**Breaking the Binary:**

**Gender Identity Communication of Nonbinary Individuals in Türkiye**

by

Şansal Güngör Gümüşpala

Bachelor of Arts, Middle East Technical University, 2020

Bachelor of Science, Middle East Technical University, 2021

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the Department of Sociology



University of Victoria



We acknowledge and respect the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

**Breaking the Binary:**
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**Abstract**

This qualitative study explores nonbinary individuals' experiences with communicating gender by asking how they, while predominantly speaking Turkish and living in Türkiye, try to communicate to other people that they are nonbinary. Turkish-speaking individuals who do not identify with binary genders employ various communication strategies, offering valuable insights into the relationship between gender and language.

Drawing on 13 in-depth interviews with nonbinary people living in Türkiye, this research offers three key findings. First, Turkish-speaking nonbinary people suffer less from grammar-based challenges and more from semantic challenges when communicating their identities because Turkish is a grammatically gender-neutral language. Second, participants discuss different strategies they use to express their nonbinary identity, such as borrowing words from other languages and using humor to smooth over challenging conversations. They also frequently take on the role of educating others about gender-related terms and concepts. Finally, participants stress that communicating their gender identity goes beyond simply sharing; it's about being acknowledged and accepted. Therefore, their methods of expression shift depending on the social context, societal expectations, and the availability of supportive resources. Taken together, these findings reveal how the Turkish language, along with cisheterosexual norms and expectations, shape both the construction and expression of gender identity. This research offers a unique look at the relationship between society's use of language and the impact of language on society, while taking into account the influence of traditions and cultural norms.

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**Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to the participants of this research. Without your time, openness, and willingness to contribute, this project would not have been possible. Your insights and experiences have been invaluable, and I am truly grateful for your collaboration.

To my supervisory committee, Aaron Devor and Katelin Albert, thank you for your guidance, feedback, and unwavering support. Your expertise and encouragement have shaped this thesis in more ways than I can express, and I feel incredibly fortunate to have had you both in this process.

Thank you, Ecem and Ege, for supporting me through this process and introducing me to UniKuir, which has meant the world to me. Thanks you, Midori and Ken, for your hospitality and making me feel welcome. I am also grateful to my friends who have made Victoria feel like home and who have supported me over these three years with incredible food and study sessions: Cédric, Eli, Rachel, Abby, Fatemeh, Mariia, Skylar, Yasmeen, Lucía, Yiwen, and my fluffy friend, Lucy. To Sarah, Kaveh, and Yankı, thank you, my friends, for providing both emotional and academic support for my writing.

To my dear friends Dilara, Melis, Şeyma, Onur, Sertaç, Elvan, Dilan, Vuslat, and my dear Kemal, thank you for always encouraging me to continue my research. And to Salih, Satı, Aylin, Bengisu, and Nalin, my "group for creating a scene," thank you for always being there for me, I felt your support all the time even from the other side of the world. Aşkkuşum, thank you for your never-ending support and for making sure that I applied to UVic.

To my mum, thank you for your endless love and encouragement. Your belief in me has been my greatest source of strength. To my dear sibling, Cansu, thank you for always being there, for your support, and for reminding me to stay grounded. To my brother in spirit, Uğur, thank you for always being by my side and for being my chosen family. Finally, to my dearest partner, Cameron, thank you for your patience, love, and constant reassurance. You have been my biggest support through this process, and I couldn't have done it without you.

## Introduction

In December 2020, the Advertisement Board within the Ministry of Trade decided that LGBTQ+ and rainbow-themed products should only be offered for sale on e-commerce sites with the warning phrase "+18" (Milton, 2020). In September 2023, Turkish Education Minister Yusuf Tekin announced the introduction of an optional class for grade school curriculum titled, "The Family in Turkish Society," aimed at combating "LGBT values" in the school curriculum (Buyuk, 2023).

These legal actions and bans are just a few examples of the State's decreasing tolerance toward the LGBTQ+ communities in Türkiye. The attitudes toward LGBTQ+ persons by both state and society have several effects on policies that are created, and in return, these attitudes are shaped by policies and state actions in a vicious cycle, resulting in further alienation and exclusion of marginalized individuals (Lewis et al., 2017; Yılmaz & Göçmen, 2016). Another example of these policy changes is the withdrawal (July 1st, 2021) of the Turkish government from the Istanbul Convention, a human rights treaty of the Council of Europe against violence against women and domestic violence that had been previously ratified by Türkiye in 2012. According to Turkish officials, this withdrawal is due to a section of the Istanbul Convention that addresses sexual orientation and gender identity, which is seen as incompatible with Türkiye's "family values." With this change, LGBTQ+ individuals living in Türkiye have become more vulnerable to domestic violence (Bouscaren, 2021).

New laws and legal actions in Türkiye continue to complicate and negatively affect the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals. LGBTQ+ people are vulnerable to social isolation, physical abuse, and violence that may even escalate to acts of homicide or suicide (Yenilmez, 2021). Increasing social recognition accompanied by studies and projects is essential because LGBTQ+ recognition and visibility play a significant role in changing people's attitudes and

state laws, which, in turn, will improve the living conditions of LGBTQ+ people (Acconcia et al., 2024; Altay, 2022).

With this said, academic literature in Türkiye on topics of LGBTQ+ people is mainly conducted by and for cisgender heterosexual people (Kalanlar, 2017; Mete & Özerdoğan, 2019). This tends to push LGBTQ+ perspectives to the margins and prioritize cisheteronormative points of view. Studies conducted about understanding how public attitudes affect public policies may help to solve the problems mentioned above in institutions and may reduce hate and discriminatory attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ communities. However, few studies have been conducted that explore the first-hand experiences of sexual and gender minorities or focus on their daily life problems or needs (Engin, 2015; Koruyucu, 2017; Taşkın et al., 2022).

In Türkiye, one minority group that has been studied very little is nonbinary persons, those individuals whose identities fall outside of binary gender categorizations. Turkish law, though binary sex marker change is possible (Sunata et al., 2022), considers individuals to be male or female according to the sex on their birth certificate. This means that non-binary genders are not recognized in Turkish law. Conducting everyday life and maintaining daily interactions are challenging with binary gendered norms, traditions, and use of space. In order to make visible the struggles and problems faced by nonbinary people in Türkiye, collecting the first-hand experiences of nonbinary individuals is essential. So, with this in mind, I investigated what techniques are used by nonbinary people in Türkiye to convey their gender identities to others. This work, which conveys the relationship between language, traditional norms, and nonbinary gender identities, aims to increase the visibility of this group, providing a better understanding of the concerns they experience and shedding light on their daily interactions.

People's experiences concerning their gender, especially around issues of gender inequality and discrimination, have been studied in Türkiye for a long time (Dedeoğlu & Elveren, 2015; Gülay & Kardam, 2004; Palaz, 2002); however, discussions of identities that do not conform to the gender binary are relatively new (Apalı et al., 2020; Toraman, 2024; Yılmaz & Göçmen, 2016). Definitions that take gender identity as unchanging exclude many people's experiences. Taking the view of queer critics, one does not have to experience gender as a static or a taken-for-granted identity (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Nonbinary people may perceive and experience gender in a dynamic, fluid, and oscillating manner or do not consider their experiences to be gendered at all (M. Galupo et al., 2016).

How individuals develop ways to perceive and understand the world is based on their interactions with their social surroundings and is necessarily intimately related to language (Bourdieu, 1972). In general, language (from naming, words, slang, grammar, or the absence of vocabulary) and its usage has an impact on nonbinary people's invisibility, unrecognition, and unintelligibility. In the Turkish language, the grammar used is gender-neutral, as it does not use gendered pronouns or have gendered grammar. Despite the gender-neutral structure of language, Turkish society continues to uphold strict norms and expectations related to gender roles in the language.

Furthermore, there is no exact translation of the term nonbinary in Turkish. It is possible that this might shape one's sense of belonging, sense of self, how they interact with others, and how self-identification works differently across cultural boundaries. Still, with the impact of globalization, some nongovernmental organizations and queer communities have been spreading the use of the English term "nonbinary" as an identity label. Given the intersection of Türkiye's binary gender traditions and the gender-neutral character of the Turkish language, I focus on nonbinary individuals' gender communications with others in their everyday interactions. Here, communication of one's nonbinary identity is not limited to

verbal expressions; it can include various forms, such as changing one's name or altering appearance through clothing or hairstyle.

My broader aim in this study is to reflect global gender issues in relation to Turkish culture and language and broaden the literature about the relationship between language and gender. In the English-speaking world, studies concerning nonbinary people are becoming more common (Darwin, 2020; M. P. Galupo et al., 2021). However, in Türkiye, even though there is a handful of studies that have incidentally included nonbinary people (Köylü & Güzel, 2021; Önder, 2021), only one study has so far been conducted concerning specifically nonbinary people, their issues and their experiences (Toraman, 2024).

More steps need to be taken in order to fill this knowledge gap. With the Turkish translation of my study, I aim to work with LGBTQ+ organizations to support nonbinary individuals and modify the common discourse around nonbinary issues. I believe that this work is important in terms of conveying the experiences of nonbinary people living in Türkiye and mapping their common experiences and identity negotiations in daily life. This is important to increase the visibility of nonbinary people, raise their voices, and show that they are not alone.

**Research Question**

The intent of the proposed qualitative study is to understand the life experiences of Turkish nonbinary individuals focusing on their communication in Türkiye by utilizing symbolic interactionism and queer theory. My main research question is:

> How do nonbinary people, predominantly speaking Turkish and living in Türkiye, try to communicate to other people that they are nonbinary?

To answer my main research question, I will use these attendant questions to guide my investigations:

- In what ways does the Turkish language affect nonbinary individuals in expressing their gender identity?
- What verbal and nonverbal strategies do nonbinary individuals use to express their gender identity? Are there any challenges associated with these strategies?
- How, and in what contexts, do nonbinary individuals in Türkiye express their gender identity to others?

**Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity**

My lived experiences have shaped how I view the world and conduct research, and I begin my positionality statement by sharing a glimpse of my past. While I was working on my findings, I was in my hometown in Türkiye for two months and read some of my old diaries. To my surprise, even though I know gender and language are an interest of mine, I was not expecting to find a personal reflection about these issues in my old diaries. I translated the entry from Turkish to English to quote a couple of sentences from the beginning of my diary entry I wrote in June 2015:

> 'My Coming Out Story; Not Right out of the closet!' [originally in English] I think this is an expression that has no Turkish equivalent. As we know, we live in a difficult country, and I am sure that no country is easy; after all, we live with people. Before I tell the story of my 'release,' I would like to talk about how long and how I stayed inside and what I did inside.

After this beginning, for two pages, I reflected on my childhood, my gender and sexuality, and the norms around them in Türkiye. Then, I describe my first coming out, a coming out from which I withdrew because of the backlash. At that time, I was using some words in English because I did not know the Turkish equivalent word *"açılmak"* (to open up), even though I had queer friends and was in an LGBTQ+ community. I include this in my positionality statement to show that thinking and reflecting about gender communications,

coming out processes, the way people express it, and the languages one uses were, and still are, some of my biggest centers of attention and also part of my personal life and growth. Moreover, as a nonbinary person whose main language is Turkish, who has been living in an English-speaking country for three years, and who learns French through their also nonbinary partner, I am experiencing how language and the degree of embedded gender in language impact my everyday life and my self-expression. While this provides great insights, it also makes me biased, and to mitigate this throughout this research, I focus on staying connected to my interview data to ensure it guides my analysis and discussions.

I understand reflexivity as a dialectic among the researcher, the research process, and the analysis (Jordan & Yeomans, 1995). Therefore, to increase my reflexivity and awareness of my positionality, I benefited from queer intersectionality theories (Browne & Nash, 2010). Also, I try to situate my research in a broader social structural and historical materialist context. My sociological research has been greatly influenced by my undergraduate philosophy training, where I focused particularly on intersectionality, queer theory, and conflict theory. This foundation has shaped my commitment to a social constructivist, qualitative approach in my research.

As I expressed, concerning my positionality in this study, I have a dual position. I am not only an outsider as a researcher studying in the West, but also an insider as a nonbinary person who grew up in Türkiye. I am using my own experiences as a starting point because I think my insider positionality is providing me with valuable insights. However, since I started this research, many things have changed in Türkiye: a devastating earthquake happened, policies related to LGBTQ+ and women have deteriorated, attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people have gotten worse, and even the country's name changed from Turkey to Türkiye. I secondhand witnessed all these from the other side of the world. I learned about them from family, friends, and newspapers' eyes and only being able to guess the atmosphere. With this

said, being in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, working with many trans and nonbinary people from different cultural backgrounds and witnessing nonbinary people communicating their gender using English and French widened my understanding of the relationship between language and (trans)gender.

As Dasgupta (2013) points out, given the inner and outer dynamics of the researcher, my position was both a challenge because I tried to pay particular attention to my biases, and it was also an advantage since my position allowed me to build a better rapport with my participants and gain insider insights into the issues they faced and their coping strategies. In short, I believe that my lived experiences and insights on the lack of LGBTQ+ visibility and misrepresentation issues that nonbinary people face in Türkiye helped me in conducting this research.

