home. I first discovered my **gender identity** during my freshman year at my boarding school, where I realized that <u>gender</u> isn't limited to just boxes. Although the idea of **more than two <u>genders</u>** was a bit strange to me (I just came from a catholic school), it resonated with me. I participated in many <u>gender</u> conforming activities when I was very little, but as I got older, I began to drift away from being a <u>girl</u>. However, because my parents are socially conservative, their beliefs discouraged me from exploring my **gender identity** for a long time. I have a dream of becoming a neuroscientist, but because of my **gender identity**, at times I question whether I'll ever be successful in life, but most of the time I try to hold my head high and actually study for once. I'm looking forward to getting to know all of you!"

The discovery that gender could be understood (and linguistically expressed) as "something other than man or woman" was always discussed in a positive light. This realisation or epiphany challenged the dominant binary gender system, thus allowing for the condition of possibility from which a non-binary subjectivity emerged within the forum. On the other hand, binary language was framed as *limiting* (as in "two boxes") and thus negative. This linguistic re-conceptualisation of the gender binary was therefore an affective force which allowed for the production of multiple gender configurations within the forum. The limitation then became a potential to de*territorialise* and *become*. The forum was therefore a place where *linguistic*

becomings were *territorialised* through story-telling and through the awareness that multiple gender subjectivities were possible and can be de*territorialised*. Another forum user shared their journey of rejecting/embracing gendered language:

> "In the beginning I knew that I didn't like <u>female</u> <u>pronoun</u>s (she/her). Then I thought about what <u>pronoun</u>s I should use. I struggled with this for a couple of days, because I couldn't find things online about how I was <u>feeling</u>. So luckily I knew someone that had a lot of experience dealing with the **transgender community**. When I talked to them they let me know I could use what ever <u>pronoun</u>s made me comfortable, so I started using my name. After I month I realized that the words like <u>girl</u>, mam, and sister bothered me when I was referred to as that. I wanted <u>people</u> to use person, say "you have a good day" leaving off mam. I now know that I am **gender neutral**. In the beginning of this I would have called myself <u>gender</u> fluid. But each day I evolve and hope some day we can get along in the world without everyone having to be labelled with what their sexual or **gender identity** are. But that might be just wishful thinking. We do <u>love</u> our labels."

Linguistic becomings were continually negotiated within the forum. For instance, in this forum user's case, their journey (going from female, to gender fluid, to gender neutral) showed how (dis)comfort (as an *affective intensity*) was an important factor in their *linguistic becoming*. Their discomfort with the gendered language led them to seek out information online about the most appropriate linguistic options to describe their feelings around gender. While their affective discomfort with language might sound like an individualised experience, their discomfort challenged a dominant social system of gender categorisation. In that sense, *linguistic becomings* (such as shifting pronouns) required a social interaction in which, in order to be recognised as authentic, individuals must disclose such desires to others. As such, the discomfort is not intrinsic to the individual; rather, the discomfort is dependent upon the utterances of others. As such, *linguistic becomings* are an inherently social act since "selves are both singular and plural" (Davies, 2010).

The common thread among these narratives was the rejection of binary language. But these rejections had to be negotiated in a variety of contexts. And these negotiations were also mediated by a variety of factors, such as personal experience with the gender binary, expression, and embodiment. All these elements contributed to the *assemblages* of non-binary gender identities within the forum, which were contained not within the individuals themselves, but in their relational experiences with other bodies (Bennett, 2010). Furthermore, learning about the existence of non-binary genders and linguistic choices opened up myriad possibilities among forum users. For some of these forum users, learning about these possibilities resulted in an immediate "epiphany" moment, allowing them to identify as non-binary almost without hesitation. These *linguistic becomings* were not as immediately obvious for other forum users, however. Some expressed being unsure about using gender-neutral pronouns. One forum user commented about pronouns:

> "Sometimes I try to convince myself that I'm truly just my **assigned gender at birth.** I don't mind the gendered pronouns that come along with it when talking to people in public. Online I hate gendering myself. I just roll with whatever pronoun people assume me to be. I learned "they/their/them" is a thing but I'm not sure how to ask people to use it without calling attention to my gender which I'm still unsure of. I can't bring myself to say things like "I'm a **woman**" or "I'm a **man**" because both feel wrong. I feel like I lost my way and am suddenly finding my original path again."

Linguistic becomings are by no means consistent or static across different contexts. Some forum users expressed feeling more comfortable using gender-neutral language (or "not gendering themselves") online than offline, showing the contextual and situational nature of *linguistic becomings*. For this forum user, using *they/them* pronouns offline was challenging because they were not comfortable navigating these negotiations ("calling attention to my gender") – that is, requesting others to use this type of language. While they were uncomfortable calling themselves a man or a

woman, they did not mind binary language during interactions with strangers. This is a consistent finding across the interview participants and the forum users. As such, context is one of the most important factors in the *linguistic becoming* of non-binary people – that is, the level of social proximity was crucial in terms of disclosure and authenticity.

Linguistic becomings can also alter the way in which a person understands their contexts and how they navigate social interactions with others. Many forum users spoke about the lessons they have learned since adopting *non-binary language*. One forum user commented that, after adopting gender-neutral (*gender neutral*; n=18) language, they understood the world and social interaction differently:

> "I think I've been transitioning this whole entire time since I first discovered nonbinary identities and felt like androgyne was basically the exact way I've always viewed myself and described myself! First I found an identity, and word to describe myself! Then I was trying rewire myself into getting used to viewing myself, and seeing myself as they it took awhile and a lot of correcting myself in my mind to use **gender neutral** terms and using they for myself. Then after finally getting use[d] to calling myself they and other **gender neutral** ways, I started working on rewriting my brain into seeing everything in a more grey area and to not assume people's genders. I worked to unlearn everything society has taught me to see the world, and gender. Honestly I'm glad I did rewire my mind, and start questioning everything I was conditioned to because now I feel more free, and not chained to society expectations, roles, norms, stereotypes, and etc. like viewing everything with a more open mind, and very grey area feels liberating. […] I think I'll be transitioning and evolving/growing into a new me until I die. I won't always be the same person who I am now, or who I was in past."

Not assuming people's genders became one of the central elements in the *linguistic becomings* of non-binary people. This concept allowed them to create a community of mutual understanding, respect, and what Richards at al. (2016) called the "ask etiquette" culture among queer communities. Transitioning was then also redefined as not only physical but also intellectual – by rewiring the way they understood gender in general. *Gender and linguistic becomings* were therefore

understood as fluid and always evolving in the understanding that individuals "won't always be the same person" and that the labels one employs can shift over time. Additionally, this linguistic fluidity and renegotiation was also present in the definition of the labels themselves.

Linguistic becomings, as theorised in this thesis, also related to the (re)configuration of linguistic parameters – that is, the semantics of commonly used terminology within non-binary discourse. These negotiations will be explored below.

(Re)defining Linguistic Parameters; Territorialising Meanings

The previous sections on *linguistic becomings* have explored the ongoing discovery, negotiation, and adoption of gender-related language such as gender-neutral labels, pronouns, titles, etc. This section will explore the ways in which language (as it related to gender identities) is (re)configured on an ongoing basis, thus *territorialising* certain meanings and usages over others. The reconfiguration of gender-related language occurred during interactions between forum users. During these interactions, forum users expressed their personal relationships with their gender as well as gender-related language. These interactions, in turn, produced a variety of linguistic parameters by defining concepts and subsequently employing this language, thus expanding the semantic landscape of gender identities, expressions, and embodiment.

Among this language, terms such as gender, sex, and sexuality were actively discussed and (re)defined by forum users. These (re)definitions often occurred within sections such as "What is gender? What does it mean to you?" and "There's your sex, there's your gender, there's your sexuality," wherein forum users provided definitions of these concepts. These discussions were identified in concordances such as *sex and/or*

gender (n=82), *gender and sex are not the same thing* (n=13), *sex and/or sexuality* (n=42), and *sexuality and identity* (n=23), among others. Forum users' definitions were coupled with their personal narratives of gender, sex, and sexuality – which contributed to the *territorialisation* of their overall meanings within the forum. As such, these definitions were framed as highly personal and differing from person to person. Yet, some parameters were indeed suggested and reinforced, thus *territorialising* certain meanings over others. In other words, while forum users' descriptions of their gender experiences were seemingly unique on the surface, their narrative contained some common threads – namely, a reconfiguration and *queering* of gender, sex, and sexuality: from binary to non-binary. For instance, one forum user commented on the rejection of these binaries:

> "The language we use is primarily based around that <u>binary</u> finite description of the world. It's been used so much and taken as not the simplistic view and description, that it has indeed become a description of fact for many. It's a way of thinking without very much logic. Simplicity without room for an expanded definition. The logic used that defines **<u>gender and sex </u>as the same** thing doesn't allow for any other explanations. Whenever anything else is introduced to that thinking, it's viewed as an attack on the logic. But there is much hope, sexuality that isn't <u>male</u> attracted to <u>female</u> and vice versa has changed quite a bit in the last few years. So simply taking the idea of your <u>sex </u>and keeping it as separate from your <u>gender</u> isn't that much of a stretch. […] It's a nice benefit of being <u>trans</u>, and I think as <u>nonbinary</u>, that the world isn't defined in finite terms, but rather infinite variations are always possible."

This forum user employed the concept of sexuality as a way to (re)define the possibility of gender plurality. Sexual diversity (the idea that there are multiple ways of experiencing sexual attraction outside of heterosexuality) has gained a significant amount of mainstream attention and, as such, has made it possible for gay and lesbian identities to *become* possible in people's imaginations – to *assemble* as a sexual possibility. However, gender diversity requires another layer of comprehension, as separating gender from sex is often "viewed as an attack on … logic" (echoing Jordan

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Peterson's arguments, for instance) – that is, gender and sex are typically understood to be "the same thing." This extract alludes to the culture-wide *sexuality-assemblages* which sets parameters on the types of sexual desires, behaviours, codes, categories, etc. that are possible within this sexuality *assemblage* (Linstead and Pullen, 2006). The premise of gender plurality, which disconnects sex from gender so that these categories can exist independently of each other, is not yet widely understood in mainstream society, as the culture-wide *gender-binary-assemblage* also sets parameters around roles, expressions, etc. Sexuality (as an *assemblage* which has been *deterritorialised*) was therefore used as a tool to allow other forum users make sense of gender and sex as separate in the same way that sexuality and gender have been separated in some common understandings. Yet, gender, sex, and sexuality cannot be defined in finite terms, but rather infinite variations which are always possible and emerging.

Forum users understood the possibility of movement and reconfiguration of gender, sex, and sexuality. These *gender-binary-assemblages* were, therefore, de*territorialised* and converted into non-binary configurations. This was in and of itself a *linguistic becoming*, as these concepts were (re)defined beyond their "typical" (read: widely understood) binary classification. Another user commented:

> "You're supposed to 'act' like what your sex is, and that is what your gender is as well. This is where the system breaks down, falls apart, doesn't hold up to cultural norms. Because gender is based on your sex, and that belief is so tightly held that babies are 'fixed' if they don't meet the criteria of that belief. Nobody teaches you that there is a difference, the tightly held cultural belief is that your **sex and** your **gender are** one and **the same**. It's interchangeable, the definitions for each are closely matched, I think it's only biologists and some psychologists who actually realize there is a difference. For **trans people**, most understand it, but even within the community, there are some who don't get it."

While the gender and sex binaries can be considered dominant systems of power, they are not entirely restrictive and can indeed be productive. In other words,

they were challenged, redefined, and negotiated on an ongoing basis. These structures were, in fact, de*territorialised* within the forum. For instance, the mutual understanding that sex and gender were not "the same" was the common thread that symbolically united forum users and allowed them to *territorialise* a non-binary subjectivity. This emergence (the separation between sex and gender) did not originate in this forum, but it was intensified in this online space. It was used as a tool.