## Context and Literature Review

### Language, Gender, and Communication

Gendered language has long been a subject of critique. Second-wave feminists and binary trans people have been questioning and challenging the ways in which language reinforces gender structures and norms. Thus, gender and sexuality have been a core part of linguistics, highlighting the links between language, gender, and power. Critical analyses of power dynamics and ideologies are an essential part of understanding and challenging the notion of "common sense" and essentialist positions in the studies of language and society (Angouri, 2021).

Most research in language and gender studies, excluding formal linguistics that focuses primarily on language elements like grammatical gender or pronouns, falls under sociocultural linguistic scholarship (Litosseliti, 2021). This approach examines the social contexts, relationships, and effects related to language use rather than just its structural features. It is deeply related to sociology and many other disciplines, such as psychology, anthropology, and communication studies, in that they share similar interests in understanding social structures, power dynamics, and human interactions. One of the most influential works on these issues was Robin Lakoff's "Language and Woman's Place" (1973), which showed how language both shapes, and is shaped by, societal norms and power structures, particularly around gender. While Lakoff was homogenizing all women in one group, all men in another in a binary way, as a product of her time, her work emphasized that women's speech can be differentiated and distinguished from men's speech in many ways, largely a product of social status and power dynamics.

Kira Hall (2014) argued that three major theoretical developments in the field of language and gender research in the 1990s brought non-normative identities into mainstream academic discussions. First, was the development of the concept of "communities of

practice" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992), which reframed how one understands language and gender within social groups. Second, was the rise of ideological approaches that analyze the relationship between language and gender, emphasizing that linguistic expression is shaped by broader social ideologies. The last major development she pointed out was the emergence of queer linguistics, which focuses on the notion of performativity and fluidity, and which critiques rigid gender roles and language norms.

Language should be understood not just as static or textual, but as a historically evolving, practical human activity (Savcı, 2021). Understanding language as a historical and practical process reveals how messages are received and who has access to language. By focusing on translation as a social practice, the methodology helps to expose how gender and sexuality intersect with other social categories such as race, ethnicity, language, and colonial history. Translation reveals how nonnormative identities are constructed differently depending on the intersecting structures of power in different cultural and linguistic settings.

The way language is used determines what is deemed to be normal and acceptable and what is not deemed to be normal and hence not acceptable. This demarcation can be found in everyday life interactions; for example, in announcements, people often start with "ladies and gentlemen," and this binary categorization sets the norms. The English language contains many such fundamental structures that are founded on binary gendered assumptions (Shuster & Lamont, 2019).

The concept of gender-fair language encompasses both gender-neutral and gender-inclusive approaches. The gender-neutral language aims to eliminate gender-specific references, such as using "firefighter" instead of "fireman" in English. Gender-inclusive language strives to represent all genders. In French, for instance, a dot (.) is inserted to refer both to masculine and feminine forms, thereby acknowledging all genders, like *intelligent.e* (Dilmen, 2023; Hord, 2016; Lardelli, 2023)

The concept of "coming out" has become a part of a personal narrative, particularly within LGBTQ+ communities. Coming out in this context involves disclosing one's sexual or gender identity and often marks a significant moment in one's life. Coming out is considered not just a disclosure of sexuality or gender identity that is different from the dominant norm in society but an act that establishes, creates, and affirms a new self-identity (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013).

**Studies on Non-Binary Gender Identity**

Because categorizations and definitions change and are fluid over time and place, I would like to make terminological clarifications and definitions of the concepts that I use in this thesis. The term nonbinary can have different connotations. According to Allen (2020), nonbinary gender identity is just one of the terms used to describe people who do not define themselves as strictly women or strictly men, who experience a gender identity between the two, or outside of both. Non-binary individuals may also describe their gender identity in other terms such as gender-fluid, agender, bigender, or with a completely different label.

Non-binary people are sometimes included in the broader category of transgender or trans. This marks an important shift, in that transgender identity has historically been often thought of as a transition from one side to the other within the binary gender system (Thorne et al., 2019). The meaning and use of the word transgender is complicated and controversial. According to Thorne et al. (2023), in Western academic literature, gender identities that are not in the binary system are now discussed under the transgender identity spectrum. With this said, Darwin, (2020) in the United States, highlights that no such unified "transgender community" exists. Her analysis shows that nonbinary people often feel compelled to label themselves as transgender for reasons like intelligibility, even though this doesn't completely match their experiences.

Allen et al., (2020) explain that although, by definition, all nonbinary people are considered transgender because their gender does not align with their assigned birth sex, there is no consensus among all nonbinary people about identifying as transgender. The reasons are varied in that people may locate the word “transgender” in the binary system, or people may experience exclusion or even rejection from transgender communities that are focused on binary identities. It may also be the case that people may connect the word “transgender” with specific life preferences or even political beliefs that may not fit them.

Monro (2019) elaborates on different theories currently used by researchers and argues that studies about nonbinary people, which should consider different social forces, such as economic and political, are needed to understand what shapes identity and constitutes what is socially possible in any given context. Positioning oneself outside the binary gender system still involves difficulties in one’s identity being accepted by society. In their literature review article, Matsuno & Budge (2017) explain that nonbinary people in the United States face several challenges in a society structured around binary gender identities, experience more psychological distress, and are at higher risk for suicide.

Fiani and Han (2018) focus on some of the challenges that binary and nonbinary transgender and gender non-conforming adults face in the United States. They categorize the challenges of nonbinary people under three themes. Personal challenges include a lack of information and relatable examples of experiences as a frame of reference. Interpersonal challenges include not being accepted with their nonbinary identities and exclusion from binary transgender communities. Finally, systemic challenges include dealing and interacting with cisnormative society, implicit binarism, and lack of media representation and recognition. Chetkovich (2019) argues that some of these struggles, especially systemic challenges, can be caused by gender panics and anxieties among cisgender people. These

anxieties arise when gender non-conforming people might be included in gender-segregated spaces, such as sports events and public restrooms.

**Literature in Türkiye**

Despite the rising worldwide popularity in researching 2S/LGBTQIA+ issues and topics, LGBTQ+ studies in Türkiye are still at an early stage. For example, the first piece of literature published on nonbinary issues was by Tar  in 2021. Although there were no direct anti-gay or anti-trans laws in the history of either the Ottoman Empire or today's Turkish Republic, discrimination against LGBTQ+ people became particularly palpable with the adoption of European political concepts such as the nation, the nation-state, and civil marriage during the founding years of the Republic (Ze'evi, 2006). This discrimination was further intensified by the impact of the neoliberal Islamic government of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) after the 2000s (Engin, 2015). This does not mean that binary gender expectations and heterosexist norms did not exist before then.

People who lived outside the binary gender norms always existed in both the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. In earlier times, they had different names. It is possible to understand from the articles and books written about z*enne* (Mansbridge, 2017) and *köçek* (Koç Keskin, 2013) that there were people living outside of the traditional binary gender system in the Ottoman Empire. The concept of "*zenne*" was used in a certain type of traditional Ottoman theater and meant that male actors appeared on the stage as women (Arat, 2016). However, the meaning of the term shifted, and today, *zenne* is the name for male belly dancers with very feminine attributes.

People called *köçek* were assigned males at birth and were taken on by traditional dance companies at the age of seven or eight. They were trained to perform exclusively for male audiences in feminine attire. A contemporary understanding of *köçek* can be explained as a fluid identity independent of normative categories in that it blurs the boundaries between

genders (Barutçu, 2021). Transitioning from boyhood to an adult androgynous expression and performance, these dancers often used two names even in their non-performing daily lives: one masculine and the other feminine (Arvas, 2021). Moreover, during their performances, k*öçek*, unlike the *zennes*, continue to benefit from the power attributed to masculinity by the patriarchal system, thanks to their "masculine" features (such as mustache, beard, belly) that also create gender confusion with contrasting gender elements (Barutçu, 2020).

The production and translations of academic writings, articles, and essays concerning LGBTQ+ topics in Turkish literature have increased heavily in the 2010s (Ul, 2021). Still, some of the articles existing in the Turkish literature (Biçmen & Bekiroğulları, 2014; Zengin Taş, 2019) homogenize gender identities and sexual orientation-related experiences and merge the individual or particular group experiences as a homogeneous identity. Combining the experiences of diverse groups into a single category without accounting for, or overlooking, diversity within the group might lead to the missing of different needs and experiences (Kneale et al., 2019; Yenilmez, 2021). Although many people of varying gender identities and orientations come together in the struggle for rights in Türkiye, researchers need to approach these studies carefully and produce more nuanced works since different identity groups have different experiences and needs.

In Türkiye, however, there is very limited research that directly addresses the problems faced by nonbinary people. The first Turkish publication centered on nonbinary individuals was the thematic brochure (Tar, 2021) published by the Kaos GL (Kaos Gay and Lesbian Cultural Research and Solidarity Association), which is one of the oldest and largest LGBT rights organizations in Türkiye. A large portion of the brochure tackles frequently asked questions about nonbinary people. One of the questions they address is regarding the influence of the West. This issue is frequently asked to LGBTQ+ individuals in Türkiye,

especially towards identities such as nonbinary that do not have a direct translation: “Even the concept is in English, is ‘nonbinary’ a Western imitator?” The answer follows: “... For example, the word heterosexual is a word that has been passed into our language from English. While not suggesting that heterosexuality is a Western imitation, why should we argue that being non-binary or LGBTI+ is a Western imitation, right?” (Tar, 2021, pp. 15, my own translation) This questioning also aligns with the government’s political discourse that LGBTQ+ people and requests for their rights are imported ideologies that aim to corrupt traditional family values (Engin, 2015; Zengin, 2016).

With this said, the experiences of people who define themselves under the nonbinary umbrella can be seen in different LGBTQ+ studies. Among the 633 participants in Kaos GL’s 2021 study, which investigated the situation of LGBTI+ individuals in the Turkish private sector, 57 people included themselves in the nonbinary umbrella (Köylü & Güzel, 2021). The research concluded that nonbinary people in Türkiye reported difficulties finding a job because of their gender identity and that they are discriminated against in the workplace when they could get jobs.

In Turkish, gender that is expressed in language can be analyzed at three levels (Göçtü & Kır, 2014). Grammatically, Turkish lacks gendered pronouns and nouns and gendered grammatical rules. Semantically, gender is sometimes specified by adding terms like “erkek” (male) or “kadın” (female), though gendered affixes are rare compared to English. Pragmatically, because of culture and socialization, the mannerisms and word choices of men and women might change.

Despite the absence of explicit grammatical gender in Turkish, the literature demonstrates that language usage is heavily shaped by societal gender roles and cultural expectations around binary gender, creating a cycle in which the language conveys and fortifies gendered cultural norms. For example, Güden (2006) explores the use of sexist

language in Turkish and its impact on perceptions of women. She argues that language serves ideological purposes and that sexism in language mirrors sexism in society. Her research shows how gendered terms in Turkish contribute to the patriarchal ideology that uses language to marginalize women in public spaces. She argues that although changing sexist language is a long and challenging process, it is crucial to start somewhere, such as replacing entrenched gendered terms (e.g., "*işadamı*" (businessmen) with "*iş insanı*" (businessperson)) and avoiding sexist phrases (p. 30).

On a similar line, Berk Yilmaz (2019) explores how gender and sexist role perceptions in society are reflected through language, specifically through proverbs and idioms. She shows that women are frequently mentioned in Turkish proverbs and idioms but often in a negative context, which highlights the deeply rooted gender bias present in cultural language. She argues that the content of these everyday idioms and proverbs reveals the subconscious of the dominant culture and uncovers the societal and cultural expectations of gender roles for men and women. Her analysis highlights how societal norms and expectations are deeply embedded in the way people speak, reinforcing rigid gender roles. Violating these roles often results in social ostracism or punishment. Women are often subjected to passive roles, such as being seen as delicate or dependent, while men are expected to take on active roles, like providing for the household.

In Türkiye, discussions around gender-inclusive language predominantly focus on the inclusion of women, and there are almost no discussions about the inclusion of non-binary individuals except a few LGBTQ+ organizations efforts like KaosGL. In one of the few studies, Alan & Okyayuz (2022) explain the challenges translators face in representing queer identities in audiovisual translation when translating from English to Turkish. According to them, the main challenge is translating English binary pronouns into the grammatically gender-neutral Turkish. While English has widely recognized the use of "they" as a pronoun

for individuals outside the gender binary as an alternative to she/he, Turkish lacks a culturally accepted equivalent for indicating non-binary identities due to its syntax-wise gender-neutral structure. Their analysis shows that the Turkish translation of the audiovisual media often fails to acknowledge the character's queerness and gender nonconforming aspects, and this erases their queer and nonbinary visibility.

In Türkiye, people who identify their gender experiences outside of binary gender categories use different terms to explain their gender. With the newly introduced concepts and terminology, mainly from English sources, people who know English may find a name for their experience to think about and define themselves. Turkish LGBTQ+ people appropriate English terms to identify themselves, such as *kuir* for queer and *lezbiyen* for lesbian, and some LGBTQ+ organizations have started to use the term *na(n)baynari*, which is the Turkish way to write nonbinary (Gedizlioğlu, 2020).

Nevertheless, apart from some solidarity groups, the use of these terms is not yet widespread in the Turkish social context. Based on my personal observations and involvement, those who use and know these terms tend to be LGBTQ+ people themselves who had an opportunity to be involved with solidarity organizations, or who know English well enough to be able to research their gender experiences online. There is little to no recognition of these terms and people in the media and very few academic studies in Türkiye; thus, people who do not know English face challenges finding enough resources or representation to relate to and understand their own gender identities.

Alternatively, my involvement with LGBTQ+ activism in Ankara, Istanbul, and Antalya made me realize that people have been using the term *akışkan*, which translates to "fluid," since the middle of the 2010s to refer to their gender experiences that fall outside the binary. People also use *Lubunca*, the name given to a certain type of slang used within the LGBTQ+ communities, specifically among trans+ people in Türkiye, to express themselves

(Kontovas, 2012). The use of *Lubunca* in certain spaces was common in the Ottoman and early years of the Republic. *Lubunca* functioned as a private and secret language used by "transvestites" and "transsexuals" for self-protection in the 1970s and had its heyday in the 1980s and 1990s when police and state control were extensive (Biondo, 2017).

According to Sinnott (2010), the debate over language use, construction of terminologies, and categories of analysis are vital because, in social sciences, these categories provide the unit of analysis. The struggles that nonbinary people face are also heavily influenced by the use of language and binary gender categorizations. The lack of room for self-identification and recognition of nonbinary people is amplified by these problems.

To exemplify the problems created by these binary categorizations, Zengin's (2016) research on transgender people's experiences with state policies in Türkiye is useful here. Zengin (2016) argued that the Turkish state's definition of sexuality and gender is a part of nationalist projects that rely heavily on the binary family unit. For example, from 1976 until 2016, the Turkish Republic used pink and blue identity cards to categorize the sex of the citizens materially. It can be said that they assign a color to this duality to plan the nation's policies according to demographics based on a family unit consisting of gendered citizens: a mother, father, and binary-gendered children (p. 228). In Türkiye, there have been people who adapted the term nonbinary to identify with for years, but apart from solidarity groups and non-governmental organizations, their experiences have not been included either in the policy-making processes of the government or in academic studies.

Lastly, one of the first studies that was conducted specifically focusing on nonbinary people's life experiences in Türkiye was Ecem Toraman's (2024) thesis work, *Beyond the Gender Binary: Being Non-Binary in Turkey*. In their thesis, Toraman delves into the identity development of nonbinary individuals, including their first experiences with gender identity awareness, their acceptance of it, and their gender expressions. Their findings indicate that

while each nonbinary person follows a unique path and pace in their gender journeys, there are common factors that influence them: the cisheteronormative system in Türkiye, the absence of legal rights and protection, and discrimination and marginalization. They also explain how language is a significant factor in gender identity development, especially when there are no concepts with which to identify.

Turkish literature on nonbinary, transgender, gender-diverse, and gender nonconforming individuals living in Türkiye is lacking but a burgeoning space for inquiry. Building on the need for this research and the early insights of Turkish scholars, I contribute much needed voice and research in this area, particularly from my position as a nonbinary scholar and person. To this end, my research aims to explore and highlight the communication experiences of nonbinary individuals, rendering them visible in relation to the broader context of language, gender, and oppression in Türkiye.

## Theoretical Framework

Many social disciplines guided and informed me throughout the research. In this regard, this project is quite interdisciplinary, with literature, theories, and concepts searched and utilized from gender studies, transgender studies, queer studies, Asian and Middle Eastern studies, sociocultural linguistics, philosophy, psychology, and the discipline I am currently grounded in, sociology. The main theoretical frameworks that I utilize to understand nonbinary individuals' identity communication are symbolic interactionism and queer theory. Symbolic interactionism helps to explore people's internal perceptions about gender and how those are constructed, produced, and repeated by individuals in social interactions. Since the central question of my thesis is about how individuals convey a part of their own identity to others, I believe that symbolic interactionism is the most helpful guide to understanding micro-level interactions and social negotiations. Queer theory critiques essentialist views of gender and sexuality, viewing them as socially constructed and fluid concepts open to scrutiny and analysis. This framework provides a critical lens to examine how nonbinary individuals construct their identities and resist binary gender norms on a larger scale, and it helps me to understand the relationships between language, communication, and gender identity.

### Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is the theoretical approach that argues that society is created through meaningful interactions among individuals and that human behavior can be explained by focusing on these interactions. In this understanding, identities are negotiated through interactions (Howard & Hollander, 1997). People's identities and status definitions emerge from their actions instead of being objectively assigned by institutions (Goffman, 1959), enabling individuals to make sense of the world from their own subjective viewpoints (Carter & Fuller, 2015). Goffman's concept of "dramaturgy" posits that individuals engage in "impression management," constructing a public self through the manipulation of signs and

symbols to create a desired impression in the minds of others (Goffman, 1959). This performance of the self is not fixed or essential, but rather is shaped by the social context in which it takes place.

In his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman explores the concept of self and how individuals project a certain image of themselves to others in social encounters. He uses a dramaturgical perspective to examine how people manage the impression others form of them and present themselves to others. Goffman argues that individuals aim to communicate a certain picture of themselves, projecting an image of themselves that others will perceive. In social interactions, the self emerges from this projection, which is done through a collective performance involving actors and audience. The confirmation of a person's projected self relies on trust in the social environment and the credibility of the performer's performance.

The self, according to Goffman (1959), is both social and mutable, and subject to negotiations between the possessor of the self and the social audience. The social audience may either accept or reject the performer's presented self, emphasizing that the self is actually a product of social exchanges. The self is not a fixed, organic entity bound to a specific place or a predetermined path; instead, it emerges as a dramatic effect shaped by the scene in which it is presented. The crucial concern is whether the self will be credited or discredited, which depends on the success of the performed scene. In other words, the self is not a cause of the scene, but rather a product of it. As Goffman (1959) notes, the self is not derived from its possessor but rather generated by the whole scene of their action. Therefore, the self is not a fixed entity but a dynamic and contingent one that emerges from social interactions and performances. Goffman's (1959) analytical perspective led him to develop an original conception of the self that seemingly presents contradictory views of the self. On the one hand, the self is portrayed as a purely social construct without any personal core,

while on the other hand, the self can somewhat break free from social limitations and strategically manipulate social situations to present itself in a favorable light (Branaman & Lemert, 1997).

In relation to Goffman's ideas about gender, especially from *Gender Advertisements* (Goffman, 1979), West and Zimmerman argue that gender is not a fixed or inherent characteristic but is instead a social construct that is performed through interaction with others. They suggest that gender is not simply a matter of biology or individual choice but is shaped by cultural norms and expectations. Specifically, in "Doing Gender," West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that the concepts of masculinity and femininity are developed from repeated, patterned interaction and socialization. According to this idea, gender is something relationally done rather than an innate quality of an individual and is determined by whether or not someone performs the acts associated with a particular gender.

"Doing gender" as a concept is a mechanism for explaining the reproduction of gender inequality, and it can be applied as a mechanism in broader sociological theories. However, Davis (2017) argues that the concept of "doing gender" should not be seen as a theory in and of itself, but rather as a way of understanding the origins and maintenance of culturally constructed norms of behavior tied to sex categories. Davis emphasizes the importance of rigorous, systematic approaches in sociological research and suggests that "doing gender" should be used in line with its original intention to understand and potentially disrupt gender norms rather than simply documenting the diversity of gender experiences.

**Queer Theory**

I also utilize queer theory in my analysis to understand the experiences of nonbinary people in Türkiye. The underlying ideas of queer theory have many parallels with symbolic interaction theories, especially Goffman's (1959) "dramaturgy" and West and Zimmerman's (1987) concepts about gender.

Hannah (2022) explains that even though origins of theory explicitly in academia dates back in the 1990s, today it is still heavily relevant because of its flexibility and openness to new directions. Queer theory's foundational resistance to fixed categories has led to its application in diverse fields such as sexuality, gender, race, and class, and beyond. Discussions about the essentialist and constructionist theories of gender had reached an impasse in Western scholarship, as observed by Butler (1999) and Rubin (2006).

Today, queer has been used as an umbrella term for individuals who engage in non-normative sexual practices and/or identify outside of normative gender and sexuality categories, including many people in 2SLGBTQ+ communities (Jagose, 2005). Some individuals who challenge hegemonic notions of gender, sexuality and embrace fluidity and inclusivity use the term queer to describe themselves. However, queer is not limited to LGBTQ+ communities and can extend to different aspects of culture. "Queering" can be seen as a process of challenging cultural norms and boundaries in relation to gender, sexuality, and other social expectations (Valocchi, 2005). In this sense, queer theory can be understood as looking at subversive behaviors or theories that bring into question the assumed natural relations among body, sex, gender, and self. Queer theory does not understand identity as a natural given but understands it as a social construct (Butler, 1999). This approach is critical of social dichotomies and biological understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality. Rather, it insists on considering categories in a more fluid manner, which lends itself better to qualitative investigation (i.e., exploring social phenomena with a view to complexity rather than standardization). It attempts to deconstruct established categories, in particular, ones related to gender, which are catalysts for multiple gender identities. Specifically, the notion of queer challenges society's sex/gender regime by questioning, disrupting, and offering opportunities for rebuilding identity formation. Identity, in queer theory, is not independent

of society, and it is an ongoing process in relation to many social impacts, such as language, religion, traditions, and ethnic and economic classes.

Examining things and beginning research from a queer perspective provides tools to challenge fundamental structures that support any identity, while still acknowledging and respecting categories of identity. However, some people mistakenly believe that queer theory only deals with sexuality and gender (Halberstam, 2011). To counter this, an intersectional approach has been adopted by queer theorists that recognizes the interconnectedness of sexuality with other social and identity categories. By doing so, queer theory becomes an interdisciplinary field that can generate novel insights into the ways in which sexuality and gender intersect with and are influenced by other factors. Queer theorists examine the categories, binaries, and language that are used to describe gender and sexuality and aim to understand how these constructs influence our understanding of what is considered normal or deviant (Ghaziani & Brim, 2019). Through this kind of critical analysis, queer theory seeks to challenge dominant power structures and the ways in which they perpetuate inequalities. It is an interdisciplinary field that draws upon various theoretical frameworks, including feminism, postmodernism, and critical race theory, to name a few. It is also closely linked to activism, in that many queer theorists see their work as contributing to social justice movements and challenging oppressive systems.

Moreover, queer theory acknowledges the influence of the researcher's subjective experiences and biases on the research process and results. This approach highlights the complex and fluid nature of power relations, which are not fixed but constantly negotiated and contested (Manning & Adams, 2021). As Ahmed (2014) argues, queer theory is about exploring the ways in which sexual and gender norms are produced and maintained and about creating new forms of knowledge that challenge these norms. This involves not only studying

queer people but also actively engaging with them in the research process, acknowledging and valuing their lived experiences and perspectives.

Both Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy and West and Zimmerman's (1987) concepts about gender have a deconstructivist aspect, in that they challenge essentialist notions of the self and gender. They emphasize the performative aspect of identity, highlighting the ways in which individuals actively construct their identities through interaction with others. This deconstruction of essentialist notions of identity is in line with queer theory's critique of fixed categories and norms. Butler (1999) extends this deconstructionist critique to the concept of gender itself, arguing that gender is not an inherent or stable characteristic but is rather a socially constructed performance that is constantly being produced and reproduced. Butler suggests that gender performance is not simply an individual matter; instead, it is shaped by larger cultural and social structures.

Overall, the deconstructivist impulses of symbolic interaction theories and queer theory offer important insights into the performative nature of identity and the ways in which social categories and norms are constructed and enforced. By using these insights to analyze nonbinary gender identities, one can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the social and cultural forces that shape gender practices and experiences. Symbolic interactionism informs the research by focusing on why and how nonbinary individuals communicate their gender identity in different social settings. Queer theory guides the critical analysis of language and social norms and helps to unpack and examine the power dynamics involved. Together, these theories offer a complementary approach, with symbolic interactionism addressing micro-level, interaction-based strategies of communication and queer theory critiquing the broader societal structures, norms, and power dynamics.

## Research Methodology and Methods

This research is methodologically guided by a qualitative interpretive approach, which creates space for me to emphasize how the participants make sense of their experiences in Türkiye, with a particular focus on the use of the Turkish language. This approach is fitting for uncovering the meaning people give to their experiences and understanding social interactions among people and the norms and values they share. According to the qualitative interpretative approach, to understand the meanings of people's experiences, a qualitative researcher needs to be open-minded, curious, empathic, flexible, and able to listen to people telling their own stories. Also, because the researcher is not absent from the narrative and meaning-making process, they need to engage with these experiences reflexively (Creswell & Miller, 1997). Therefore, I paid great attention to my own position and wrote reflexive memos that helped me in my analysis stage and throughout the research.