Most forum users called this commonality "non-binary," as this term was seen as encompassing all individuals whose sex did not entirely correspond with their gender(s). However, the keyword *non-binary* was not as intense within the network as other terms such as *transgender* and *trans*, which were used as umbrella terms to define similar gender movements. In fact, *gender is non-binary* (n=95) was the only intense concordance that was included in the final analysis. As such, some forum users embraced terms such as *transgender* and *trans* as well as *non-binary* while (re)configuring their meanings. Of course, trans has historically been redefined a variety of times (e.g., transsexual, in some trans circles, is rarely used nowadays), and its definition and configuration is still ongoing (e.g., trans* was briefly used as an umbrella term). It was therefore not surprising that the linguistic parameters of *transness* were openly discussed within the forum within concordances such as *trans(gender) people* (n=1214), *identify with gender* (n=20), *binary trans* (n=66), and *binary and/or non-binary* (n=53), among others. For instance, while some non-binary people embraced trans(gender) as part of their identity due to its definition, some positioned transsexual, transgender, and binary trans (women and men) as different from non-binary, particularly in terms of their transitioning pathways. One forum user commented on this division:

"Within this narrative, **trans people** always seek to <u>transition</u> permanently from one <u>gender</u> to another through medical interventions like <u>hormone</u> therapy and <u>gender</u>-affirming <u>surgery</u>. "De-<u>transitioning</u>" is seen as a betrayal of one's authentic <u>trans</u> life. Presenting 24/7 as one's authentic <u>gender</u> is considered the highest form of bravery. Being either a <u>woman</u> or a man — the <u>binary</u> poles of <u>gender</u> — become endpoints in a prototypical <u>trans</u> journey."

Trans(sexuality/genderism) was often defined as wishing to transition (socially and/or physically) to another (typically binary) sex/gender. Transsexual people were therefore spoken about as those who underwent gender-affirming surgeries and lived their lives as men or women; whereas (trans)gender people were described as individuals who did not necessarily undergo surgery, although some might. For many forum users, non-binary could also fit into either of these categories, as many expressed having undergone, or wishing to undergo, gender-affirming surgeries, and taking hormones to modify their gender presentation. As such, the linguistic parameters of binary and non-binary trans identities were complex and in constant (re)negotiation. These identities should therefore be understood as reflexive capacities which were produced by a variety of affects, and not as stable formations.

In a reductive way, one of the main *differences* between binary and non-binary trans identification was language. In this sense, the only requirement to *become* non-binary was to gain the understanding that gender and sex can exist independently from one another, to adopt this language, and to communicate this *linguistic becoming* to others (even if only in selected contexts) – regardless of their relationship with their bodies. Of course, there is a universe of *affective intensities* and material forces that contribute to this non-binary emergence, but language was found to be a particularly strong *affective intensity* within this *assemblage*.

Indeed, some forum users blurred the line between binary and non-binary by (re)defining the semantic hierarchy of these concepts. One forum user suggested that

'binary trans' should be placed under the non-binary umbrella rather than the opposite.

For instance:

> "If anyone has been born into any binary gender, then with even a short experience of that gender and the socialisation that necessarily follows, how can anyone describe themselves as **binary trans**. Surely you carry your experience with you even if you choose to reframe and assert a new (non birth) **gender identity**. If this hypothesis has merit then aren't all trans folk, by definition, therefore nonbinary?"

This perspective was shared by other forum members who also defined the

concept of non-binary as including anyone who deviates from or transcends the sex

they were assigned at birth, thus placing trans(gender) under the non-binary umbrella.

One forum user commented on this perspective:

> "What is nonbinary? Personally I believe that nonbinary is anyone that don't fit their **birth gender**. I brought this up in the "other world" but it was dismissed. But I would say binary gender is **identifying with the gender** you are born with, nonbinary can be a mismatch feeling or MTF or FTM. If we were binary, why would we be MTFs or FTMs. No offence to anyone but MTF and FTM are nonbinary by default. Male to Female or Female to Male show a disconnect and Nonbinary. The other sight it seems like a lot of people were fooling themselves as binary MTFs and FTMs. Binary to be is either **male or female**. I really hope this didn't offend anyone. But seriously even no matter how much female I display and MTF how can I be a binary female? By default, I could never be. SO really, what am I?"

Semantically, this is an interesting concept that relates to the idea of *authenticity*

within trans discourse. In a sense, these users are essentialising meanings of

womanhood or manhood based on assigned sex. This strategic essentialising (Spivak,

1990), in turn, *territorialises* the meaning of non-binary and places it in an essentialised

semantic category as well, inferring that anyone who does not "fit their birth gender" is,

fundamentally, non-binary. As a result, the category of non-binary becomes real and

authentic, as much as a cis woman is *real* and authentic. This type of classification did

not go unnoticed, however, and was questioned by other forum users. For instance,

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another forum user explained that these labels (binary and non-binary) are contextual

and fluid rather than static and fixed:

> "I think in a way what's being discussed here deals partly with realities and partly with semantics. If I say that I'm "transgender female", basically I'm saying that I really wish I'd been born cisgender female. I'd have been much happier that way. It's in that sense that I'll call myself "binary". I firmly **identify with** one **gender**. But if I'm claiming to be female, even of the transgender sort, what do I mean by that? I'm not completely sure. To what extent would I be like other females? I have no way of knowing, given that I can't begin to describe an experience I've never had myself. So I personally don't insist on any particular label. I'll use what's handiest in a given situation--which might vary from "transgender" to "a transgender person" to "a transwoman". Cispeople's definition of a woman is a cisgender woman, and the people of my town have known me for far too many years to believe that I'm anything like a woman in their sense of the word. They don't understand our concepts of gender. So why make my life more difficult than it has to be? Why insist on a label, woman or whatever, if it's only going to cause confusion, especially since I myself am not even sure what sort of description I want to lay claim to? I just go about my life in the belief that whatever I am will become clearer to me as time goes on. I've noted, too, that other **people's perception** of me can evolve as time goes on. E.g., there are two men that I've known for years who now appear to be completely at ease referring to me as a lady. They're probably not clear at all in their own minds exactly what I am, but man no longer seems appropriate to them. So I might be binary, depending on how you want to look at it, or I might be nonbinary, depending on how you want to look at it. Perhaps the best descriptor would be "interesting". I rather like that one."

Context was an important factor in the *linguistic becomings* of forum users. For

example, the label that this individual employed for themselves depended upon what

was "handiest in a given situation." In these contexts, people's perceptions were

understood to be the deciding factors. These issues will be further explored in the

following section on material elements, as this factor was found to intensify desires to

adopt a given identity – whether binary or non-binary. It is clear, however, that their

body and the ways in which it was interpreted by others had was an *affective intensity*

that *(de/re)territorialised* their *linguistic becomings* contextually.

Labels and their various meanings were discussed at length within the forum. As

such, declaring a gender identity label was encouraged, if not expected. The explosion

of labels to describe gender diversity created a space where specific experiences gained linguistic legitimacy. While finding the most appropriate label (albeit temporarily) was an important element in the *gender becomings* of some forum users, other material factors such as gender expression and embodied experience were also integral to their gender identity exploration. Furthermore, language did not comprise the entirety of the *non-binary-assemblage* within the forum.

The following section will explore the ways in which gender expression, embodiment, and affective elements (such as dysphoria) were significant to the *assemblage* of non-binary identities within the forum. I will continue to illustrate the ways in which linguistic and material elements affect and are affected by one another in the ongoing negotiation of gender identities within the forum.

Material Elements of Gender

This section explores the material and affective elements of non-binary genders within the forum. These material and effective elements represent a significant *intensity* that, together with the linguistic elements outlined in the previous section, *territorialised* non-binary gender identities within the forum. Among these material elements, gender expression, embodiment, and the medical language of dysphoria were the most significant *intensities*. These elements were typically found within the forum in threads where forum users described their gender expression, their embodied experience, and their *feelings* (an affective element) about gender. These threads had names such as "nonbinary presentation" and "how does your gender feel today?", but these discussions were found throughout the corpus. Some of the collocations related to these *intensities* included: *present as a guy* (n=16)*, dress as a woman* (n=19)*, gender*

expression (n=165)*, gender neutral* (n=18)*, male body* (n=103)*, male and/or female* (n=581)*, gender dysphoria* (246)*, body dysphoria* (n=161)*, sense of identity* (n=20)*, as well as the use of the keywords *feel* (n=8,011) and *feeling* (n=1,487) used throughout the corpus. As described in the previous section, material elements are not in isolation from discursive ones – they are connected, as they affect and are affected by one another.

This section will explore three material elements of gender including: gender expression and "passing," people's perceptions and safety, and *affective embodiment* (fluidity, neutrality, and dysphoria). These material elements *territorialised* gender identities within the forum but were by no means homogenous. As I will demonstrate below, there is no unifying non-binary embodiment, but a multitude of material forces that produce a variety of non-binary modalities.

Gender Expression and "Passing"

According to Kessler and McKenna (1978) and Speer (2005), social representations of gender are not only binary but androcentric – that is, people tend to classify others as either men or women based on the assumption that they have (or lack) a penis, regardless of the articles of clothing those people might be wearing and the contexts in which they are found. Mental representations of gender – and the social expectations around it – were therefore carefully considered by forum users as they negotiated their embodied gender expressions.

Many forum users indicated that their decision to embrace/reject a given gender identity was modulated by their gender expression, which was, in turn, modulated by people's perceptions of their gender. In other words, some forum users felt as though

"passing or not passing" as binary gender was one of the main reasons they embraced a non-binary gender identity. As such, their *linguistic becomings* (label, pronoun, title, etc.) were affected by (and affected) the ways in which they were perceived by others. For instance, one forum user described how their process of identifying as non-binary was related to their gender expression:

> "I **identify as nonbinary** mostly because I am not passable as a <u>woman</u>. Deep down inside, I'll always wish I could just be a <u>woman</u>, but that is not in the cards for me. So I present <u>androgynous</u> and/or <u>genderqueer</u> as it's the next best thing. Even back when I tried to **present as a guy**, I was read as a **gay guy**. That bothered me quite a lot, as I am not interested in men romantically or sexually, I am just a person who has traits and mannerisms that <u>society</u> considers <u>feminine</u>."

Many forum users understood "passing" as the clearest indication that they could embrace a binary gender identity, thus placing a great deal of value on people's perceptions of their gender. For this forum user, the inability to be read as a woman disallowed them from embracing "woman" as their identity label despite having the affective desire to do so. As a response, they embraced a non-binary identity and an androgynous expression instead.

Bornstein (1994, p 125) suggests that "most passing is undertaken in response to the cultural imperative to be one gender or the other" – that is, passing is often motivated by the social pressure to conform. On the other hand, many people enjoy the safety that passing provides them, as well as the sense of fulfilment and accomplishment that being read as the gender they want to express can provide.

I argue that the possibility of *becoming* non-binary offered this individual – and many others within the forum – a space where the cultural imperatives of gender were indeed challenged; the impossibility (to *become* a woman) became a possibility (to *become* non-binary). While this individual's *affective intensities* and desires to be a

woman were, in their view, made impossible by not passing as a woman, they consider identifying as non-binary to be "the best next thing." Therefore, the existence of non-binary as a social category was a productive force that offered gender possibilities which went beyond the limits of the gender binary – and it offered them sense of fulfilment and accomplishment.

This was, however, not a universal experience within the forum. Some forum described how "passing" as a binary gender (different from their assigned gender) did not mean that they could not identify as non-binary. One forum who passed as a woman commented:

> "I like to dress <u>feminine</u>, be perceived as <u>female</u> and like you, thinking of E[strogen] in the future as I want to <u>feminine</u> shape of my body, softer body <u>hair</u> and soft features. Basically, I'd like to be a <u>male</u>-bodied person who looks and is perceived as <u>female</u> by others. There is a common misconception that if you begin identifying as <u>binary</u>, that you have to cut ties with your <u>nonbinary</u> identification or community. It's not true at all. There is no and/or. You can be happily both, regardless of what other <u>people</u> think. Many <u>people</u> think **identifying as a** <u>nonbinary</u> **woman** or <u>nonbinary</u> man is contradictory. It's not, it just means one is <u>nonbinary</u> in <u>identity</u> and <u>woman</u>/man in terms of body and/or social role."