### Study Sample

In line with my research question, my target research group was self-identified nonbinary people. For the purpose of my study, I used the following definition of nonbinary: any gender identity that is not always and exclusively male or female. Following my first recruitment criteria, participants had to use predominantly Turkish as the main language in their daily lives, be between the ages 18 and 30 years old, and have lived in Türkiye for at least five consecutive years until six months before the time of the study.

To recruit participants for my study, I used the snowball sampling method and word-of-mouth. First, I distributed my research poster (see Appendix A) and a call for participation text to two private LGBTQ+ WhatsApp groups in which I am involved. These groups had more than 100 members each and were used to disseminate information about LGBTQ+ events in universities in Türkiye. This allowed me to reach nonbinary people who met the criteria for my study. Secondly, I posted the research poster on my personal social media

accounts, including Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp. This allowed me to reach a wider community and potentially reach individuals who may not be members of the LGBTQ+ WhatsApp groups. Also, through this process, I reached potential participants through my personal connections with various LGBTQ+ communities.

After initially reaching out to participants through solidarity groups and organizations with whom I already have connections, I used snowball sampling, a purposive sampling method. I chose snowball sampling because it was a feasible method to research and recruit marginalized populations and was aligned with my methodology. I sent a brief explanation of the study with a Letter of Information, Verbal Consent Form, and Resource List (see Appendix B) to interested potential participants through email, and if they were still interested in participating in the study, I made arrangements for the interviews on a day and at a time that was convenient for them.

**Data Collection**

I conducted semi-structured interviews; with this method, participants were not limited to the predetermined interview questions and had space to take the conversation in the directions they felt were relevant and important to this topic. Since I was studying in Canada, and COVID-19 public health recommendations were still in place, I chose to minimize in-person contact and conducted all interviews via video conference using Zoom. Utilizing video interviews allowed me to interview participants from different cities and allowed participants to be in an environment of their control. Participants generally expressed that they were comfortable during the interviews, and they were used to having online meetings at that point in their lives after experiencing more online learning and communications due to COVID-19. During the interviews, I felt that I was able to build a personal rapport with the participants.

I started each interview by introducing myself, briefly sharing my aims with this study, and having a short talk about the research. I provided participants with an opportunity

to ask any questions, including personal questions and questions concerning their participation in the study and the consent form. Before moving to interviews, I obtained verbal consent, and each interview was audio-recorded with the participant's knowledge and consent. After asking about demographic information, I asked open-ended questions that allowed participants to express their gender conceptualization and nonbinary experiences without being explicitly directed to follow a particular narrative. I created my interview guide based on the Anglophone literature about nonbinary individuals' experiences and revised it with the feedback of my supervisory committee. I asked questions that are beyond the scope of this research project, including their gender perceptions and conceptualizations, daily life experiences, support systems and resources, and their future hopes and expectations. However, in this analysis, I only discussed the findings and themes that are in the scope of the research question, which are about communication of nonbinary identity in the Turkish language, and the relationship between language and identity.

I encouraged my participants to speak as freely and openly about their experiences and views as possible. For their participation in the study, I offered a 200 Turkish lira online gift card ($10 CAD) at the end of the interview to thank them for their time. Four participants politely declined my gift card offer, stating they were very happy to participate.

I conducted my interviews in two months, and after reaching a state of saturation, I finalized the data collection stage after the thirteenth interview. Each interview ranged between 40 minutes and two hours, with an average of one hour and 20 minutes. I transcribed my interview data from audio to text in Turkish, ensuring that all personally identifiable information was removed from the transcripts to maintain confidentiality. I anonymized the entire dataset accordingly. To ensure that participants' words represented their experiences accurately (Tebbe & Budge, 2016), after the transcription process, I offered participants an opportunity to review their interview transcript and provide feedback to me; two participants

chose to review their transcript and provided me with their feedback, which I then reflected in the data.

**Data Analysis**

During the analysis process, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework to identify codes and analyze them into themes and categories. Utilizing thematic analysis helped me to be able to both "reflect reality" and "unpick or unravel the surface of 'reality'" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). Before starting coding, I familiarized myself with the interviews by (re)reading and drafting initial code ideas. To accurately represent the participants' experiences, the theme selection emerged from the data rather than being predetermined. I utilized open coding and did not bring pre-set codes to the analysis and developed and modified the codes as I worked through the coding process (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

I analyzed all of my data first through the computational qualitative data analysis software NVivo (2018), then switched to MAXQDA (*MAXQDA 2022 [Computer Software]*, 2022) for my data analyses because of the more user-friendly and accessible interface, and repeated my coding for the first three interviews. After the coding process and initial search for the themes, I discussed emerging themes with my supervisor and reviewed and revised my themes to avoid duplicative ideas. Because the researcher makes active, interpretative choices in generating codes and constructing themes, researcher reflexivity was and still is an integral part of my research throughout the process. I wrote my positionality section in the introduction chapter of this manuscript to be open about my subjective experience and views (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

**Doing Bilingual Research**

As expressed in my positionality statement and in the section above outlining the aim of the research, many factors guided my decision to conduct the interviews in Turkish while writing

the final work in English. After transcribing the data, I coded the Turkish interview transcripts instead of translating them fully into English and then coding them in English. On the practical side, translating transcripts would have been highly time-consuming and would require significant resources and effort.

Besides the practical reasons, my reasoning behind this was to avoid data loss in the translation process in terms of loss of cultural references, expressions, or phrases that do not have direct translation. This aimed to ensure the authenticity of participants' original voices. In translation, there is always the possibility that choices made by the translator could influence the meaning of certain words or alter the tone of participants' statements (Turhan & Bernard, 2022), and I fear that translating before analyzing would add translators' (either me or professional translators) interpretation of the meaning, which would interfere with the coding and analyzing process. This risk of distortion or interference was something I wanted to minimize in order to maintain the integrity of the data throughout the coding and analysis stages. Instead, after coding, developing my themes, and writing findings, I translated the relevant quotes into English. Translating and doing justice to the quotations that were used in the findings was a long and imperfect process, but this approach allowed me to have more control over the translation process, ensuring that key phrases were accurately conveyed while maintaining the participants' original intent as much as I could.

**Ethics**

To answer my research question in this project, I needed to understand Turkish-speaking nonbinary individuals' perspectives and life experiences, and as a researcher, I am aware of the ethical responsibilities that come with interviewing people so as not to cause any harm. I obtained permission to conduct my research from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board (see Appendix C). I used a password-protected Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to document participants' pseudonyms, scheduled interview dates, record the completion status

of their interviews, and whether they had received their incentives. Throughout the process, participants were reminded that all information they provided would be treated as confidential and anonymized.

The identities of the participants were protected indefinitely to ensure their privacy and confidentiality. At no point were their names or any other identifying information linked to the study or its findings, either in the published work or in any communications about the research. All personal details, such as names, locations, or any other potentially identifying characteristics, were either anonymized or excluded from the data to prevent the possibility of identifying participants. This approach was crucial not only for ethical reasons but also to ensure that participants felt safe sharing their experiences openly, knowing that their privacy would be safeguarded both during and after the study.

Prior to beginning the interview, each participant was provided with an opportunity to ask any questions, including questions concerning their participation in the study and the consent form. I proceeded with the interview process only after verbal consent had been provided and audio-recorded. Participants were advised that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason for up to two weeks following their interview. Participants might have experienced some emotional discomfort and distress, which varied based on their personal comfort levels when discussing their gender experiences as nonbinary individuals. To mitigate this potential harm, I reminded participants at the beginning of the interview that they could decline to answer any question they did not want to answer for any reason without having to provide an explanation. Moreover, I checked in with participants throughout the interview to ask if they felt comfortable proceeding, and reminded them that they could decline to answer any question. Also, following the interview, I provided a list of resources to participants, which offered additional support.

## Findings and Discussions

My main focus with this research is the communication of one's gender identity. This might encompass a range of expressions (verbal or not) that might not always involve explicit declarations. Communication can include changing one's name or pronouns, explaining their gender verbally, altering their appearance to let others know that they are nonbinary, or subtly integrating aspects of one's gender identity into daily interactions. Throughout my interviews, participants explained many ways of communicating their gender identity in different contexts, emphasizing the multifaceted experiences of nonbinary Turkish individuals. We discussed how they communicate or express their nonbinary identity in daily life, noting differences in queer communities, work or school environments, and with family. We also discussed any difficulties or misunderstandings they faced, including specific examples and challenges within the existing gender framework in Türkiye. I asked about the impact of the Turkish language on their expression, examining linguistic challenges, benefits, and the use of specific terms or phrases. Some of the questions were about how these linguistic factors influence their sense of self and identity, noting any changes in Turkish vocabulary regarding nonbinary identities.

In what follows, I share my findings from 13 in-depth interviews and weave an analytic discussion throughout. My themes are: i) Characteristics of Turkish: "a somewhat gender-neutral language"; ii) Strategies and Adaptations: "I think you are how you feel"; iii) Communicating Gender Identity in Various Contexts: "More than sharing, I insist on being seen and accepted." In the findings, I excluded the forced coming outs or outings of participants without their control or consent, as it was not their own communication of their nonbinary identity.

**Participant Demographics**

| Pseudonym | Gender Identity | Pronouns | Sexual Orientation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fikret | Nonbinary Agender Transmasculine Transman | He/they | Bisexual |
| Pera | Nonbinary Transmasculine | They/them | Pansexual |
| Moray | Nonbinary Transmasculine | They/them | Bi+ |
| Elvin | Nonbinary | They/them | Pansexual |
| Nova | Nonbinary | They/them | Feeling attracted to women |
| İndigo | Nonbinary Transmasculine | They/he | Bisexual |
| Bulut | Nonbinary, Twink | He/they | Pansexual |
| Iraz | Nonbinary | They/them | Pansexual |
| Rüzgar | Nonbinary | They/them | Bisexual, bi+ |
| Odil | Gender nonconforming, Nonbinary | They/them | Pansexual |
| Ekin | Nonbinary Transmasculine | He/they | Bisexual |
| Deniz | Nonbinary | They/them, any pronouns | Bi+ |
| Mika | Agender*, Nonbinary | They/them | Queer |

* The participant used the word *"cinsiyetsiz,"* which can also be translated into English as "genderless."

All the pseudonyms I chose and assigned to the participants are gender-neutral. Of the participants, three were assigned male at birth, while ten were assigned female at birth. The participants' ages range from 21 to 32, with an average age of 27. In terms of language skills, four participants speak Turkish and English; two speak Turkish and a little English; one speaks Turkish and Kurdish; three speak Turkish, English, and a little German; one speaks Turkish, English, and German; one speaks Turkish, English, and French, and one speaks Turkish, English, Italian, and Spanish. Considering the participants' high level of secondary education, their range of language skills aligns with those typically seen in similarly educated individuals within Turkish society.

Over the past five years, 11 participants have lived in large metropolitan cities: six primarily in Ankara, four in Istanbul, and one in Izmir. Two participants lived in relatively smaller cities in the Black Sea region and Southeastern Anatolia. Also, two of the participants, Mika and Rüzgar moved to an English-speaking country within six months prior to the interview from Istanbul and Ankara, respectively. Regarding education, seven participants were master's graduates or students, five were bachelor's graduates or students, and one was a high school graduate or student.

**Theme 1: Characteristics of Turkish: "a somewhat gender-neutral language"**

When we discussed the effect of Turkish on their gender identity communication, each participant mentioned the positive sides of Turkish, focusing on its gender-neutral aspects, particularly in pronoun use. All participants said that compared to other languages, the Turkish language grammatically provides a lot of freedom of expression beyond the gender binary.

They also identified some drawbacks such as the difficulty in affirming one's nonbinary gender identity and the hesitation in asking about pronouns, leading to potential invisibility. Interestingly then, while participants agreed that Turkish is a grammatically gender-neutral language, for most of them, society was still using Turkish in a very binary way. Also, participants expressed frustration with the inconsistency and lack of standardization in terminology about gender identity and sexual orientation, often leading to confusion and miscommunications. Overall, participants pointed out Turkish's binary aspects, societal reluctance to use gender-neutral terms, and the difficulties in explaining nonbinary identities due to the absence of standardized and clear terminology in Turkish.

***Pronoun Use: "both a plus and a minus"***

All participants talked about pronoun use, discussing that, unlike in English, the third-person pronoun (e.g., they/them pronouns) in Turkish does not indicate gender. Mika explained,

"you can express yourself more easily than in English during the day because you do not have to use the 'he she they them' [originally in English] distinction about yourself." They valued this feature of Turkish for its ability to obscure gender, benefiting both closeted and open individuals. Deniz described how gender-neutral pronouns, combined with the gender-neutral term "partner," keep one's partner's gender ambiguous "in an environment where there are 'cishets'" allowing people to avoid coming out. For Odil, this characteristic of the language also allowed more control over one's coming out process, as they explained:

> You know, even if I don't directly say 'I'm nonbinary,' when I refer to myself as 'they, them,' it's understood from there. Such a thing doesn't happen much in Turkish, that's why. So, in English, there might be more situations where, […] without that being the goal, I indicate that I'm nonbinary more often.