Similar to the previous example, passing was framed as an important element of this forum user's gender *becomings* – they also wanted to pass as a woman to other people. Unlike the previous example, this affective desire to be perceived as a woman and to have a "feminine shape" was not framed as the reason for identifying as non-binary. Therefore, this example again blurs the line between binary and non-binary gender identities and their processes of emergence and *becoming*. The material elements of gender, such as gender expression and embodiment, were important to this emergence; however, these material processes were heterogeneous, contextual, and complex, *assembling* with the linguistic elements outlined in the previous section.

This complexity was further exemplified in the rich narratives of forum users who described being unsure about embracing a given label due to their complex relationship with gender expression and embodiment. For instance, one forum user described how their expression and embodied desires related to this uncertainty:

> "I wear mostly clothes from the women's department and makeup most of the time when I go out. Honestly, I do want to be fully transitioned eventually including SRS [sex reassignment surgery], but I'm in no rush. If I push myself too far, too fast, I become agoraphobic. I really needed to take things this slowly in order to even get to this point. Whether doing things out of the typical order, or not wanting to transition as fast as possible, or being OK with the fact that I'll likely always be non-passing makes me nonbinary, I don't know. I'm not sure how much it even matters if I'm **binary or nonbinary**. I've lost way too much sleep pondering what label I should use. I'm fine with just transgender, I'm definitely not a man, and was definitely DMAB [designated male at birth]."

Gender expression and passing as a woman were again framed as one of the deciding factors in the *linguistic becomings* of some forum users. However, for this individual, the binary and non-binary dichotomy was purely semantic. As such, they understood their *gender becomings* in terms of movement – from rejecting their assigned gender to *becoming* another gender – so they simply identified as transgender.

Movement between these semantic categories was therefore present within these narratives. Some forum users "came out" as binary after identifying as non-binary within the forum. These *linguistic becomings*, once again, related to gender expressions and the materiality of the body, but not always in consistent ways. One forum user, for example, came out as an androgynous woman, challenging the idea that "passing" was a requirement to *become* a woman:

> "I went through a period of time when I was mentally very fluid, and thinking way too much about what gender I was mentally at any given moment. I found looking at this like that somewhat disturbing. I really do feel a lot better when I think of myself mentally as just a woman. I just am a woman whose body looks a little different than most women. I'm not sure being non-passing makes one nonbinary, though it does tend to make me go more for an androgynous look, rather than a look I just can't pull off. Gender presentation, **gender identity**, and

sexual orientation are all different things. The way I see it right now, my **gender identity** is <u>woman</u>, my presentation is <u>androgynous</u> though going more and more femme, and I'm still only attracted to women."

These narratives demonstrated the complex affects and different modalities of *becoming*. While some forum users questioned whether there was such thing as a stable or unifying non-binary gender expression, many others understood the concept of androgyny as one of the main gender expressions among non-binary people. Androgyny, as the previous examples showed, typically involved mixing different material expressions such as clothing and bodily modifications in order to *queer* the perception of others – that is, to use semiotic symbols that attempt to subvert *cisnormative* standards. However, the intention was not always to subvert gender roles; for many forum users, it was about feeling comfortable and safe.

People's Perceptions and Safety

People's perceptions of gender mattered a great deal, as shown in the previous narratives. Many forum users commented on some of the reasons why "passing" was so important – namely, that being "misread" could often result in violence and harassment. One forum user offered some words of advice for someone who was exploring feminine *gender expression* (n=165):

> "As you said, you can choose your **gender expression**. Pick the one that suits the social situation you're in, even if your inner <u>gender</u> doesn't align with the **gender expression**. Picking a different **gender expression** doesn't invalidate the <u>gender</u> you are, it just means you are picking a **gender expression** that allows you to safely navigate social situations. Sometimes, safety has to be a priority over authenticity and sadly, depending on the area you live in, this may be the case. As you've said, you can't <u>wear</u> make up or **women's clothes** in public since it's risky. You can dress <u>androgynous</u>ly though, where it doesn't lean too far <u>masculine</u> nor <u>feminine</u>. Opt for neutral clothing, nothing overly <u>masculine</u> or <u>feminine</u>. You can use foundation and contouring lightly, the effects aren't obvious and can compliment one's face because it is put on lightly compared to heavily applied make-up."

As noted above, safety in public was a particular concern for most forum users. Harassment, violence, and discrimination based on gender expression were therefore constraining elements that inhibited forum users from fully representing their embodied desires. As such, many preferred to "slide under the radar" in public settings in order to avoid these negative consequences:

> "I need a world where I'm not terrified to step outside my door dressed as who I am, due to the fear of being bashed. […] People may perceive me as a <u>transwoman</u> and become violent. […] I am just **presenting as <u>male</u>** as that is the safe thing to do. At the very least, I am an androgynous male although I have been wondering lately about playing around with masculinity (growing facial hair out and using pink hair chalk on it and dying a few streaks in my hair pink)."

The desires to enact a given gender materially were therefore inhibited by people's perceptions of gender, but also people's (violent) *reactions* to these possibilities. While some forum users perceived being read as a binary gender as a sign of invisibility, some found comfort in knowing that they were safe. Of course, the affective desires to "play" with the gender expressions (e.g., androgyny) were prevalent within the forum, but these expressions were reported not always to be enacted offline.

The following section will explore the embodied elements of *gender becomings*, which relate to not only gender expression, but the materiality of the body itself. I will show how affective desires to modify or not modify bodies are related to *gender and linguistic becomings*.

Affective Embodiments

Affective embodiment, in the context of this thesis, refers an experience of *intensity* (Massumi, 2002) which envelops the body in the form of feelings, desires, and emotions. These do not necessarily have to be expressed linguistically, as these material

elements can exist outside of discourse. However, some of these *intensities* and desires were indeed communicated in the forum in the form of *feeling* (as this keyword was used significantly; n=1,485) and the collocation *sense of identity* (n=20), to name two examples. Specifically, the *affective intensities* that were discussed in the forum referred to the embodied *fluidity/neutrality* of gender. These were also discussed in terms of desires (or lack of desire) to embody a non-binary identity through gender-affirming services such as hormones, surgeries, and speech therapy. As such, affective fluidity and affective neutrality (the materiality of these *intensities*) will be explored in this section. The last part of this section will discuss the language of dysphoria and the ways in which this medical diagnosis was employed within the forum as a tool to speak about embodiment and affective desires. The language of dysphoria has been *territorialised* through psycho-medical discourses. However, dysphoria is understood here as a linguistic tool used by forum users to describe their discomfort with the gender binary, their identities, as well as the materiality of their bodies. As such, dysphoria is theorised as an *affective intensity* rather than a specific condition. This term was used inconsistently and in multiple ways throughout the NBC: as a tool used to describe their identities, their general discomfort with the gender binary, and their embodiments.

- *Affective Fluidity*

Gender is never stable; it is always in a constant process of becoming, "a constant journey which must start and end in the middle" (Linstead & Pullen, 2006, p. 1306) – that is, it is always in movement, but it has no final destination. Consistent with this description of gender, forum users showed the fluidity and mobility of their genders

in their narratives. Some described gender as a mobile object which appeared and disappeared in different places, shapes, and forms, often in unexpected ways. As such, gender fluidity was conceptualised as an *affective intensity* which had material properties. One forum user provided a rich description of their gender fluidity:

> "When I first came to the realisation I did not fit the binary male model as perfectly as I previously thought and began exploring my nonbinary identity, I would experience moments where my **sense of** my **gender identity** would completely disappear. I would panic and be like, 'No, come back, my **gender identity**! Now that I understand myself more, the fluidity is making more sense to me, my identity being fluid is quite accurate in that it rarely stays the same - it evolves as I mature and go through different experiences. The best way I can describe being genderfluid, it is like sand running through my fingers. In different situations, my gender fluctuates or disappears entirely. For example, when I am studying graphic design on campus, my **gender identity** disappears and I go completely into artistic drive, it makes sense because gender rarely comes into my art unless I make transgender-centric work. When I am walking in the shopping centre and see any sort of clothing that catches my eye, my female gender comes alive, the sparkle dances in my eyes as my chest gets all giddy with excitement. When I am keeping an eye on the forum and speak logically, my male side is speaking. In both situations, the opposite gender fades from view but there is never any panic on my end, not like there was in the beginning of my exploration because, like you, I realise they are in the background and will come back. :) There are times where my gender blends into one, the male, female and a mix of both/neither all become my **gender identity** that make up who I am. I have noticed lately that sometimes I mistake the **gender identity** blending together as disappearing from sight."

Some participants drew from gendered tropes, tools, stereotypes and ready-to-hand images in the surrounding culture concerning what masculinity and femininity look like and feel like to describe their gender fluidity. For instance: "my female gender comes alive, the sparkle dances in my eyes as my chest gets all giddy with excitement. When I am keeping an eye on the forum and speak logically, my male side is speaking." Such binarised descriptions, in some ways, *reterritorialised* the gender binary; however, the possibility that an individual can easily draw from "both genders" is a *deterritorialisation* of the rigidity of gender, whereby new gender possibilities can emerge.

While language was used as a tool to describe the *affective embodiments* of gender, the material elements of gender – the way these are felt – cannot be entirely captured linguistically. For instance, this forum user employed a variety of metaphorical devices to describe their gender fluidity. Notably, "sand running through my fingers," "blending," "mixing," and "disappearing." These metaphors allude to the materiality of gender as an affective force which can be transformed and behaves differently under different conditions. Yet, metaphors do not entire capture the embodied experience of fluidity as an *affective intensity* since these nuances (in the form of feelings and desires) can exist outside of discourse.

Gender fluidity, nonetheless, was the closest linguistic approximation to describe these types of *affective embodiments*. Other individuals used the language of *modality* to speak about their *affective embodiment* as non-binary. For instance, one forum user shared their experience switching between *guy mode* and *girl mode* to describe their gender fluidity:

> "[When I'm] in full out guy mode, well, I am conscious that I am not a guy. But I am so used to being me and being stealth or semistealth that I don't care about it. In full out girl mode, I am conscious that I am not a girl. But I know I pass fairly well or they don't care so I just be me. My body language changes, my voice naturally goes higher and more whispery, my perception of self becomes feminine. As a guy, the voice is relaxed, and I just deal head on with stuff."

For this forum user, gender fluidity, as an *affective embodiment*, was enacted differently depending on context. Context, therefore, allowed certain gender possibilities but not others. In the context of this forum, unique forms of non-binary gender identities were possible, as people within this forum typically understood the nuances of gender fluidity. Yet, these modalities can be materially enacted (and performed) through individual's body language and their voice, which are not entirely

linguistic. As such, their embodied gender fluidity does not require language to be enacted.

- *Affective Neutrality*

Similarly, for those forum users who identified as gender-neutral, *affective embodiments* of gender-neutrality were also enacted in material ways. These enactments were paired with *linguistic becomings* but were not dependent upon them. Gender neutrality could be expressed through androgyny, as previously outlined in the section on gender expression. But in an embodied form, materiality could take on different forms. For one forum user, for example, embodied gender-neutrality involved undergoing gender-affirming surgery:

> "When I came out to my psychiatrist as <u>nonbinary</u>, my psychiatrist made it sound like if I experimented with changing my **gender expression**, like my <u>hair</u> or clothes, etc... that I would be able to be comfortable and not require any surgeries (for example, bottom <u>surgery</u>) If I didn't explicitly **identify as male** or <u>masculine</u>, why would I need bottom <u>surgery</u> to make my body more <u>masculine</u>? His idea of a **gender neutral** body is getting top <u>surgery</u> and leaving the bottom alone. No, that is NOT **gender neutral**, it isn't for me at least. Being **gender neutral** would be sexless - in my circumstances [it] would be removing my genitalia down there entirely. [… M]y physical sex has to be effeminate male in terms of appearance."

For some forum users, embodied gender-neutrality entailed transforming their body in order to align with their desire to appear androgynous. This forum user, for instance, desired an "effeminate male" embodiment, which entailed mixing a variety of gender signifiers such as being "effeminate" while having a "male body." Their ideal body aligned with their internal sense of self – that is, a "sexless" non-binary person whose body, gender expression, and *linguistic becomings* were all be in "neutral" synchrony. These *affective intensities* guided – and *territorialised* – their desires to

undergo gender-affirming surgery. These narratives were found throughout the corpus, as body modifications were widely discussed and debated within the forum.