Non-gender-indicating pronouns also decrease the experience of being actively misgendered. Participants explained that they do not know other people's gender assumptions about themselves since these assumptions are less verbally explicit than those in English. Thus, participants said they were less stressed and confronted with misgendering. Bulut explained, "If I were in a country where more English is spoken, I would be addressed as 'she' frequently." They explained that this situation "would create more dysphoria" for them, and "in that respect, Turkish is positive; you don't get too tired in daily life."

Moreover, participants also said that not thinking about gendered pronouns makes it easier to talk about others as it reduces the fear of misgendering other people. Fikret said, "I don't have to care about anyone's gender based on their appearance. Because the pronoun is exactly the same, and I can talk to everyone the same way." Indicating that it is easier to not assume or feel the need to know someone's gender in conversations or based on gender expression to talk about them. Fikret also mentioned that this offers flexibility for those "questioning" or uncertain about their gender identity because they do not need to update others about their preferred pronouns, allowing them to explore their gender identity more easily.

Participants also focused on the disadvantages of the lack of gender-specific pronouns. For example, Fikret noted:

> Having no specific pronouns is both a plus and a minus in Turkish. On the plus side, it means you don't necessarily misgender someone by using the wrong pronoun since the pronoun is the same for everyone. However, it also means that you don't know the person's gender, and people are often hesitant to ask.

Although Turkish pronouns are not gendered, there are still many gendered adjectives and adverbs; therefore, hesitation to ask about gender identity can lead to misgendering nonbinary people with these words. Fikret noted that sharing their pronouns in English is easier than disclosing their gender identity, which is more personal. Pera mentioned that gender-indicating pronouns can serve as tools for visibility and affirmation: "Having the pronoun used correctly makes me feel good, it makes me feel recognized, and it's something essential for me." Similarly, Mika mentioned that gendered pronouns in English can help them feel free in terms of having agency. They said: "When someone refers to me as 'she,' I can correct them by saying 'they/them' for my pronoun. Being able to correct this gives me a sense of freedom and makes me feel good."

***Binary-gendered Use of Turkish: "not as gender-neutral as it seems"***

Even though my questions centered on the Turkish language, participants gave examples comparing Turkish to other languages they spoke, predominantly comparing it with English and Kurdish. They all agreed that, compared to other languages, Turkish is more gender-neutral. However, the most common critique from the participants was that Turkish is not as gender-neutral as people think. Rüzgar said, "We often say that Turkish is a genderless language, but it's not as 'gender-neutral' as it seems." They exemplify this with a commonly used family word "child" (*çocuk*) explaining that "When we say 'child,' (*çocuk*) it's not always gender-neutral—it depends on the context. Of course, when a family says, 'my child,' it's more ambiguous, but when someone says, 'I met a child,' it usually means a boy."

Many participants said that existing gender-neutral word choices as alternatives to gendered words were sometimes perceived as distant or too respectful and not commonly used. Deniz gave an example, saying that instead of "Mister" ("*bey"*) or "Mistress" (*hanım*) people can express themselves using terms like "dear" (*sayın*) or speaking with "polite you" (*siz*). Though Deniz said gendered words are more established and people "feel the need to write 'Mr.' or 'Mrs.'" Nova said: "So, it does affect my self-perception because even though our language is very suitable for being gender-neutral (*cinsiyetsiz*), it is not used this way" because when it is used in a gender-neutral way, "it is considered a very formal or official language." According to them, "that's why people generally prefer to use things like 'my girl,' (*kızım*) 'my boy,' (*oğlum*) […] instead of just saying 'I,' 'you' in every social setting."

Participants also mentioned the restrictive nature of this linguistic characteristic, as Moray explained: "The language is very much built on a binary gender system, like all other languages. So I struggle a lot when trying to explain myself; I can't find the right words because of this." Fikret similarly explained: "When you're walking down the street, people say 'ma'am' or 'sir,' 'sister' or 'brother.' The language is based on society and is very gendered, in the way people address each other, in how it's used."

The gender assumptions and misgendering that participants faced also showed the gendered use of Turkish. Mika shared a day of their life that exemplifies how the gendered use of Turkish increases their experience of being misgendered and the conflicting emotions that result.

> I'm going to work, it's seven o'clock. My day hasn't really started yet. It starts on the [subway]. 'Hey son, can I pass?' 'Hey son, get up, let me sit.' I'm already going to work, Ms. Mika. I'm confused. I go back out again on the road. 'Hey son, sir this and that.' 'Sir.' It happens, I mean. Sometimes tiring, sometimes funny. But at the moment, it's tiring.

The gendered nature of language also influences gender assumptions and misgendering by others and creates feelings of inauthenticity for some participants. To expand this, Iraz stated

that, in professional settings, they sometimes feel forced to conform to gendered language to maintain good relationships and ensure their workday goes smoothly. This involves engaging in small talk and using gendered terms to avoid conflict despite it compromising their comfort and gender identity, they explained, “It’s like I’m continuing the role I’ve played for years. Because until I came out, for years, I played a role; I played a character.”

When I asked participants if they use Turkish queer slang *Lubunca* to express their gender, two of them said the slang is used in a very gender-binary way. Moray, about *Lubunca,* said: “A language that is very binary and consists of male and female, a language where there are not many [words about] women, [...] let alone nonbinary.” They suggest that with the LGBTQ+ community, “we can talk about removing the binary gender system from Lubunca a little more.” Parallel to this, Deniz said: “As far as I know, there is nothing in *Lubunca* that directly corresponds to nonbinary.” With this said, they talked about how nonbinary people might still be using the *Lubunca* words *“laçovari,”* and *“gacıvari”* which translates to “mannish” and “womanish” respectively to express nonconforming gender identities.

***Gender-related Terminology: “The language is indeed insufficient for explaining.”***

Participants mentioned that they find gender-related terminology messy and confusing in Turkish. Language is ever-evolving; there are new words and translations, and sometimes, the use of new terminology intimidates people. The lack of a Turkish equivalent with some English terminology and general unfamiliarity with concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality makes it difficult for participants to communicate their identities effectively with others. When talking about this insufficiency, Bulut recalled their experience with reading Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1999) in Turkish. They noted, “...constantly, always there are footnotes [from the translator], the need to explain a word all the time.” This frequent need for explanations stemmed from the translator’s struggle to find suitable Turkish equivalents

for many terms used by the author. Bulut added, “Because the translator has to explain, cannot translate. I mean, there is no equivalent in Turkish for most of the terms they used.”

*Gender Identity vs. Sexual Orientation*

The concepts that are used to explain gender identity and sexual orientation were often confused and mixed by people to whom participants tried to explain their gender. Deniz, Nova, and Elvin explained how they were seeing an extra layer of confusion and communication issues when they were talking about their gender identity, because people, for a while, were thinking that they were talking about their sexual orientation. For them, mainstream society frequently fails to recognize the distinctions between being trans, nonbinary, or having a particular sexual orientation. Instead, there is a tendency to lump all non-normative identities into a single, misunderstood category. Deniz points out that rather than understanding the specific aspects of “orientation and identity,” people often perceive them as an indistinct mix within the broader “LGBT+ cloud.”

Elvin explained that the difference was very obvious to them, but “for anyone who is not the subject of, let’s say, the queer struggle, or for any normative person, this is just an ‘anomaly.’” They said that the distinction between “sexual orientation and gender” is not important to many around them. For many people, Elvin is “just a nonconforming [person] and in which aspect often doesn’t matter much” and they are perceived by the general Turkish society as “shouldn’t be this way.”

Nova said that “Especially, for people who are not familiar with this literature, or do not have much knowledge about the concepts, it can seem very foreign when you say it.” They told how “It can be understood as a [sexual] orientation at first, sometimes it requires explanation” and thus “it can be difficult to convey.” For Nova, this was particularly challenging, as conversations about sexual orientation can be seen as very private topics that should not be discussed in public.

Nova explained that when they or their nonbinary friends expressed that they are nonbinary, they got responses such as “so, what, do you like women?” or “you didn’t have to bring your bedroom business in here (*yatak odanı da buraya taşımana gerek yoktu*).” They also expressed that “right now, gender identities other than male and female are seen as if they are directly a part of the LGBT+ community, and this LGBT+ is perceived as a definition made directly based on orientations.”

*The concepts of “sex” vs “gender”*

Like we see with the collapsing of gender identity and sexual orientation, participants similarly discussed the conflation of sex and gender. All the participants stated that, in Turkish society, people have a confusion or do not differentiate between the concepts of “sex” and “gender.” Fikret said, “There isn’t a vocabulary that can understand this difference. Culturally, it doesn’t exist.”

When asked about this differentiation, Nova answered:

> When we say gender *(toplumsal cinsiyet)*, it is always understood as a continuation of biological sex (*biyolojik cinsiyetin*). So, actually, when we say sex (*cinsiyet*), everyone understands it as both together. Because, you know, being biologically assigned women means that all the other roles are also necessarily brought along, I think, there is such a belief. Therefore, I think mostly, they use it as an umbrella term (*çatı*).

Because of these conceptual gaps that complicate discussions about gender identity, participants mentioned that they are doing a lot of explanations. Iraz illustrated this by saying, “While explaining to my mother, for example, I had to first explain what these things [gender and sex] are. I even said their English versions, like, there isn’t an exact equivalent in Turkish, but like, look, people made different words.”

Deniz further explained the societal confusion and resistance around these concepts, especially “from the government [...] there is such a reaction against this. Like making everything called ‘gender’ (*toplumsal cinsiyet*) negative. When gender is mentioned, they see

it as both a perspective on women's rights, feminism, and, opening a door to LGBT+." Deniz summarized this as "the sex-gender distinction doesn't settle well." and explained how this resistance and misunderstanding contribute to the difficulty in making the sex-gender distinction meaningful in broader Turkish society.

Participants also mentioned that not knowing sex and gender-related terminology makes it harder to express themselves, especially when coming out. For example, Iraz said "I don't think it is understood by general society (*sokakta bir karşılığı olduğunu düşünmüyorum*) [...] when talking with friends in the queer community, yes, but when we look at the general society. I don't think it [the differentiation of 'sex' and 'gender'] is used." Similarly, Rüzgar said, "So actually, every time I come out, it's difficult if I'm not coming out to other LGBTQ+ people (*lubunyalarla*)."

Some participants highlighted the slow pace of change and adaptation in the Turkish language regarding the inclusion of genders beyond binary genders. Deniz noted this gradual shift in society, explaining, "compared to five years ago, now when sex (cinsiyet) is asked in some studies and surveys, it's not just asked as men and women." This reflects a growing recognition of gender diversity, even though it is a slow change. Odil offered a more pessimistic view, explaining, "There might be a change in the language used within the LGBT community, but I haven't noticed any change in general usage." They said "The only change is that, for example, instead of saying *'bilim adamı*,' [scientist men], it is used as *'bilim insanı,*' [scientist person] […] There is a big drop in gendered terms." Odil additionally noted that while LGBTQ+ communities might be adopting more inclusive and clear terminology, these changes are adopted at a slower pace by the broader public.

*The concept of "nonbinary"*

All participants mentioned the limited Turkish vocabulary for discussing gender identity impacting their communication and understanding. For example, Fikret, about different

gender identities, said, “there is a lack of terms in the general culture therefore, there is no equivalent. It [term nonbinary] is not understood either.” The lack of appropriate terminology in Turkish culture hinders understanding and recognition of nonbinary identities, affecting the development of participants’ gender identities. Nova said:

> It might have affected the process of discovering my gender identity. Because, both due to the word nonbinary being a foreign term and it being a concept that has only recently started to be heard more in Türkiye, I was very late in finding words that belong to me and discovering the concepts that would define myself.

Nova’s experience illustrates how lack of appropriate language can delay self-discovery and self-definition for nonbinary individuals. Rüzgar mentioned that they had experienced significant confusion because of a lack of translated resources about gender-identity-related terminology. They even accidentally thought, for a short period, that using “cis woman” might be appropriate to emphasize that they were biologically female but had a different gender identity. Rüzgar said:

> I called myself a cis woman. Because I coded it like, I have breasts, I have a vagina, that's it. It was so unclear what it was. This was around 2014 or so, the first time I heard about it. Because there was nothing in Turkish, and I couldn't understand from the English I read, like how that experience was, how it felt, you know, but those few months passed like that. Then, luckily, I figured it out. I realized, no, no, that’s not it at all. It seems very funny now.