While not all non-binary people transition medically, many forum users narrated their desires to undergo body modifications. These modifications were seen as a mechanism to fully embody their gender identities beyond (or in addition to) their *linguistic becomings*. One forum user commented on their desires to have a *male body* (n=103):

> "I identify my sex to be male. I am AFAB but my brain feels AMAB, I feel like my mind is male, in other ways, non-gendered. Much like [name] says, I want a **male body** but not particularly a male identity to go with it. Even though technically speaking, my biological sex is female, I perceive it to be male. Every bone in my body will feel like it's pulling in every possible direction if I perceive otherwise. It's just so my idea of being male, happens to involve a flat chest and male genitalia. This does not hold true for others and that is OK. People like to say male genitalia does not make a man a man. That's okay, I am not a man though, far from it, I am male and require a male genitalia to feel wholly comfortable in my body that is overrun with male-nerve endings"

Other forum users shared their lack of desire to undergo any type of body modification. These forum users considered the relationship between their bodies and their *linguistic becomings* as non-binary and shared these narratives within the forum.

> "In real life I still go by my birth name because honestly I really like it, and I don't exactly feel like I need to change my name. Like I'm just as nonbinary even with a very masculine name! But I had to come to that realization! When I first came to my **gender identity** I jumped too fast into everything, and I had to take a step back and realize some things about myself, and for a while because I wasn't planning on hormones or transitioning I think I was very much just try to learn to feel comfortable with the body I had, and I came to realize my gender is just as valid regardless my presentation."

These narratives exemplify the variety of material experiences of gender. While this individual did not desire any type of body modifications to enact their gender, the fact that they had to speak about this in the first place is an example of the myriad ways

in which forum users challenged dominant narratives around *transness* such as the discourses of being "trapped in the wrong body" (Carter, 2013).

In this study there was no such thing as an essential non-binary body/aesthetic. Therefore, material authenticity as a non-binary person was not obtained by passing, transitioning, or mixing and matching gendered signifiers. Instead, embodiment was an affective force which produced context-specific desires which were enacted in context-specific times and spaces. As such, there is no single narrative of non-binary embodiment, as non-binary people come in all shapes and forms and express a myriad of desires about their bodies. Of course, these are some common threads, as displayed by the intense words of interest and concordance lines outlined in chapter 7. These *intensities* do indeed *assemble* the narratives and *territorialise* meanings; however, these *intensities* do not imply that an essential non-binary materiality *exists*.

- *Dysphoria*

The DMS-5 defines gender dysphoria as the "distress that may accompany the incongruence between one's experienced or expressed gender and one's assigned gender." (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p 451). While the DSM-5's diagnosis of gender dysphoria does not *require* an inherent rejection of one's primary or secondary sexual characteristics, it does frame gender dysphoria as engendering a "strong desire" to undergo body modifications. As such, those who "suffer" from gender dysphoria are not required to undergo gender-affirming surgeries; however, in order to access gender-affirming services, people are *required* to be diagnosed with gender dysphoria. The fact that individuals need to be diagnosed, therefore, is still pathologising. As demonstrated by Davy and Toze (2018), the concept of gender

dysphoria is inconsistently used in the psychological literature, "sometimes referred to as a specific diagnosis; sometimes as a phenomenological experience of distress; and sometimes as a personal characteristic within individuals" (p.196). It was not surprising, then, that forum users also employed the language of gender dysphoria in a variety of ways, which were not always consistent. These various usages will be explored below.

The keyword *dysphoria* (n=1,771) was significantly used throughout the NBC. This term was frequently used as a gender descriptor akin to gender identity labels. For instance, many used the expressions "I am dysphoric" or "my [gender/body] dysphoria" alongside their gender identity labels. As such, the adoption of this label was also considered a *linguistic becoming*. Although not all forum users embraced the language of dysphoria as a label, the majority of forum users understood when other forum users made these declarations, typically offering sympathy and support to those who declared *dealing with gender dysphoria* (n=20).

In the context of this thesis, I will conceptualise dysphoria as an *affective intensity* rather than a psychological or medical condition. I argue that the language of gender dysphoria is both a *linguistic becoming* and an *affective embodiment* which was used in *productive* ways. For instance, the language of dysphoria allowed forum users to speak about their bodily desires in "authentic" ways, as this language was validated by psycho-medical institutions that controlled their access to gender-affirming services. Dysphoria, as an *affective embodiment*, allowed forum users to verbalise their bodily desires using a *territorialised* language of "incongruent" gender identities. The language of dysphoria, therefore, was part of the *non-binary-assemblage* for many forum users; it permitted them to create novel conceptions of subjectivity, identity, and

agency by combining material and discursive elements in certain social contexts (Duff, 2014).

Due to its various usages, some forum users took it upon themselves to define the concept. One forum user, for instance, equated dysphoria to *transness*, thus inferring that one must experience dysphoria in order to be trans(gender):

> "In my opinion, "trans" means that what is on the inside doesn't match what is on the outside. This means that a person with any **gender dysphoria**, no matter how small, is transgender. I use the label for myself, because I feel almost completely feminine on the inside, but see a man every time I look in the mirror. I wish I had female curves and sizable breasts, and wish I didn't have any body hair, but I don't want bottom surgery. *I still think I'm trans because of my dysphoria*, but in a **nonbinary** way." (Emphasis theirs.)

Many forum users understood their gender identity in terms of gender dysphoria, as shown in this excerpt. The fact that the use of "gender dysphoria" was so prevalent in the forum demonstrates how the dominant medical discourses around transgenderism are still prevalent among trans and non-binary people – and that such concepts are sometimes unquestioned by transgender people (Davy, 2011). This forum user did not offer a critique of the medical model, for instance. They instead suggested that particular bodies and feelings do not necessarily have to go together – which they called "gender dysphoria." This was not a universal view within the forum, however. Other forum members also understood gender dysphoria as an *affective embodiment*, but they did not correlate this feeling with transness. In other words, gender dysphoria was not a requirement to *become* non-binary:

> "It is entirely possible to be cisgender and experience dysphoria. It is also possible to be nonbinary and medically transition due to dysphoria (I just so happen to be more comfortable being a male-bodied nonbinary person than a female-bodied one.) It is possible to be nonbinary and experience no dysphoria and no desire for surgery, its possible to be trans, have no dysphoria or desire for surgical intervention."

Gender dysphoria was therefore questioned by some forum users, as they understood the inconsistencies of this diagnosis. This did not prevent them, however, from embracing the term. The language of gender dysphoria allowed them to verbalise their *affective embodiment* in ways that other forum users also understood. For instance, this forum user described being "more comfortable being a male-bodied <u>nonbinary</u> person than a female-bodied one." As such, gender dysphoria, as a *linguistic becoming*, allowed them to communicate their *affective embodiment* in terms of (dis)comfort (with the gender binary), which, as I have outlined in the previous section, was a common thread in setting the linguistic parameters of gender identities.

The adoption of this label, nonetheless, validated some forum users' feelings about their bodies as well as their desires to undergo transition. While the linguistic parameters around gender dysphoria have been defined by medical and psychological institutions, embracing dysphoria as a descriptor can serve a strategic purpose – that is, to acquire gender-affirming services. However, gender dysphoria was not universally embraced by all forum users. Some, in fact, rejected the label while still commenting on the ways in which their *affective embodiments* were not aligned with their assigned gender:

> "I'm going with nonbinary, but I think Neutrois might fight a little better? I don't suffer from **gender dysphoria** but I've always been more aligned to masculine traits and things even before I really understood that stuff. As a kid/teenager I got pigeon-holed as a tom boy and I think for a while that hid the truth. For me, the ideal would to just be neutral - kind of neither? I've also been considering drag and have begun coming up with a King persona. I'm hoping this forum can really help me get to grips with it all."

- *Body Dysphoria*

The language of *body dysphoria* (n=161) was common within the corpus. In these narratives, forum users located the source of their distress (an *affective intensity*)

to a specific body part. As such, their *linguistic becomings* as non-binary were linked to their affective desires to transition medically. Naming the source of their (body) dysphoria offered a productive condition of possibility which would allow them to feel differently about their bodies. One forum user offered a description of their distress as located, specifically, on their chest:

> "How does your gender feel today? Lots of dysphoria lately. Feeling nonbinary, as usual, but hating it. As in, hating being in between. I've caught myself wanting to go back to pretending to be cis but also kind of wanting to transition to male. And I know it's because there is no space in society for nonbinary people. EVERYTHING is binary. How can I not be? Where do nonbinary people belong, exactly? I want it to be simpler. I want to be one or the other. But that's not me. My chest dysphoria has been very high, too, and is making these feelings worse. So is the little bit of fat I have, because it's very womanly fat and I feel I look more butch than androgynous. Not that there's anything wrong with being butch, of course. There's not. But that's not what I'm going for. Butch is still woman. Having a very womanly body sucks. When I got my hair cut it made me feel better for a few days, but now I feel worse. But my **gender is** still **nonbinary**. I just hate it right now."

These desires to alleviate body dysphoria were also paired with social elements such as people's perceptions of their genders. As discussed on the section on gender expression, when people perceive someone's gender as ambiguous (not fitting the dominant, binary codes), unsafe situations could emerge. As such, safety became a very crucial element, altering the ways in which forum users presented themselves to the world. For instance, a forum user discussed the link between their body dysphoria and the distress that people's perceptions of their body can produce:

> "It seems **body dysphoria** and my **assigned gender at birth** is what gives me most discomfort. I also have fears of being outed in **men's restroom**, that may tie into social stuff and other's perception of my gender."

The *affective intensity* of distress (in the form of dysphoria) is not an inherent experience among gender-diverse people – that is, the "strong desires" to *become* another gender do not necessarily *cause* distress, as suggested by the DSM-5. Instead,

distress emerged due to the stigma and discrimination (in the forms of violence, harassment, and microaggressions) that gender-diverse people experience. As shown in chapter 6, the level of distress that these social interactions can produce is context-dependent; it intensifies depending on the level social proximity. As such, minority stress (Meyer, 2003) and marginalisation stress (Bouman et al., 2010) are linked to the concept of dysphoria since the source of distress is not entirely placed on the individual (and their body), but instead placed in people's perceptions and (negative) reactions to it.

Dysphoria can be understood in a myriad of ways – from an identity label akin gender identity, to a desire to embody a specific gender, to the negative effects that occur when one's gender is misunderstood. Furthermore, the language of dysphoria was not always consistently employed within the corpus, resembling the ways in which the language of dysphoria is also inconsistently used within the psychological literature (Davy and Toze, 2018). Overall, the language of dysphoria was invoked by some forum users as it provided them an extra level authenticity about their embodiment within a psycho-medical model of identity. This term was adopted by this online community to communicate these embodied and affective desires, as well as the distress they experienced due to people's perceptions of their body.

Gender non-conforming people have been found to expect rejection and stigma based on people's perceptions of their genders (Rood et al., 2016, p. 160). Consistent with "proximal stress experience" (Rood et al., 2016) and the minority stress model (Meyer, 2003), the distress that forum users experienced was due to interactions in which people's perceptions of their gender were made salient. Distress, as shown in chapter 6 (language-related distress) also originates in context-dependent situations

which are mediated by social proximities and intentions. Gender dysphoria is, therefore, neither an internal nor an essential element in *becoming* non-binary.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter offered a qualitative exploration of the NBC. The linguistic and material elements of non-binary gender identities were explored, demonstrating their relationship as well as their complexity, multiplicity, and mobility. It was concluded that there is no unifying linguistic or material narrative of non-binary. Instead, this analysis showed how *gender and linguistic becomings* are negotiated and *(de/re)territorialised* in an ongoing way. The linguistic and the material parameters of non-binary gender identities within the forum were continuously and contextually (re)assessed.

In terms of the linguistic *affective intensities* that were identified in the NBC, seeking authenticity, identifying as non-binary, exploring and adopting gender-neutral language, and re-defining linguistic parameters were found to the most significant. Relatedly, gender expressions and passing, people's perceptions and safety, and *affective embodiments* (affective fluidity/neutrality and (body) dysphoria) were found to the the most *intense affects* within the NBC. These discourses (both linguistic and material) were interconnected as demonstrated by the network of *non-binary language* shown in chapter 7.

The various narratives found within the forum demonstrate the possibilities of gender, which were achieved by the *(de/re)territorialisation* of dominant systems of power such as language, gender expressions, and embodiments. In the process of *deterrioralisation*, a *reterritorialisation* of certain tropes, stereotypes, and images of

masculinity and femininity was sometimes enacted. Some forum users, for instance, drew from these (binary) discourses to *assemble* their *gender and linguistic becomings*. Nevertheless, the internet, as a source of information, authenticity, and validity, served as a place where conditions of gender possibility could be explored, reassessed, redefined, and negotiated. The internet also served as a space where language, material bodies, and affective desires *assembled* to create different forms of non-binary identities, thus allowing them to *become*.

Non-binary gender identity *assemblages* are made up of flows of *affective intensities*, linking human and nonhuman things (such as the internet). Gender identities are therefore not inherent characteristic of a body or an individual. Instead, they are fluid and rhizomatic. Yet, a repertoire of linguistic parameters as well as the material and *affective intensities* were identified, demonstrating the different affects that make up the non-binary gender identity *assemblage* without essentialising it. For instance, a number of unitary narratives were identified within the forum, such as the rejection of the idea that gender and sex were the same thing, and a discomfort with the gender/sex they were assigned at birth. These unitary narratives were consistent with the findings among interview participants.

9. DISCUSSION

Figure 7. Juno Roche. Used with written permission from Juno Roche.

"I'm ecstatic about the words that work for me: 'trans' and 'queer'. Neither of them fall down on the side of femininity or masculinity, and neither of them have to adopt an oppositional position, an anti-position. I wish I could simply say 'I'm nonbinary' but I'm tired of being in direct opposition to something I don't even believe in. If I am walking away from the binary, then I walk away from both sides towards my trans centre. It is a positive space, not oppositional. I'm no longer even sure if there is any purchase in my describing myself as 'trans-femme' or 'nonbinary femme', as it confuses me. Why would femme be any more pertinent than masculine if I am trying to reject such constructs as flimsy and judgemental?" (Roche, 2019, p. 18).

Figure 7. Juno Roche (Twitter profile picture). Quote from their book: *Trans Power*.

This thesis explored the experiences non-binary people face in relation to language, as well as the ways in which they negotiate their identities, authenticity, and embodied experiences. Gender was theorised here as something one *becomes* rather than something one *is* (Linstead and Pullen, 2006) – a relational process (a constant journey with no final destination). Gender *becomings* are constantly *(de/re)territorialised* through *affective intensities* which move through the body, society, language, and other material and abstract elements. Importantly, the concept of

linguistic becomings was developed in this thesis, suggesting that language was an important *affective intensity* among non-binary-identified participants, allowing for their identities to *become*. Material affects were also found to be important to this *non-binary-assemblage*, thus forming multiple iterations of non-binary *becomings*. In that sense, a variety of *affective embodiments* were also identified, contributing and extending the theory of *gender and linguistic becomings*.

Roche's narrative of their process of *gender becoming* (above), in many ways, exemplifies the complex relationship between the linguistic (e.g., adopting a label, pronoun, etc.) and the material (e.g., *affective embodiment* through gender-affirming modifications, expression, etc.) *affective intensities* outlined in this thesis – that is, the multiple ways in which these *affective intensities* relate to one another, emerge, shift, and are socially (re)configured and (re)negotiated in an ongoing basis. Roche's process of *gender and linguistic becomings* was exhibited by their recent adoption of the identity label "trans" as well as *they/them* pronouns, leaving behind the category "woman" or "trans woman" and the pronouns she/her, which they had embraced for many years. While Roche does not identify as non-binary, they also do not identify as binary. As such, their relationship to language has shifted over time – it was affected by a variety of factors, including their embodied experience, historical identity labels such as "trans woman," and the recent availability of linguistic resources such as gender-neutral language.

This thesis explored some of these complexities, suggesting that a variety of linguistically and materially expressed *affective intensities* affect – and are affected by – the *gender and linguistic becomings* of individuals. These included *memories, proximities, realisations, intentions, people's perceptions, embodied desires,* etc., and

were negotiated in a variety of contexts which differed between and within people. As such, non-binary people's processes of emergence and subjectification were found to be extremely heterogeneous, suggesting that there is no such thing as a unified non-binary narrative. However, there are common threads, which are expressed in the form of *affective intensities.*

Summary of Findings

This thesis examined the *gender becomings* of non-binary people both offline and online. A sample of twenty-two non-binary-identified people living in the UK were interviewed for this project using a semi-structured interview schedule, which included questions about their identities, language, challenges, and social negotiations. The same participants were also asked to provide a short writing sample, which was included in the analysis. Lastly, a corpus of *non-binary language* (the NBC) was created for this project. The NBC was built from an online forum where non-binary people wrote about their identities, asked for advice, and shared information pertaining to their genders. This data was then analysed using a materialist approach to research and using *assemblage theory* (DeLanda, 2006), which was inspired by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). As such, the experiences of non-binary were understood in terms not only of language, but also of society, the body, and other material factors – all contributing to the *assemblages* of non-binary gender identities.

Using this framework, the interviews and short writings were analysed in chapter 5. I argued that the most relevant *affective intensities* relating to the *assemblages* of non-binary gender identities were: experiencing discomfort with assigned gender at birth, having close friendships and/or relations (partners or relatives)

with other LGBTQ+ people, learning about gender diversity and discovering the language that best describes the relationship with gender, adopting that language (a *linguistic becoming*), and embodiment. While these *affective intensities* were common among most participants, they were not homogenously experienced by participants, as there is no such thing as a single non-binary narrative. Moreover, I found that both linguistic and material *intensities* were crucial to the *gender becomings* of non-binary people in this study. These *affective intensities* were found to be in constant development, reconfiguration, and evolution, as they were *(de/re)territorialised* in multiple ways and at different levels of social interaction.

In this chapter, the concept of *linguistic becomings* was developed. Linguistic *becomings* refers to the discovery, adoption, (re)assessment, and ongoing social negotiation of gender-related language. This *affective intensity* contributed to the *gender becomings* of non-binary people in the present research in a significant way. However, these *linguistic becomings* were also shown to be in flux at all levels: individual, social, and societal. As such, I argued that *linguistic becomings* are an inherently social act.

Given the importance placed upon language, chapter 6 explored the effects of misgendering on participants. As such, this chapter explored the ways in which non-binary people in the present study navigated the world using *non-binary language,* the distress that originated from social interactions in which their language was not affirmed, and the various ways in which non-binary people managed these situations. These interactions were mapped out, showing a topography of social interactions among participants. I found that misgendering from those in close social proximities (such as close friends, partners, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and close family

members) often resulted in more intense distress due to their high levels of emotionality; however, the intentions (whether intentional or unintentional) behind such utterances, as interpreted by participants, modulated these effects. For instance, when misgendering was interpreted to be intentional, distress was more intense. Yet, in emotionally distant interactions such as extended family, acquaintances, or strangers, the distress caused by misgendering was found to be less intense because misgendering was mostly unintentional. This distress was found to accumulate over time, however. While this model is not perfect, it is a close approximation to the different *intensities* that non-binary people experience in different contexts.

The non-binary corpus (NBC) was then quantitatively analysed in chapter 7. Analyses were conducted using corpus linguistic tools, including frequency, keyness, and collocations. This corpus-based approach was found to be exceedingly useful in analysing the NBC in a systematic way. These findings helped narrow down this large dataset (2.9 million words) into a more manageable subsample. As such, 85 interrelated words (44 keywords and 41 collocations) were used to create a network of *non-binary language*, which was used to visualise the NBC and find the most intense words of interest. Lastly, three concordance lines for each of the top fifteen words of interest were downloaded, thus creating a subsample of *non-binary language*. This subsample was analysed in chapter 8.

This robust, systematic approach led to the qualitative analysis of the NBC in chapter 8. In this chapter, *linguistic becomings* were found to be significant to the ways in which non-binary people sought authenticity online, consistent with previous findings. This chapter described the various processes of linguistic emergence: discovering, adopting, and (re)negotiating language. The linguistic parameters of non-

binary identities were also found to be constantly reassessed, redefined, and renegotiated. Lastly, the material elements of gender were found to be equally important as the linguistic elements. A variety of material, *affective embodiments*, as they were formulated in language in the form of feelings, desires, and emotions – and their relationship to language – were identified, including affective fluidity, affective neutrality, and (body) dysphoria. This section concluded that there is no single non-binary embodiment, but multiple iterations reflecting the numerous possibilities of the body. The language of dysphoria, which was prevalent in the corpus, was inconsistently used by forum users. Dysphoria was therefore conceptualised as a linguistic tool used by form users to describe their discomfort with the gender binary, their identities, as well as the materiality of their bodies. As such, dysphoria was understood here as an *affective intensity* rather than a psychological or medical condition. Overall, and similar to the interview and short writing findings outlined in previous chapters, the analysis uncovered some of the linguistic and material *affective intensities* which allowed non-binary identities to *become*, albeit in an online context.

Combined, the interviews, short writings, and the NBC make a significant contribution to the knowledge base on non-binary gender identities, their emergence, linguistic *assemblage*, and ongoing negotiation.

Gender and Linguistic Becomings and the Rhizome
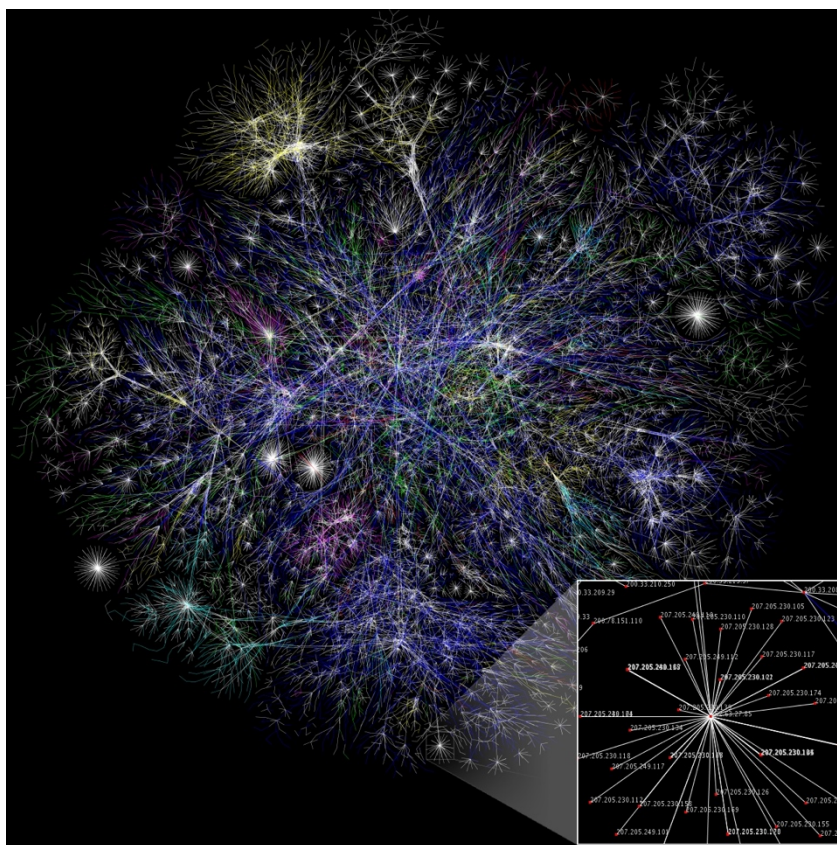
Figure 8. Partial map of the internet. From http://www.opte.org/maps/. Image licensed under a Creative Commons License. No changes were made.

In *A Thousand Plateaus,* Deleuze and Guattari (1987) described the rhizome as a metaphor for the multiple ways in which *assemblages* are *(de/re)territorialised*. In this book, they also laid out a number of principles describing the shape and form of the rhizome which, in some ways, resembled a network such as the one portrayed in Figure 8. These principles included: *interconnectedness, heterogeneity, multiplicity, rupture,* and *mapping*. Below I outline these principles as a way to sketch out (metaphorically) the shape and form of the *non-binary-assemblage* as a rhizome – based on my research findings. Moreover, I draw upon these principles in order to extend the theoretical contribution of *linguistic becomings*.