Rüzgar explained this “ridiculous short time” emerged due to the lack of appropriate vocabulary, and after three or four months, they “dealt with that information pollution.” This experience of having a hard and confusing time finding the words to express themselves was not unique to Rüzgar. All thirteen participants mentioned that there is no widely accepted Turkish word for the term nonbinary and many other gender-related terminology; for example, Moray said, “There is no equivalent in Turkish. Not in a form that people can understand.” Fikret emphasized the novelty and unfamiliarity of the term “nonbinary” in Turkish society:

> A lot of people really don't know English, and when you say you're nonbinary, it's a hard concept for them to grasp. It's a new thing in the language. People understand terms like trans woman and trans man, but nonbinary was a term I literally discovered while researching my symptoms on the internet during a gender crisis in 2019, which I didn't even realize was a gender crisis at the time. Until then, it was a term I had never seen. If I had seen it earlier, maybe I could have identified myself more easily.

Since there were no Turkish words or definitions to talk about nonbinary gender identity, participants said that they had to use English words to describe their gender identity. Most of the participants mentioned they were using "nonbinary," borrowed from English. However, there are also issues in taking an English word directly, as Nova mentioned, because the word "nonbinary" is in a foreign language; "it actually loses some meaning when it is translated into Turkish" and is difficult to pronounce in Turkish.

Deniz highlighted the drawbacks of using an English term to describe oneself as: "Expressing oneself with an English term can be irritating or feel more foreign and unattainable within the context of the general societal landscape." They elaborated on how this restricts individuals from realizing, understanding, and expressing their nonbinary identities: "Most likely, if everyone fully understood the concept, there would be many more nonbinary people." They pointed out the lack of "a direct term in Turkish" as a significant issue.

Rüzgar opened the language gap further by saying, "Taking nonbinary directly into Turkish and adding Turkish suffixes to it like nonbinaries, nonbinary's (*nonbinaryler*, *nonbinarynin*,) it doesn't make it feel Turkish enough or like ours." They also discussed the implications of not having a Turkish word, stating, "if policy is going to be made or something is going to be done and we propose something, I can't write nonbinary there." They said, "I would have to write the world's longest definition, like 'identities outside of the binary gender identity.'" Elvin uses a strategy simplifying their experience of being nonbinary by saying: "So in general, when I'm talking to people who are a little more

uninformed, I probably use 'neither man nor woman.'" Moray further explained the downside of using nonbinary terminology, stating:

> Expressing yourself, you're already in a non-normative realm for cis-hetero people. And they don't have much knowledge about these topics. On top of that, you go there and express yourself with an English word. It's like the conversation moves further away from you, and the person also drifts apart from you.

Using English terminology was creating barriers, distancing nonbinary people from those they were trying to communicate with. However, when they were trying to avoid foreign words and focus on using Turkish words, participants expressed that the explanations were quite lengthy, and that affected expression, as Moray explained:

> So, a language in which you cannot express yourself, of course, affects your existence. It makes it difficult to explain yourself to someone. Because you can't go and tell someone about yourself. While talking [about yourself], you need to make a paragraph of speech. It means there is something insufficient for you to explain your own existence. It restricts you there.

As Moray said, explaining the word is very cumbersome and requires a lot of words, and because explaining takes a lot of time, individuals' expression of themselves is also restricted. Elvin further noted, "To say that 'I am an individual outside the binary gender system' is very mouthful, really. That's why I almost never use it." Similarly, Odil said "Most of these terms, like nonbinary, are translated into Turkish in a cumbersome way, such as 'the one that does not exist in binary gender (*ikili cinsiyette bulunmayan*),' and so generally 'nonbinary' is being used." And since "most people have never encountered these words" this creates a barrier that limits effective communication. They also explained that, "generally speaking, the terms do not become standardized, whether it's assigned sex (*atanmış cinsiyet*) or gender (*toplumsal cinsiyet*)." This lack of standardized terminology not only hampers understanding but also restricts the ability to explain one's identity using Turkish.

There were also issues about how the definition was commonly made and explained. Bulut and Moray mentioned that the word "nonbinary" being founded on a binary

understanding is problematic. Bulut elaborated on this point, saying they end up having to explain through the negation of men and women and stated: “Frankly, people can’t grasp this situation. Because it really doesn’t have a name. Like, there are women and men, and nonbinary is a definition made through them. The language is indeed insufficient for explaining.” Moray also mentioned that “Establishing oneself through a non-binary framework via a binary concept is not a nice thing.” They elaborated, “Defining the word trans as non-cis, for example, is not a nice thing. Instead, the word trans was created, so we say trans. I would like something like that. But I’m not sure how much Turkish allows for that.” Moray emphasized that making a definition by using negation further confuses its meaning and limits its clarity. They exemplified this problem as: “when I say ‘woman,’ ten different things might come to someone’s mind, but at least it can set a boundary.” However, they continue by saying that “The lack of boundaries in the concept of nonbinary makes it difficult both in terms of language and in expressing it.” Moray concluded by expressing that this “makes it very difficult to understand” themselves, let alone expressing their identity to someone else.

Moray explained that the difficulty in expressing themselves due to language contributes further to their invisibility. Moray’s insight pointed to the importance of language in increasing visibility and acceptance. They further explained, “the more you say something, the more its visibility increases. The less you say it, the more you disappear, the more invisible you become.” This lack of terminology forces many nonbinary people to use vague or inaccurate labels, thus perpetuating their invisibility.

**Discussion of the First Theme**

My guiding question to understand the relation between the Turkish language and nonbinary people’s communication was: “in what ways does the Turkish language affect nonbinary individuals in expressing their gender identity?” My analysis revealed three key sub-themes

related to the ways Turkish affects nonbinary individuals in expressing their gender identity: pronoun use, binary gendered use of Turkish, and the absence of standardized terminology. Language, understanding of self, and communication are deeply interwoven since through language, individuals and groups make sense of themselves and communicate with others, create rules and traditions, and pass these to the next generations. Language is not just a means to reflect and communicate pre-existing gender categories; it is also a part of what constructs and maintains these categories (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). Linguistic structures of the language greatly influence how people speak and write about nonbinary people (Lardelli & Gromann, 2023). Similarly, nonbinary people are bound to the medium of language when they express themselves through language.

Gender exists in different degrees in various languages; for example, languages such as German and French have grammatical gender. In these languages, every noun has a grammatical gender. In languages such as English, gender is expressed with pronouns, and kinship or gender is seen in some occupations (Stahlberg et al., 2007). In genderless languages in which Turkish is included, there are no grammatical structures that indicate gender in the language besides kinship words and some exceptions (Gökmen & Peçenek, 2023), through cultural context and individual expression, the language often becomes gendered in practice, reinforcing existing gender roles.

My participants in this research talked about how access to language impacted their understanding of their own gender and contributed to increasing the level of effort it takes to express themselves. In comparison with more gendered languages, such as English, Kurdish, and Spanish, participants mentioned the positive aspects of Turkish, focusing on its gender-neutral grammar, particularly in pronoun use. The ambiguity created by the gender-neutral Turkish pronoun helped prevent others from making assumptions about their gender identity. This being said, some participants also specified that while Turkish's lack of gender-specific

pronouns can help avoid misgendering, it can also hinder the affirmation of one's gender identity, because people might be hesitant to ask about people's gender and assume another's gender.

Alan and Okyayuz (2022), in their research on the translation of audiovisual media from English to Turkish, discuss how the lack of gender-specific pronouns in Turkish, while seemingly neutral, can contribute to the erasure of non-binary identities. They note that using direct translations, such as translating he/she/they as the Turkish gender-neutral pronoun "*o*" can (un)intentionally dismiss characters' nonbinary identity in characters' conversations, leading to cisheteronormative interpretations. In order to resist the erasure of nonbinary identities in mainstream media, and because audiovisual media incorporate diverse gender identities into broader society, they emphasize the need for deliberate translation choices to maintain the representation of nonbinary identities.

While some participants were happy with Turkish being grammatically gender-neutral, others were very hesitant to consider Turkish as a fully gender-neutral language since it was not used in a gender-neutral way in their experience. Even though there is no grammatical gender in the Turkish language, significant attention is given to semantic/lexical gender, which refers to gender distinctions based on the meaning of words (Gökmen & Peçenek, 2023), or to covert/social gender, which refers to situations where gender is not explicitly marked but is implied or understood through cultural or contextual cues (Kerimoğlu & Doğan, 2015). Participants explained that they often cannot express themselves or be addressed in a gender-neutral way due to Turkish society's persistent binary gender mindset, which is reflected in the gendered language commonly used. This can be explained by the norms of cisheteronormativity in the culture and its influence on language use. Another example of culture affecting language is *Lubunca*, a queer slang developed by

and for binary trans people, which two participants found to be limited and still rooted in heterosexual binary norms, making it restricting for expressing nonbinary identities.

Participants in my study expressed frustration with the inconsistent and non-standardized terminology relating to gender and sexuality concepts in Turkish, which complicates communication and understanding. Reaching a consensus on these concepts' Turkish equivalents is challenging (Başar, 2013); an example of the often-confusing terminology used in Turkish is the use of the terms "*cinsel kimlik*" (sexual identity) and "*cinsiyet kimliği*" (sex identity) as they are used interchangeably due to the lack of a set terminology (Berk Yılmaz, 2019). This societal tendency to confuse sex with sexuality and gender within Turkish communities complicates matters further. Many people still confuse sexual orientation with gender identity, seeing being gay as a gender issue or, conversely, being trans as an immoral sexuality issue (Selen, 2020). The lack of consistent and standardized gender-related terminology in Turkish presents significant communication challenges for nonbinary individuals.

All thirteen participants in the study expressed frustration with the absence of clear, effective terms to describe their gender identities. This lack of established terminology often leads to misunderstandings and requires nonbinary individuals to explain and reframe their identities constantly.

In Turkish, many terms that describe gender identity are either absent or inadequately developed, forcing nonbinary individuals to rely on borrowed or makeshift terminology. For instance, all participants mentioned the challenges of not having a direct translation for "nonbinary" in Turkish, compelling participants to use a combination of words or foreign terms to convey their identities.

English significantly influences the Turkish-speaking LGBTQ+ communities, including participants in this research, particularly in their use of language to discuss gender

identity and sexual orientation. Words like "*lezbiyen*" (lesbian), "*kuir*" (queer), and "*transmask*" (transmasc) were commonly borrowed from English, highlighting a reliance on English terms to express these identities. When asked about their preferred pronouns during the interviews, which were held in Turkish, all participants, even those with limited English proficiency, responded using English pronouns without needing explanations or translations. This reliance on English while still talking in Turkish, discussed by all participants, shows that even though it is not an inherent structure in the Turkish language, gendered pronouns are still used to indicate gender.

This terminological gap and borrowing words from English not only affects participants' gender identity development but also impacts how they are perceived and accepted within the broader society as nonbinary people. Although language borrowing is a natural outcome of living in a globalized world, right-wing Turkish media portrays this as a Western attempt to erase Turkish religious values and corrupt family values (Korkmaz, 2023). While many terms from dominant languages, such as English, have seamlessly integrated into the everyday use of Turkish vocabulary without facing similar scrutiny, including the term "heterosexual," sexual minority and gender identity-related terms such as nonbinary are seen as promoting Western values, further stigmatizing nonbinary individuals and their use of language (Tar, 2021).

My findings aligned with Toraman's (2023) research on nonbinary people's gender identity development in Türkiye. In their study, they touch upon how the lack of nonbinary terminology and representation limits nonbinary individuals' ability to understand and communicate their identities, leading to challenges in various areas of life, including work, health, and education. In my research, ten participants mentioned that the lack of terminology and language to identify and express themselves further contributed to their invisibility.

Invisibility can strain personal relationships, including with family, friends, and romantic partners, who may not understand or accept nonbinary gender identities.

The struggle to find appropriate language mirrors the more general societal reluctance to recognize and validate nonbinary identities, both politically and culturally. Consequently, the lack of clear terminology serves as both a symptom and a perpetrator of the marginalization faced by nonbinary individuals in Türkiye.

**Theme 2: Strategies and Adaptations: "I think you are how you feel."**

Participants had several strategies and adaptations they adopted to communicate their nonbinary identities within the Turkish context. Central to these efforts was the deliberate choice of language and communication styles that affirm nonbinary identities while challenging traditional gender norms. Many participants shared that reading queer theory and learning gender-related terminology was liberating, helping them better understand themselves. To address gaps in Turkish terminology, they often relied on translated concepts from other languages, primarily English, or borrowed terms directly. Participants also shared ways to navigate conversations, such as being straightforward about their gender identity and using humor to lighten the mood of the conversation, especially when they were talking with cisheterosexual people. Another common pattern that emerged was how much effort the participants put into educating others about gender-identity-related topics, such as definitions and usage of English pronouns, in their everyday interactions. Finally, most of the participants highlighted that while their clothing choices did not define their gender identity, these choices sometimes can play a role in how they communicate their nonbinary identity to others.