Interconnectedness and Heterogeneity

According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), "any point of a rhizome can [and must] be connected to anything other […] A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections…" (p. 7). As such, rhizomes have no real centre. Instead, they are made up of a wide range of distinct *assemblages* (i.e., psychological, sociological, biological, linguistic, etc.) which are all interconnected by threads. These threads "go off" into unexpected destinations, moving at different rates, *intensities*, and speeds. Individuals are part of multiple *assemblages* which are, in turn, inherently connected to one another.

Rhizomes are, therefore, always forming new connections, always shifting, and always becoming something else. While the present thesis demonstrated that not all non-binary people experienced, expressed, or interpreted their genders in the same way (linguistically or materially), individuals who identified in the same way (as genderqueer, for instance) were indeed "interconnected" by the *territorialisation* of some "common threads" (i.e., some of the *affective intensities* I identified in chapter 5).

When participants in this study conceptualised their gender in similar ways, these articulations affected – and were affected by – factors such as historical shifts, activism, social media, representation, the self as a project, etc. Therefore, shifts in the understanding – and agreement – that gender did not have to be binary, as well as the possibility of linguistic and material alterations were "common threads" that connected participants. Other factors such as drawing upon gender stereotypes and tropes and/or the employment of psycho-medical discourses of gender to describe their experiences were also part of these "common threads." These commonalities were, therefore, part of the *non-binary-assemblage* and acted as *affective intensities* which connected – and

gave mobility to – the rhizome.

Multiplicity

According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), there is no singularity (i.e., one single way of *becoming*). Instead, there are multiple re-iterations of *becoming*:

"[a rhizome] has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature (the laws of combination therefore increase in number as the multiplicity grows)" (Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 8).

Multiplicity was identified in the various, and often contradictory, ways in which non-binary people in this project experienced and interpreted their *gender and linguistic becomings*. For instance, the different ways in which participants discussed and experienced the *fluidity* and/or *neutrality* of gender, as well as the ways in which they described and experienced their genders as "both/neither/between/either male and female." Materially, these were also discussed in terms of desires (or lack of desire) to embody a non-binary identity through gender-affirming services such as hormones, surgeries, and speech therapy. Overall, multiplicity was present in a variety of forms. Some were observable; some were not. Some possessed a lexicon; others did not. And, of course, some ways of *becoming* have not yet been *assembled* or configured into the rhizome.

Rupture

"A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on

one of its old lines, or on new lines." (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9). Furthermore,

"each […] becoming brings about the deterritorialization of one term

and the reterritorialization of the other; the two *becomings* interlink and

form relays in a circulation of intensities pushing the deterritorialization

ever further. There is neither imitation nor resemblance, only an

exploding of two heterogeneous series on the line of flight composed

by a common rhizome that can no longer be attributed to or subjugated

by anything signifying." (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 10).

Non-binary people in this study were found to re-appropriate and re-configure ready-to-hand *assemblages* relating to stereotypical masculinity and femininity. These *gender-binary-assemblages* were *deterritorialised* and converted into non-binary configurations. This was in and of itself a *linguistic becoming*, as these concepts were (re)defined beyond their typical (read: widely understood) binary classification. *Rupture,* therefore, implies that destroying a part of the rhizome does not entail that it will ceases to *exist*. The rhizome will instead rebuild itself from where it was cut off, thus re-emerging with new purposes and properties – new possibilities. It can *become* something else.

Mapping

"A rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model. It is

a stranger to any idea of genetic axis or deep structure. [… A map] is

entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. It

is itself a part of the rhizome. The map is open and connectable in all of

its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant

modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 12).

As there is no real or deep structure, *visualising* a rhizome is impossible. However, one can "experiment." This thesis it self is a form of mapping, as it employs people's narrations, stories, and interpretations to *assemble* a new (somewhat different) interpretation though a variety of (research) tools, skills, resources, etc. As such, this research explored and attempted to visualise the non-binary rhizome. This mapping, interpreting, and nuanced understanding of the rhizome was, therefore, a part of the gender *(research-)assemblage,* thus shaping and forming a particular version of it. In turn, this thesis *assemble*s a new possibility, a new "reality," and a new *becoming*.

Concluding Remarks

This thesis identified a gap in research into the ways in which non-binary people negotiated language. This research was indeed needed, as previous research had suggested that non-binary people have been shown to feel linguistically invalidated (Saltzburg and Davis, 2010), perhaps due to the prevailing *cisgenderist* ideology which invalidates gender-diverse people's identities (Ansara and Hegarty, 2014). However, no research had examined whether the use of gender-affirming language had any benefits or negative consequences among non-binary people. This thesis fills this gap in the literature and begins to understand the complexity of gender and linguistic negotiations among non-binary people. Therefore, one of the main aims of this research was to shed light on the linguistic and material elements that come together in order to *assemble* non-binary identities. This analysis shed light on the *assemblages* of non-binary gender

identities, reflecting the dynamic realities of *linguistic becomings* and subjectivities while simultaneously highlighting the materiality of the body as a part of this *assemblage*. Language negotiations, therefore, were considered a part of this *assemblage*.

This analysis maintained a commitment to the materialist epistemology and ontology, suggesting that a theory that went beyond essentialist and social constructionism understandings of gender was necessary in order to capture the nuances of gender. *Assemblage theory* (DeLanda, 2006) was employed in this thesis as a tool to understand the different affects that contribute to the *assemblages* and processes of *becoming* non-binary both online and offline. This thesis, therefore, makes a theoretical contribution with the addition of *gender and linguistic becomings* to the understandings of gender. This theory breaks away from the structuralisms and the social constructivism commitments to knowledge production which understand gender (as well as sexuality, sex, race, etc.) either as purely biological (an essential characteristic of the self) or as purely linguistic, respectively. Instead, this epistemological perspective understands gender (and other *assemblages* such as sexuality, sex, etc.) as a *becoming* – a constant process of emergence, shifting, (re)assessment, and (re)configuration. Within this framework, gender is understood as neither essential nor socially constructed, but as *assembling* in an ongoing movement of affects – which are both material and linguistic. It is unpredictable, messy, and always *becoming* (Grosz, 1994). For example, while non-binary-identified people in this project claimed membership to a linguistic *territory* (a *linguistic becoming*) which, in many cases, provided them with a sense of authenticity, many participants saw this linguistic emergence as context-dependent,

fluid, and able to shifting over time. Gender and *linguistic becomings*, therefore, were not static or fixed – they had mobility (Linstead and Pullen, 2006).

This project also makes a contribution to the field of psychology in terms of methodologies. In line with the materialist ontology employed in this project, a materialist approach to methodology (Fox and Alldred, 2014) was implemented. This approach understands research as an *assemblage* of events, researchers, research tools, ideas, etc. which are used to produce knowledge. As such, a combination of research methods was employed. Interviews, short writings, and the non-binary corpus were all part of the *research-assemblage*. And a materialist approach to analysis (a non-hierarchical, relational analysis) as well as the use of corpus linguistic tools to analyse the corpus, were part of the research tools in this *research-assemblage*. The combination of these methods was productive, as it offered a variety of ways to generate knowledge, and to shed some light on the *gender and linguistic becomings* of non-binary people.

Overall, this research found that utilising a distinct type of language – a *linguistic becoming* – not only served as a tool to differentiate their gender and *territorialise* their identity, but also as a marker of social identity and group membership. Such a linguistic marker allowed their identity to be recognised and more widely validated, at least in their close social circles. These linguistic negotiations were not easy, as participants expressed feeling a great deal of societal rejection which rendered their identities and *linguistic becomings* unintelligible. These findings reflected the *cisnormative* (Bauer et al., 2009) and *cisgenderist* (Ansara and Hegarty, 2014) ideologies which prevail in society. These ideologies were found within the data, as they disallowed gender-diverse people from fully expressing their identities.

These ideologies (in the form of gender stereotypes, tropes, and ready-to-hand *assemblages*) were also drawn upon and re-purposed as a way to *assemble* a non-binary *becoming*. In other words, by using the familiar (material and linguistic) resources emerging from the gender binary (i.e., masculinity and femininity), participants (both online and offline) *(de/re)territorialised* new *gender becomings*. In a somewhat paradoxical sense, non-binary people in this study employed these resources to create the space in which non-binary *becomings* were possible. Therefore, non-binary territories were produced by *reterritorialising* pre-existing, pre-existing images of masculinity and femininity such as gender roles, medical discourses, and psychiatry, as well as ascribing significance to gender expressions and embodiments. As such, *becoming* non-binary had the emancipatory capacity to offer new (linguistic and material) spaces into which the self (as a project of becoming) could unfold. Furthermore, as these *gender and linguistic becomings* emerged through *affective intensities*, parameters and constraints concerning non-binary genders also began to emerge. However, I found that non-binary people in this study also rejected some of these *territorialisation*s and actively fought against them.

Many participants and forum users faced a great deal of discrimination and misgendering, based on their gender expressions, embodiment, and *linguistic becomings*, affecting their wellbeing and overall quality of life. Some individuals were more affected by misgendering than others, which was modulated by their emotional proximity as well as their intention. Nevertheless, non-binary gender identities were shown to be *(de/re)territorialised* in an ongoing way – that is, identities (and the language surrounding them) were not fixed in time and space, but were in a constant process of *becoming*.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research does not intend to be a generalised representation of non-binary people. Instead, this research examined the experiences of twenty-two non-binary-identified people in the UK as well as the language that anonymised forum users at a specific moment and time (when data was collected). Therefore, the interpretations in this study simply *represent* (and helped produce a version of) the gender identities of the participants in this study. Because language and identities are constantly evolving, this thesis cannot affirm, concretely, that non-binary people experience language and embodiment in the same way – as this would be ontologically inconsistent. Therefore, this thesis argues that the participants of this study may or may not experience their genders differently by the time this thesis was completed, as a variety of affects can influence their embodied and linguistic experiences over time.

The interview and short writing participants were mostly AFAB individuals who were, for the most part, white and held advanced degrees. However, this was not measured directly and was found during the data collection. This could be interpreted as a limitation to the study, as the experiences of AMAB individuals, people of colour, and people with lower educational attainment were largely unrepresented.

The gender expressions of the three AMAB individuals in this study were largely on the transfeminine spectrum. As such, these participants were likely to experiences discrimination based on their gender expression as a result of the societal prevalence of *trans-misogyny* (Serano, 2007). Similarly, only one participant identified as black and two identified as mixed-race. The only black person in the study also described themselves as poor, a survivor of domestic violence, and felt as though they

were not represented in non-binary communities in the UK. Future research, therefore, should ensure that samples represent a wide range of non-binary perspectives that extend beyond AFAB, white, and educated individuals. Future research should also examine how (and whether) social divisions are maintained or disrupted within these communities.

This research only focussed on the experiences of non-binary people as they navigated their identity in the English language. However, three participants spoke about negotiating their identities and attempting to use gender-neutral language in other languages. Many of them expressed feeling more comfortable indexing their identities in English, as the linguistic resources were available to them in this language. Future research should look into the experiences of bi-cultural and/or bilingual individuals in terms of their linguistic negotiations in other languages, and/or in comparison to English.

Historically, the field of psychology has examined gender diversity from a pathologising perspective, thus furthering the stigmatisation of trans and non-binary people in society. Employing a *trans-affirming* stance to research enabled me to examine gender diversity and plurality in its multiple forms and iterations – and to examine the lived experiences of non-binary identities using a compassionate, affirming, and empathetic lens, while also being methodological, analytical, and critical. The present research adds to the representation of non-binary gender identities within the social sciences, and demonstrates that, in order to capture the nuances of gender diversity, identity, and language, the field of psychology ought to adopt a *trans-affirming* stance to research.

Applications and Implications

This thesis has produced a number of novel findings about non-binary people's lived experiences that are useful for practitioners and policymakers. Informed by *action research*, which is aims to improve people's lives by developing empirically-informed actions, I will offer some practical applications and recommendations for practitioners and policymakers. I will also offer some ways in which the present research can benefit the non-binary community in the UK and internationally by demonstrating the need to understand gender as *becoming* rather than gender as *being*. Lastly, I will briefly outline a dissemination strategy aimed at ensuring that the present thesis' findings are spread widely among various audiences.

Practitioners

This thesis found that language was indeed a significant element to non-binary people's identities and sense of authenticity and wellbeing. Although I found that these *linguistic becomings* were mobile and not fixed, it is important to recognise the importance of respecting people's autonomy in naming non-binary people's gender experiences. This is particularly important as neglecting non-binary issues and language can lead to significant levels of distress among non-binary-identified people. The research has shown that social interactions in which non-binary people were misgendered – either intentionally or unintentionally – generated increased levels of emotional distress. Some participants described this pain as "a thousand paper cuts," alluding to the ways in which these *microaggressions* build up over time. It is therefore imperative to challenge and adapt the inherently cisgenderist systems embedded in language use that undermine gender diversity. For example, when it comes to indexing

gender in medical, educational, legal, and work environments, there are typically only two gender options (man/male and woman/female) in formal introductions, forms, etc. It is recommended that an array of gender, pronoun, and title options (including open response) should be included. Additionally, these linguistic adoptions should be updated on an ongoing basis, allowing clients to change their preferences periodically. Adding these options would ensure that those who do not identify solely as men or women are acknowledged and that they then feel comfortable accessing vital services such as medical treatment, social services, housing, and employment. The research findings also made clear that service providers and practitioners are in need of inclusion and diversity training that includes gender diversity and language use. Such training should be informed by this thesis, as it demonstrated the varying effects of misgendering on trans and non-binary people (particularly in the workplace). These trainings should be updated frequently to account for new *linguistic becomings.*

Policymakers

This thesis evidenced the negative repercussions that non-binary people experience due to their (lack of) legal status in the UK. Non-binary people are currently unable to legally declare their non-binary gender and are therefore not protected under the Equality Act 2010. This means that public and private entities are not legally required to recognise non-binary genders nor their linguistic markers. The present study added to the growing body of research demonstrating that non-binary people are disproportionally affected by discrimination and marginalisation – which affects their overall physical and psychological health. For instance, this thesis showed that not being legally recognised affects non-binary people's access to necessary services

(medical, legal, and financial). Many non-binary people avoid these services due to the fear of being misgendered, experiencing harassment, and/or violence. These factors contribute to their *minority stress* – their high rates of anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicidality.

This thesis therefore recommends systematically working towards changes to the legal framework that allows for recognition of non-binary people and protects them from exclusion, violence, and harassment under the Equality Act. Additionally, it is crucial that non-binary people are affirmed, validated, and properly accounted for in data collection, as this will help further their visibility and social intelligibility, thereby diminishing their emotional distress.

Non-binary Community

I believe that the present thesis can also be useful for the non-binary community at large, as well as those who are currently questioning their gender identities, in a variety of ways. This thesis showed that identities are produced by a multitude of *affective intensities* which are in constant motion, and not by linear factors or narratives. As such, the idea that gender identities can be *de/re/territorialised* by these *intensities* can help non-binary people to – metaphorically – visualise these complex processes of emergence and to make sense of them.

The present research also indicates that non-binary people may benefit from understanding genders – and the language surrounding them – as flexible, mobile, and volatile (not fixed or stable). The central message of *becoming* rather than *being* can be comforting (easing some anxieties) for many non-binary-identified or questioning people as they navigate their social identities. For instance, learning that gendered

language and embodiments are not a reflection of their inherent, true self, but a way of describing the varied, complex, and multidimensional ways of *becoming*, can provide significant psychological relief for some people. In that sense, there is no right or wrong way of *being* non-binary. *Becoming* is ongoing; it has no final destination and, thus, has emancipatory power.

Dissemination Strategy

These research findings have been presented at a number of national and international conferences including *Lavender Languages and Linguistics*, an international conference dedicated to the study of language, gender, and sexuality. Based on this research, I have also developed a number of seminars and lectures which I have delivered to undergraduate and graduate students in the UK and the US. I plan to continue presenting my research findings at these types of conferences and research-led modules.

I aim to disseminate my research at impact events (geared towards practitioners and policymakers) where members of the non-binary community, including some of my interview participants, will be given a voice and a space to share about their experiences and language use. Drawing from my participants' narratives, I also plan to produce easy-to-access guidance (in the form of a book) on the importance of gender-affirming language and social representation. These impact events and publications will be aimed at practitioners and policymakers; however, they will also be of interest to the non-binary community, as they are a form of social and linguistic representation and validation.

This research will also be developed into key journal articles. I will develop the thesis into a monograph for the *Routledge Gender and Sexualities in Psychology* series, and I will also publish a number of articles in academic journals: An article on the theoretical and empirical implications of *linguistic becomings* will be directed at *Gender and Language*; an article outlining language-related distress will be directed at *Language and Social Psychology*; and an article on methodology will be directed at *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*.

Becoming Something Else

The present research, which had a clear problem-oriented objective, made important theoretical and methodological contributions to LGBTQ+ psychology, gender studies, and sociolinguistics by applying techniques from these fields of study to non-binary populations, thus making it a truly interdisciplinary study. As such, this thesis offered an original contribution to knowledge by furthering and developing theory (*gender and linguistic becomings*), by employing innovative methodologies (corpus-based research and network visualisation), and by yielding original data. While the narratives (both offline and online) of participants in this study merely represented a snapshot of their process of *gender and linguistic becomings* at a specific time and place, I argue that the theoretical and methodological contributions that this thesis offered can (and should) be further extended and applied to a variety of research domains, topics, and praxis. My hope is that this thesis will serve as a springboard for those seeking to employ, develop, and extend these theoretical and methodological contributions, including by employing the non-binary corpus in further research. I hope this research will also contribute to the visibility of non-binary people in the social

sciences. This is especially important as non-binary people continue to fight for

recognition, validation, and equity in a highly *heteronormative*, *cisnormative* society,

particularly in the current political environment.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A (Semi-structured Interview Schedule)

1. I would like to begin by getting you to **think and talk about** your sense of **self-identity**. I think the best way for us to explore this is for you to answer the question "who am I?" in as many ways as possible.

   - What makes you you?
   - What are some of the most important aspects of your identity?

2. How do you generally define gender? With that in mind, please describe your gender(s) (if any)
   - What is your gender identity?
   - Is it different from your gender expression?
   - Is it different from how people perceive your gender?
   - Why?
   - How important is gender to you?

3. In relation to understanding your gender (*your identity as…),* what was one of the most defining moments?
   - Did you have a eureka moment?
   - How important was this moment to you?

4. How important is it to for you to disclose your gender to others? Why?

5. Are you "out"? If so, to whom have you disclosed your gender (identity as)?
   i. Family
   ii. Friends
   iii. Partner(s)
   iv. Work
   v. School
   vi. Health practitioner

6. What were some of their reactions? Were they positive, negative, or neutral? How did this make you feel?

7. Are there spaces where you feel **comfortable** talking about your gender? For example, work spaces, social spaces, health environments, family, etc.
   - Are there spaces where you feel **uncomfortable** talking about your gender?

8. Are you part of any non-binary groups either **online** or in real life?
   - How do you feel in this spaces?
   - What level of support do you think you have received? Is this important to you?

9. Have you faced any **challenges** because of your gender? If so, where and when?
    - Are there **any othe**r challenges that you have experienced because of your gender?

10. How important is the **language** that people use to **refer to you**? For example, using the correct pronouns, titles, and neutral language such as sibling, children, parent, etc.
    - Does it differ depending on the situation?
        i. Family
        ii. Friends
        iii. Partner(s)
        iv. Work
        v. School
        vi. Health professionals
    - How does it make you feel when they use the *correct* language?
    - How does it make you feel when they use *incorrect* language?

11. Have you experienced misgendering? If so, please **describe an instance** when you were misgendered.
    - If any, how did it **make you feel**? How did you **manage or cope** with the situation?

12. Have you faced any **challenges** regarding **language** use? If so, where and when?
    - How do you feel when your gender is not listed on a form?
    - How do you feel when your gender is not included in conversation/writing? For example, "boys and girls," "ladies and gentlemen," "Mr. and Ms.," etc.
    - Are there any other challenges that you have experienced? How did it make you feel?

13. Have you experienced any **prejudice** or **discrimination** because of your gender/identity? If so, would you mind sharing about your experience?

14. How confident do you feel about the **social status of non-binary people**? Do you feel that you are supported **institutionally**? i.e., health care, education, in the media, etc.

15. How do you feel about the future? Do you think the use of **language** for non-binary people will change in the near future or long-term? How?

16. This brings us to the last question. This is your opportunity to elaborate on any point that we have not yet discussed. For example, what would you like others to know about your gender(s) and language use?

17. Do you have any questions for me?

18. This brings us to the last question. This is your opportunity to elaborate on any point that we have not yet discussed. For example, what would you like others to know about your gender(s) and language use?

Appendix B (Participant Information Sheet)

1. Who is doing this study and why?

The study is being conducted by Sebastian Cordoba, a PhD candidate at De Montfort University in Leicester, as part of his doctoral studies. Sebastian's supervisors are Dr Zowie Davy (first supervisor), Prof Brian Brown, and Prof Rusi Jaspal. Sebastian Cordoba has experience working with LGBTQ people and his primary interest is the interaction between language and identity among these communities.

This study is the first of several focussed on non-binary people's language and identity. These studies aim to shed light on the social, psychological, and linguistic lives of non-binary people, as well as to educate people about gender diversity. To this day, research focussed primarily on non-binary people is limited – their experiences, language usage, and overall wellbeing is under-explored. This study, therefore, also aims to incentivise other researchers to generate more research focussed on this population.

2. What is the study about?

This study focusses on the social, linguistic, and psychological lives and experiences of non-binary people in the UK, with a special focus on language usage, identity, and wellbeing.

3. Why am I being invited to participate?

You are being invited to participate because you are a self-identified non-binary or genderqueer person over the age of 18.

4. Do I have to take part?

No. Participation is entirely voluntary. You are also not required to take part in the interview study if you prefer not to, and you will not be asked to provide any explanation for your non-participation.

5. If I agree to participate, what will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to sign a consent form if you wish to participate. If you agree to take part, you will be asked to write a short story (500 words minimum; 1,000 words maximum) about yourself or about a non-binary/genderqueer person you admire. You should write the story in the third person (e.g., he, she, they, zie, a pseudonym, etc.). Please do not use your own name, and do not disclose anything you are uncomfortable with.

Your short story may be used in a separate publication as a way to educate people about gender diversity, as well as explaining the correct ways in which non-binary people should be addressed, i.e., pronouns, titles, neutral terms, etc. This will be done by providing some examples from your short story. Please note that your story may be edited to protect your anonymity. The researcher will keep a copy, but you are able to keep one for your records as well. We recommend, however, that you do not post your writing anywhere else, as it can be traced back to you. If you wish all or part your full name to be included in this report, please let the researcher know in the consent form.

Additionally, you will be asked to participate in a one-to-one interview that will last around 60 to 80 minutes and will take place in a venue that is conveniently located for

you and the interviewer, or via Skype. The interview will be audio-recorded in full and then transcribed for analysis.

6. What if I agree to take part but then change my mind?

You can say as much or as little as you feel comfortable with at any point during the interview and in your short story. You can refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. You are also welcome to leave the interview at any point if you wish without having to provide a reason. If you change your mind after the interview, you have 48 hours to withdraw your data (either the writing sample or the recording – or both). If so, all your data will be deleted.

7. How will you protect my anonymity?

The interviewer will know your identity because you will meet face-to-face (or via Skype) at least once. However, when the interview is transcribed, your name will be changed to a pseudonym (false name). This pseudonym will be used in reports and papers that are produced from the research. The researcher will ensure that nobody will be able to discover who you are on the basis of anything written about what you have said.

Please note that your short story and the interview material will not be traceable to you and that any identifying information will be changed to protect your anonymity. However, for the short story, you will have the option to include all or part your real name if you wish to do so.

8. Will the information I give you be kept confidential?

The signed consent forms, the short story, the recordings of the interviews, and the transcripts of the interviews will all be stored securely. Electronic data will be kept on password-protected computers at De Montfort University. Hard copies of documents will be stored in locked filing cabinets in a locked room at De Montfort University. Any linked documents will be stored separately from each other. The data will be destroyed after a five-year period of storage.