***Strategies for Communication: "after all, people want to define themselves"***

To overcome language-related challenges in Turkish, participants coped by using various strategies and adaptations. Participants mentioned the potential flexibility and inclusivity of

Turkish, which can be leveraged to promote gender-neutral communication while supporting and accommodating the expression of nonbinary identities. Taking advantage of the language being suitable for this, the participants generally stated that they were making an effort for gender-neutral usage. Elvin said:

> You know, 'linguistically-wise,' due to it being a 'gender-neutral' language but also due to how I use Turkish. For example, let's say you can call a person handsome (*yakışıklı*), you can call a person beautiful (*güzel*), but I call everyone just beautiful (*güzel*). Because in my word usage it's a bit more like one thing for everyone, and since the language itself is also 'gender-neutral,' I think it's a very good language, I mean, I love Turkish in this regard.

All participants mentioned how they made deliberate language and word choices. They said that by doing this, they avoided misgendering and they created a more inclusive environment for everyone, including those who may still be exploring their gender identities. Fikret elaborated on this preference: "In my mind, the most logical method would be to speak neutrally to everyone, or, for example, to make my compliments neutral and to maintain everything in a neutral state." They explained that this approach not only benefits those who identify as nonbinary but also supports anyone who may be in the process of understanding their own gender identity. Elvin said they are making "deliberate word choices quite often." For instance, they brought up their deliberate use of the word "individual (*birey*), instead of using man or woman." They explained they are using these words "with people who are not used to such words," because they "think that people might get used to it and maybe it will 'flourish' like this." Elvin said they "try to increase 'awareness' of this in a more open or more subtle way, or to increase the familiarity of it."

*Learning and Using Terminology*

Learning the terminology was a big turning point for many participants. Ekin explained this as "if I didn't know I was nonbinary right now, I think I would feel very dysphoric because I didn't know what I was before." They emphasized the relief and clarity that discovering the term "nonbinary" brought to their life, noting, "discovering that there is

such a thing as nonbinary really helped me." They highlighted the importance of self-identification, explaining that "after all, people want to define themselves."

Participants also expressed how they started to feel freer and happier after they accepted themselves as nonbinary, as Mika said, from the moment they learned the term and accepted themselves as nonbinary, their "horizon expanded" and they did not "feel suffocated anymore." Rüzgar highlighted the importance of visibility and access to diverse gender narratives, particularly during the early stages of their coming out process. They stated that it would have been beneficial to see diverse gender representations in the media, or around them. Rüzgar emphasized the need for accessible narratives and resources: "If only I had listened to narratives, if there were sources from which I could access these narratives." They noted that having access to the queer community both online and through queer events made a significant difference in their understanding and acceptance of their gender identity.

*Using other languages/slangs and translating concepts*

Using English pronouns to increase visibility was a widely used strategy by all participants, especially writing their pronouns in their name tags on Zoom meetings as Fikret explained. Deniz also said: "So if there is a space that asks for a pronoun or something like that, I think I make it clear by writing they/them there." However, some participants stated that they also think this strategy might have some downsides because the use of English in a Turkish context can be seen as an elitist move that forces people to learn or use English. Fikret's concerns were mainly about the complexity of expressing one's identity in a multilingual way and reflecting on intersectionality given the complex history of the class struggle in the Turkish Republic and Kurdish-speaking people's repression. Fikret said:

> In a Turkish-speaking environment, for example, at an event that we organized, somehow, when people were introducing themselves, they started announcing their pronouns. Everyone announced their pronouns, and at some point, we discussed the 'elitist' aspect of it. Because people whose native language is not Turkish already exist on this platform, and, you know, they are already forced to speak Turkish due to

> a kind of nationalism aspect, and on top of that, adding the elitist attitude of needing to know English.

Indigo shared a similar sentiment, expressing how reliance on English can lead to a speaking style that is detached from everyday life. They noted that reading everything about gender in English in academic and daily life not only complicates communication but also contributes to a sense of alienation "when we talk about queerness in general, [...] I can't speak without throwing English in the middle."

The most used word among participants was the English word "nonbinary," which was used in most cases to explain their identity. However, if people did not know English, then this was not possible or very challenging as the word is not yet commonly adapted as a Turkish word. One common strategy was translating concepts from English, particularly the word "nonbinary." Participants shared varying views on how they translated and explained this term in Turkish. Fikret noted that some LGBTQ+ organizations are holding workshops to develop more inclusive language, including translating the term "nonbinary" into Turkish. Both Moray and Deniz mentioned their involvement in such translation projects.

Nova explained that translating "nonbinary" into Turkish is often necessary to make their gender identity more intelligible, though this comes with challenges. For example, some participants expressed hesitation regarding the proposed Turkish translation of the word "nonbinary" as *"naikili*," which would be a direct word-for-word translation. Iraz explained that they didn't like *"naikili"* because *"naikili"* seems "as foreign to people as nonbinary." Rüzgar shared similar thoughts, appreciating the collective identity of *"naikili"* because the *"na"* sounds reminiscent of *Lubunca* word *"natrans"* which means cisgender. However, they pointed out the practical limitations:

> When I use *'naikili,'* because the *'na'* sounds a bit like *Lubunca,* it feels good from a group identity perspective. But, if I were to write something, I would write 'nonbinary' or define 'nonbinary' as *'naikili'* first and then write it. I don't think everyone will understand the same thing from *'naikili*,' but they will from 'nonbinary.' So, there's this weird group belonging aspect, and I'm not sure if

> everyone will understand it or if it will reach the reader. It might just stay within the group. […] So, it's positive, it makes me feel good, but it still feels immediately limited.

Rüzgar's commentary shows that there is a tension between the comfort of using a term familiar within the LGBTQ+ communities and the need for broader intelligibility, suggesting that *"naikili"* may remain limited to intra-community use unless it gains wider acceptance.

Another proposed translation of nonbinary was *"cinsiyetsiz,"* which literally means genderless. However, some participants were unhappy about this translation. Rüzgar expressed uncertainty, stating that it "implies the absence of something, and nonbinary doesn't feel to me like the absence of something." Similarly, Odil explained that "It's not the exact equivalent" and is closer to the English term "agender." Rüzgar also critiqued the use of *"cinsiyetsiz"* as they feared that this term could play into conservative political narratives. They explained their unsettled feeling about this as it could be understood as:

> It seems like we're saying something about these right-wing arguments about erasing our gender or something. Frankly, that concept seems like something that will strengthen their [right-wing government] hand. That's why, for example, I never thought about genderless. When I say nonbinary, I mean I don't feel that way. Because I still feel like I have a gender.

Deniz also shared a similar thought and wished that the term "genderlessness ceases to be such a term of fear" because the "conservatives" think that using these words serves the purpose of creating a gender identity crisis in children: "They are going to make our children genderless (*Çocuklarımızı cinsiyetsizleştirecekler*)." Most participants agreed on the complexity and inadequacy of directly translating gender identity terms to Turkish.

Participants often employed various strategies to explain their nonbinary identities due to the lack of precise terminology in Turkish. Explaining the definition of nonbinary was a common strategy that was used. Deniz, for instance, underscored the efficacy of employing negation to demystify binary conceptions. They articulated, "Conceptually, it's actually quite simple. When I explain it through not being a man and also not being a woman, it becomes

something that people can understand more easily." They explained this strategy helps bridge the gap between the unfamiliar concept of nonbinary identity and explain it using the more recognized binary gender system. Nova elaborated on a similar strategy, saying,

> Generally when I am sharing for the first time I do this by translating the word a bit more into Turkish, like, I don't feel like a woman or a man. It feels like I don't belong to either mold. Well, biologically yes, I am a woman, you know, there is such a situation. But when we look at the context of what social roles impose on our behavior, I do not feel like I belong to either of these classifications. I remember coming out as I couldn't fit on both sides.

Lastly, Indigo highlighted the use of Lubunca, in casual settings to navigate terminological challenges: "Because saying like I'm transmasc, trans masculine, etc. These are very terminological in a certain environment, but let's say I am out smoking at the party, I say I'm *'laçovari T'* (mannish trans).*"*

*Being straightforward*

Participants stated that most of the time they are being straightforward about their nonbinary gender identity and answering questions to prevent misunderstanding or misgendering beforehand, when they feel it is safe and appropriate to do so. Fikret noted the importance of asserting their identity early in social interactions to prevent misinterpretation, sharing an experience at a bar in Ankara where they quickly stated their nonbinary gender to avoid being perceived as a woman. Pera shared that sometimes people address them as "*beyefendi*" (gentleman) or something similar based on their masculinity, which makes them uncomfortable. They said they prefer a straightforward approach with people, explaining that they told people that it is sufficient to use the casual form "*sen*" (singular you) or the polite form "*siz*" (respectful singular you) in Turkish without adding gendered honorifics, titles, or terms that carry gender implications. They explain that they directly discuss how Turkish has many ways to communicate gender neutrally, emphasizing the importance of using neutral language to avoid assumptions about gender.

Some participants mentioned directly communicating that they don't like to use gendered adjectives or words. Mika explained, "When they ask how to address me, instead of using gendered terms like woman or man, you can address me as Mika." Mika emphasized their discomfort with gendered language, saying, "So, I generally tried to express that I don't like gendered adjectives and requested only my name to be used, mostly in social circles and professional life."

*Using Humor*

Some participants were utilizing playful or humorous language to express their gender. Bulut emphasized the role of communication style in their coming out journey, stating, "as I said, it depends on how you explain it, how you disclose yourself." They further elaborated on the influence of humor, noting, "There's also the direct humor situation. Explaining with humor, you are a flip flopping one (*bir öylesin bir böylesin,* You say one thing and do another/there's no telling what you'll do), and so on, these kinds of situations occur." They explained this makes the conversation less heavy.

Deniz added to this by explaining how humor and fun language are prevalent in nonbinary and activist circles. They said that this helps create a supportive and engaging environment. They explained, "Especially among nonbinary people and in activist circles, there can be much more *gullüm* [a Lubunca word meaning fun chatting] approaches to this, and this is something that feels good." They further elaborated, "Here again, it's fun to say '*ne idüğü belirsiz*'" which can be translated as an unidentified, unknown or unpredictable one, or they "express their gender in completely different ways [...] both in terms of translation and in terms of expression, saying *'naikili,'* saying *'qeyri-binar'* as in Azerbaijani [meaning outside of binary in Azerbaijani], like saying *'ikilik dışı'* [outside of binary]." Deniz explained "Turkish can also be good in such contexts where this kind of fun discussion (*gullüm*) is happening. For example, I think *'ne idüğü belirsiz,'* is something sweet from a

place like that." Not only Deniz but also Moray, Odil, and Rüzgar agreed that they feel joy with *gullüm* gatherings, for example, Odil noted that making conversations and jokes about their identity contributes to their "sense of belonging" and makes them feel more understood.

**Educating Others: "So, being nonbinary is a bit like LGBT 102"**

In the interviews, all participants mentioned at least some level of teaching. Almost all the participants were putting considerable effort to explain themselves to others. Whether in the form of translation, explanation, or teaching of terminology, participants were putting a lot of effort into making themselves intelligible to people around them. Nine participants mentioned that they were very tired of their daily interactions involving mandatory teaching moments to express their gender identity. Deniz explained how hard it is for others to understand by saying "So, being nonbinary is a bit like LGBT 102, not 101 anymore, but maybe more like 102 or something."

Bulut noted that the difficulty may stem from cultural factors, stating that "there is no public coming out of anyone famous," leading to a lack of representation in Türkiye. Bulut explained that they often resort to using familiar figures like Huysuz Virjin (a crossdressing stage persona) to explain concepts due to this absence. They described their approach to teaching by asking questions like, "How do you define yourself?" and "is your manhood (*erkekliğin*) the same as how your father sees his manhood (*erkeklikle*)?" and comparing different views of masculinity, highlighting that even though many identify as men, each person's definition differs.

When they continued to discuss the barriers to teaching, Bulut noted a lack of genuine understanding and receptiveness from those around them. They observed that "most people honestly didn't even try to understand me enough to misunderstand." They explained a cultural tendency to dismiss or trivialize their identity, making meaningful communication

difficult and diminishing their motivation to explain themselves or teach about nonbinary gender identity.

Bulut noted the curiosity of cis-hetero friends, explaining, “If someone wants me to explain, usually it’s my cis-hetero friends. They are curious about what it’s like. You feel like a rare animal at that moment.” Bulut explained how they directly explain their gender identity to demystify the concept nonbinary: “I usually tell them that it is a spectrum. I say that I don’t fit either end of this spectrum. I mean, I’m not a man, I’m not a woman. And I switch between the two.”

Similarly, Elvin and Mika discussed the challenges of constantly teaching and explaining. Elvin explained that peoples’ “intention is not bad, they are just confused and trying to understand.” Although Elvin expressed fatigue, they mentioned that “As long as I see that they respect me and at least see their effort, it’s not a problem for me. These issues get resolved during the process.” Mika noted that their family, despite not fully comprehending their nonbinary identity, have made significant progress. Mika appreciated this progress, though they acknowledged the frustration that comes with having to repeatedly explain their identity.