9. Do I receive any benefit from taking part?

We hope that this research will lead to a better understanding of non-binary genders in the UK, as there is not a great deal of societal knowledge around gender diversity. Thus, the benefits may be in the long-term. You will also receive a £20 gift voucher.

10. What do I do if the interview discussion raises issues that make me feel uncomfortable or upset?

Please only answer those questions that you feel comfortable answering. You are under no obligation to discuss issues that you prefer not to. If you decide that you no longer wish to continue with the interview, you are free to withdraw from the study without having to provide an explanation. Moreover, you will be given a debrief sheet at the end of the interview which includes contact details of the principal investigator and supervisors, who you may wish to contact for advice and support. Additionally, a list of support organisations will be provided in the debriefing sheet. These organisations offer counselling services in the context of sexual health and well-being for trans people, as well as support groups and mentoring.

11. How has the ethical management of this project been managed?

The study has been reviewed by the ethics committee for the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences at De Montfort University. Their job is to ensure that the rights, safety, dignity, and well-being of research participants are maintained. A positive review has been provided by the ethics committee.

12. What if something goes wrong? Who can I complain to?

If you have a complaint regarding anything to do with this evaluation, you can initially approach the principal investigator Sebastian Cordoba: p16164649@my365.dmu.ac.uk Tel: +44 (0)7955 801916. If this achieves no satisfactory outcome, you should then contact the Administrator for the Faculty Research Ethics Committee: Faculty Research Ethics Committee, Faculty of Health & Life Sciences, De Montfort University; 1.25 Edith Murphy House, The Gateway, Leicester, LE1 9BH: hlsfro@dmu.ac.uk, Tel: +44 (0)116 250 6122 / +44 (0)116 257 7775.

13. I have more questions that I'd like to ask before agreeing to participate.

Sebastian Cordoba is happy to have a longer discussion about the study and to answer any questions you might have. If you would like to schedule such a debriefing session, please contact him using the contact details listed below.

Many thanks for considering participation in this study. If you do feel you wish to take part, please retain a copy of this form for reference.

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Gender Non-binary Language: INTERVIEW   Sebastian Cordoba

Please read these items and **initial** the box to show you have read, understood and agree each item.

- I confirm that I have read the the information sheet [Version 2. February 2017]. I understand that this research is being conducted to learn more about non-binary genders in terms of language, identity, and wellbeing.

- I am over 18 years of age and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

- The researcher has offered to answer any questions concerning the study, and I have been provided with contact details from the researcher.
- I have been informed that I may withdraw from participation without prejudice or penalty within 48 hours of interview.
- I understand that I will be fully protected in accordance with the Data Protection Act of 1998 and in compliance with *British Psychological Society* ethical guidelines. My data will be safely stored until they are securely destroyed.
- I can confirm that I have received a gift voucher worth £20.

INTERVIEW
- I acknowledge that the researcher has outlined the interview to me, to my satisfaction.

- I am aware that the interview will be audio-recorded and that a full transcript will be produced.

- I agree that any of the data I provide during the interview may be used for publication in academic journals. I understand that in case the data are used for publication, they will be kept until five years after the article has been published, and then destroyed.
- I understand that my name and any personal details will be anonymised in any report concerning the interview part of this study.

_____   _____   _____
Print name of participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Print name of person taking consent   Date   Signature

Please read these items and **initial** the box to show you have read, understood and agree each item.

- I confirm that I have read the the information sheet [Version 2. February 2017]. I understand that this research is being conducted to learn more about non-binary genders in terms of language, identity, and wellbeing.

- I am over 18 years of age and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

- I have had the opportunity to consider the information. The researcher has offered to answer any questions concerning the study, and I have been provided with contact details from the researcher.
- I have been informed that I may withdraw from participation without prejudice or penalty within 48 hours of interview.
- I understand that I will be fully protected in accordance with the Data Protection Act of 1998 and in compliance with *British Psychological Society* ethical guidelines. My data will be safely stored until they are securely destroyed.
- I can confirm that I have received a gift voucher worth £20.

SHORT STORY
- I acknowledge that the researcher has explained the short story aspect of the study, to my satisfaction.

- I am aware that the researcher will keep a copy of my short story.

- I agree that my short story may be used for publication in academic journals. I understand that in case the short story is for publication, it will be kept until five years after the article has been published, and then destroyed.
- I understand my short story may be edited to protect my identity.

- I understand that my name will be anonymised in any report concerning the short stories. However, I understand that I have the option to use my real name for the short stories if I wish to do so.
- If you would like consent to use your **real name** for the short stories, please initial here.
  If you would like to use your real name, please write it as you would like it to appear in the short stories section:

_____   _____   _____
Print name of participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Print name of person taking consent   Date   Signature

Appendix D (Debrief Sheet)

Thank you for your participation in our study. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

The aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of the experience of identifying as non-binary. Non-binary people are consistently under-researched within the social sciences and they are poorly represented. Therefore, this research explores the social implications of living in a binary society, the challenges non-binary people face, and the ways in which language usage and identity might be related.

Your interviews will be transcribed and analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods with a tool called Language Corpora, as well as using discourse analysis techniques. The results will be part of my PhD thesis and may be transcribed for academic publication and disseminated to a broader academic community and possibly to policy-makers.

The short story you have provided may be used in a separate publication as a way to educate people about gender diversity, as well as explaining the correct ways in which non-binary people should be addressed, i.e., pronouns, titles, neutral terms, etc. This will be done by providing some examples from your short story. Please note that your story may be edited to protect your anonymity.

Your details will be kept confidential at all times, maintaining complete anonymity. Raw data will be kept in a locked cabinet and on password-protected computers, which will only be accessible to the principal investigator and his supervisors. In the case of the data being used for academic publication, materials may be kept until five years have passed from the date of publication.

If you have been affected by any of the issues raised in the interview and would like to talk to someone in confidence about them, you may wish to contact CliniQ an organisation that offers counselling services in the context of sexual health and well-being, as well as GenderedIntelligence, which provides support groups and mentoring. Their details are listed below:

CliniQ 56 Dean St, London W1D 6AQ Tel: 020 3315 6699 Website: www.cliniq.org.uk **Opening times:** Wednesdays 5:30-7:30pm	**GenderedIntelligence** VAI, 200a Pentonville Road, London N1 9JP Tel: 0207 832 5848 Website: www.genderedintelligence.co.uk **Opening times:** Monday – Friday 9:00-6:00pm

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Appendix E (Full List of Collocations)

gender	trans	transgender	nonbinary	female
fine	cis	androgyne	bigendered	male
construct	woman	christian	transition	declare
identity	women	people	entering	presentation
certificate		transsexuals	binary	human
difference		woman	enter	body
identify		bigender	identify	present
confuse		student	transitioned	mostly
neutral		black	mtf	biologically
birth		being	gender	prefer
sex		community		bear
do				fully
fluid				identify
sexuality				
live				
confusing				
role				
think				
dysphoria				
more				
talk				
nonbinary				
expression				
perception				
non-conforming				
identify				
part				
your				
question				

male	dysphoria	binary	identity	transition
female	suffer	nonbinary	research	begin
body	body	trans	gender	option
birth	trigger	system	consistent	want
everything	cowardice	transfolk	expression	full
present	alleviate		orientation	nonbinary
identify	depression		person	concentration
neither	power		struggle	to
bear	deal		clinic	hormone

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			base	go
	gender		did	change
	spike		sense	
			basis	
			disorder	
			crisis	
			woman	
			sexuality	

feminine	hate	LGBT	feel	gay
masculine		orlando	home	lesbian
neutral		slaughter	good	bisexual
present		community	comfortable	straight
side			i	anti
look			free	marriage
			need	man
			me	call
			think	basher
			see	guy
			freak	
			right	
			woman	
			uncomfortable	
			way	

self	hormone	masculine	bathroom	HRT
of	powerful	feminine	room	on
conscious	therapy	present	bill	dose
surround	surgery		unisex	dosage
esteem	transition		nongendered	srs
sense	treatment		use	start
TRUE	full		access	low
destruct	be		wars	surgery
perception			bills	go
inner			lock	cease
deception			public	be

cis	sex	pronoun	woman	hell
woman	money	go	man	heaven
transwomen	experience	name	color	lot
	birth	preferred	transphobia	go
	biological	use	penis	break
	determine	neutral	attract	go
	sexuality	correct	trans	

basis	cute
gender	live
opposite	room
birth	restroom
base	clothes
worker	jean
assign	dress
sell	cis
drive	look
characteristic	clothing
good	transgender
trafficking	identify
physical	top
	feel
	trans
	girl
	life
	identity

MTF	fuck	transsexual	feeling	surgery
ftm		pathway	thought	top
way			hurt	hormone
nonbinary			base	date
androgyne			stronger	reassignment
			unblocked	bottom
				undergo
				complication
				therapy
				hrt

hurt	hair	girl	guy	discrimination
feeling	nail	boy	mode	basis
yourself	removal	guy	hair	people
	guy	look	girl	harassment
	long	tendencies	present	prohibit
	facial	scouts	clothes	violence
	loss	more	guy	survey
	cut	whipping	more	base
	grow	danish	gay	of
	body	woman		case
	makeup			face
	short			
	skin			

accept	transitioning	lesbian	fear	queer
understand	medically	transwomen	motivator	word
love		gay	weakness	
embrace		lipstick	overcome	
express		butch	face	
			irrational	
			anxiety	
			suck	
			anger	

people	restroom	androgyne	genderqueer	happy
color	room	MTF		unhappy
discrimination	restroom			make
discriminate	public			birthday
lot	woman			today
talk	man			comfortable
its	use			foot
life				
transgender				
group				
trans				
tough				
most				
interact				
perception				
other				
many				
do				
deal				
have				
general				
majority				
be				
world				
problem				

androgynous	love	truth	wear	society
achieve	accept	absolute	sometimes	monster
present	respect	acceptance	plug	rule
slightly	cherish	live	clothes	whole
she	who	hard	bra	general
	feel	know	dress	of
	one		skirt	define

| hear | makeup | rest |
| clothes | | |

Appendix F (Full list of Co-collocations)

gender	trans	transgender	nonbinary
identity	cis	androgyne	transition
identify	woman	people	binary
neutral		woman	identify
birth		community	mtf
sex			gender
do			
sexuality			
live			
think			
dysphoria			
more			
talk			
nonbinary			
expression			
perception			

female	male	dysphoria	binary
male	female	body	nonbinary
body	body	deal	trans
present	birth	gender	
bear	present		
identify	identify		
	bear		

identity	transition	feminine	LGBT
gender	full	masculine	community
expression	nonbinary	neutral	
base	hormone	present	
sense	go	look	
basis			
woman			
sexuality			

feel	gay	self	hormone
good	lesbian	sense	therapy
comfortable	man	perception	surgery
think	guy		transition
woman			full
way			be

masculine	bathroom	HRT	cis

feminine	room	surgery	woman
present	use	go	transwomen
	public	be	

sex	pronoun	woman	hell
birth	go	man	lot
sexuality	use	color	go
basis	neutral	trans	
gender		live	
birth		room	
base		restroom	
good		clothes	
		dress	
		cis	
		look	
		transgender	
		identify	
		top	
		feel	
		trans	
		girl	
		life	
		identity	

MTF	feeling	surgery	hurt
way	hurt	top	feeling
nonbinary	base	hormone	
androgyne		therapy	
		HRT	

hair	girl	guy	discrimination
guy	guy	hair	basis
body	look	girl	people
makeup	more	present	base
	woman	clothes	face
		more	
		gay	

accept	lesbian	fear	people
love	transwomen	face	color
	gay		discrimination
			lot
			talk
			life

			transgender
			trans
			perception
			do
			deal
			general
			be
restroom	**androgyne**	**happy**	**androgynous**
room	MTF	comfortable	present
restroom			
public			
woman			
man			
use			
love	**truth**	**wear**	**society**
accept	live	clothes	general
feel		dress	
clothes		makeup	

The End (Mon, 6 Jan 2020)