Indigo talked about teaching and explaining changes depending on people’s reactions. For example, with their mother, they felt like they were making progress, as they said, “By explaining a lot of concepts and stuff, she knows as much as you and me at the end of the day.” Yet, they explained how it is draining to teach to “a person who looks at you with empty eyes, who has never encountered such a term as nonbinary in his life, from scratch.” Correcting people and teaching were also very situationally dependent on the context. Most participants shared the sentiment that not every moment needs to be a teaching moment. Deniz described this as “picking your battles” and explained that while they wouldn’t bother

educating someone on a minibus, they would intervene if, for example, a trainer at an LGBTQ+ rights workshop referred only to "men and women."

**Gender expression: "my clothing does not determine my gender"**

In-person communication involves many nonverbal cues, and gender identity is often conveyed, intentionally or not, and assumed before any words are spoken. While most participants deliberately used personal expression, such as clothing, to challenge traditional gender roles and communicate their identity, some participants emphasized that they do not choose their looks to intentionally reflect their gender identity. All participants agreed that their gender expression did not define their gender identity.

Deniz explained: Even when they say that clothing does not determine their gender, "There is this discomfort caused by this misgendering (*atanmanın verdiği rahatsız edicilik*), and also an effort to present oneself in a different way to avoid being categorized. Like a desire to appear nonbinary." In terms of communicating nonbinary gender identity, Moray pointed out that people can make the "indicators and performances that exclude binary gender" be the norm. They expanded on this by saying "within the LGBT community for being nonbinary," there is a specific way one is expected to present themselves, "being queer also has a norm," describing the expectation to "look androgynous, neither feminine nor masculine." Moray described the pressure to conform to a specific queer aesthetic, noting, "You need to look queer; the performance of your gender expression needs to be queer." They expressed, "You can't be enough, by saying that I am nonbinary (*Yetemiyorsun ben nonbinaryim diyerekten*)."

Reflecting on their past, Iraz shared that "No matter how much I say it, what people saw was a woman. So, whether I say nonbinary or not, it doesn't usually change much for them." However, embracing their trans identity and starting the transition process, made them more accepted as they said: "When I want to reflect it on my appearance and when I dress the

way I feel comfortable, when I wear my hair, you know what? My nonbinaryness became more acceptable, more visible." After undergoing gender-affirming care, including double mastectomy, Iraz found joy in the resulting ambiguity. "I feel much, much, much better than I did before," they said:

> I was always trying to hide my breasts, and it was easier for people to put me in that binary gender system. Now that they don't exist, being without breasts confuses people and they don't know what to say, and I like that. For me, it's like, if someone is confused about whether I am a man or a woman, I get excited. Yes, that's what I'm talking about, it's neither! I get all hyped up, let's think about it a little bit, so I like it. This medical process has contributed to me in a good way.

Ekin conveyed that, although unintentional, they express their nonbinary gender through the incorporation of elements from both genders "for example, getting a haircut. Or it could be mixing and doing both of the roles that society assigns to both genders separately." They explained: "Because, you know, I see this; people on the street sometimes don't understand whether I'm a girl or a boy. So, I think they sort of understand that I am nonbinary." Similarly, Odil explained that they use both masculine and feminine behaviors, either mixing them at different times or combining them and emphasized that people who see them can notice this neutral or mixed expression of gender. They explained as follow:

> Well as an expression, for example, I have my hair color. You know, even a 50 or 60-year-old person who doesn't know me can see very clearly that I don't fit gender roles. Whether it's my hair color, my choice of clothes, my tone of voice, my way of speaking. […] This is how I express it.

Mika's and Elvin's experiences showed that gender expression was not always intended to send a clear message to others. Elvin explained that while their daily activities, like wearing a skirt or nail polish, might signal nonbinary identity, they are not meant to explicitly communicate this. Elvin stressed: "I mean, it's like a way of being that feeds each other rather than a cause-and-effect relationship, a nonbinary individual may hate nail polish." Mika similarly noted that their clothing choices prioritize comfort but often align with nonbinary stereotypes, even if unintentionally.

In reflecting on their nonbinary experiences and offering advice to others, five participants stressed the disconnect between external appearance and gender identity. On this, Ekin asserted that "your external appearance and your gender identity (*beyanının*) have nothing to do with each other. I think you are how you feel." Fikret emphasized in the interview that "My clothing does not determine my gender." Lastly, Moray concluded about gender expressing by saying:

> I can say this: we don't have to look queer. You don't have to have an androgynous or that kind of appearance. I mean, if you're nonbinary, you're nonbinary. You can continue to be nonbinary while having any appearance you want.

**Discussion of the Second Theme**

This theme is guided by my second sub-question: "How do nonbinary individuals in Türkiye convey their gender identity to others, and how do they use language to make their gender identity understandable in their daily lives?" In the interviews, participants provided many examples and explanations for both verbal and nonverbal communication strategies they employ. All thirteen of them explained that they make deliberate language choices to navigate semantically gendered language. To avoid misgendering and to create inclusivity, they prefer to use gender-neutral words instead of their gendered options. This conscious decision takes effort and time to adjust. Especially in professional settings such as work or school life, using gender-neutral language causes them additional labor and stress. They also explained that they are doing a lot of teaching and educating in order to be intelligible, which creates an emotional burden. Lastly, some participants explained that they are using nonverbal expressions like clothing that challenge binary gender norms; some noted that appearance is not always a deliberate reflection of their identity, stressing that gender expression does not determine their gender identity.

Participants explained that discovering and using the term "nonbinary" brought them clarity and relief. Finding the right words to describe themselves was important to them and

increased their sense of authenticity. Participants emphasized their relief when they were finally able to reach resources and a community. People with Trans+ identities explore various labels and eventually connect those labels to their own experiences, often through personal reflection and research (Saltis et al., 2022). My participants' experience shows that, in the Turkish context, this exploration is limited due to language barriers, lack of media representation and role models.

Participants negotiated their identities through everyday interactions, using language as a tool. Because Turkish does not have a standard terminology to define gender nonconforming identities, participants expressed their identities in a multilingual way. Many participants felt that using English terms complicated conversations and caused alienation. They preferred to use Turkish translations of the words or explanations, because English terms were often seen as Western imitations, especially in the context of right-wing discourses on cultural erosion by "imported concepts and identities."

In Türkiye, conservative groups often use LGBTQ+ terms to stoke fear and frame such terms as part of a "gender identity crisis." This is seen to threaten traditional family and societal values or equate nonbinary identities with homosexuality, which is condemned in Islam (European Center for Populism Studies (ECPS) et al., 2023; Selen, 2020). This stigmatization complicates the acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities, making the translation of gender and sexuality-related concepts not just a linguistic issue but also a cultural one. With this said, as my participants mentioned, there are many translation efforts that continue in Türkiye, mostly by LGBTQ+ organizations (Kaos GL, 2022; Uçan, 2017). Translation is crucial in challenging dominant narratives shaped by conservative institutions like religion, family, and the state, and in creating counter-narratives to subvert heteronormativity and homo/transphobia in Türkiye (Duraner, 2021).

In addition to the negative discourses stemming from conservative spaces, the use of English terminology and resources is also criticized within the Turkish LGBTQ+ community itself. During my interviews, one of the most reflected and sometimes openly criticized communication strategies was using English pronouns to hint at their nonbinary gender identity. While five participants mentioned that they choose to use English pronouns to be more visible and think that pronouns can promote visibility and recognition of diverse identities, two participants raised how this expectation to use English pronouns can create a sense of linguistic superiority and exclusion. The use of English pronouns in a Turkish context can be perceived as an elitist move that imposes additional linguistic burdens. This perception stems from the fact that English proficiency is often associated with higher social status and education (Dogancay-Aktuna & Kiziltepe, 2005). Consequently, the expectation to use English pronouns can create a sense of exclusion for those who do not speak English, reinforcing a hierarchy where English speakers are privileged. This dynamic can marginalize individuals and create barriers to full participation in conversations about gender identity and inclusivity.

In their interview, Fikret told me in length why they think using English terms while speaking Turkish can be elitist. Fikret's concerns highlight the intersectionality of language, ethnicity, gender, and class within the complex history of Türkiye. Kurdish speakers in Türkiye have historically been repressed by Turkish nationalist policies aimed at enforcing linguistic homogeneity (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2012). By adding the expectation to use English pronouns, terminology, and resources, there is a risk of reinforcing these historical inequalities and creating new forms of linguistic exclusion.

There are also academic discussions highlighting the power dynamics in the dissemination of LGBTQ+ categories, framing them as Western impositions and knowledge imperialism (Massad, 2007). Such critiques are valuable in interrogating global inequalities,

particularly in relation to visibility politics, "coming out," and the dominance of English as a class marker, as my study also questions the elitist use of English. With this said these critiques may risk oversimplifying local gender experiences and overlooking the dynamic, hybrid ways in which local communities engage with and transform global discourses. In my interviews, participants' wordings show that their gender conceptualizations and communications operate beyond simplistic binaries of Western imitation/imposition vs. local uses, revealing a more complex interaction between global structures and local everyday practices. My research demonstrates that nonbinary individuals in Türkiye do not simply borrow external categories; rather, they actively negotiate, reshape, and localize them within their own experiences.

Participants were often in the position of both learning and teaching the terminology needed to explain their gender identity. They had to teach themselves how to talk about these topics, usually without many opportunities or sufficient language resources. This self-education typically involved searching online resources in English and engaging with LGBTQ+ organizations. However, as my research highlights, this process of self-education is not simply an act of adopting English terms but also of reshaping and localizing them within the participants' own cultural contexts and language. Just as participants use both English discourses and local practices, their gender conceptualizations reflect a hybrid engagement with external categories, such as the use of Lubunca terms like "*laçovari* (mannish)" or "*gacıvari* (womanish)."

Once they understood the terminology, they faced the challenge of communicating and teaching others about their gender identity. This process was not always casual but was driven by the unintelligibility and necessity to reiterate their nonbinary gender identity. There was a need and expectation for individuals to educate those around them and advocate for their rights, such as teaching about nonbinary identities to healthcare workers in order to

access gender-affirming care, or informing policymakers. A lot of teaching happens because there is no formal education about gender identity and sexuality-related topics in schools or professional contexts (Erturk, 2019), and there is very limited Turkish mass media representation (İnceoğlu, 2020; Şansal, 2021), so nonbinary people find themselves in a position to fill this gap.

Participants frequently engaged in translating, explaining, and teaching their nonbinary identities to others, and this took a lot of time and energy. While they often explained themselves through translation and teaching terminology, they sometimes chose silence if coming out felt too exhausting or they feared not being taken seriously. Nonbinary people strike a fine balance between the need to express themselves and avoiding the redundancy of educating others.

Constant learning and teaching were also a stage for developing and maintaining participants' gender identities. Participants reaffirmed their gender identities with language and word choices. This identification-based affirmation was very prominent in the interviews when we were talking about gender expression, which I can summarize as, “I identify as nonbinary; therefore, I am nonbinary.”

Participants emphasized the importance of verbal declaration rather than gender presentation as a method of identity construction and affirmation. This is in line with the literature; nonbinary individuals often self-disclose their gender and remind others about their gender (Shuster & Lamont, 2019), engaging in constant “identity work” through which they construct, maintain, and negotiate their identities in interaction with others (Sumerau, 2021). This ongoing practice of verbalizing their identity can be seen as a form of self-determination rather than being limited by external expectations of how nonbinary people “should” look.

With this said, some participants explained that they also communicate their nonbinary identity through physical presentation and actions. During the interviews, five

participants explained that they can express their gender identity through their outfit choices and the (non)use of nail polish and makeup, which is also consistent with the literature (Fletcher & Swierczynski, 2023). When we were talking about gender expression and its link to the expression and communication of nonbinary gender, Elvin said:

> That's why I started to play a little bit more, especially through my dressing, [...] wearing a dress while working in construction and building walls with a drill or doing work that requires physical strength. Like, while I feel feminine, doing work that is generally associated with masculinity, that chaos allowed me to use this space as a playground a little bit, and even if it feels chaotic.

Elvin's experience provides a vivid example of Butler's (1999) subversive repetition, showing how it operates in practice. The concept of subversive repetition suggests that while unintelligibility can lead to marginalization, it also creates a space for resistance. By existing outside of the binary normative framework, unintelligible identities can subvert and challenge dominant norms, potentially catalyzing broader social and cultural changes. Elvin's choice to wear a dress while engaging in traditionally masculine activities, like construction work, serves as a form of gender performance that defies conventional norms. They explain how these actions blur the lines between femininity and masculinity. By engaging in behaviors deemed inappropriate by societal standards, nonbinary people can demonstrate that these norms are socially constructed and not inherently natural or inevitable.

Butler (1999) posits that norms of masculinity and femininity are essential for an intelligible identity, as individuals are socialized into these norms from an early age. Gender minorities, who may challenge these norms, do so by repeating them in unauthorized contexts. This repetition, termed "subversive" or "parodic," shows that there is no singular, natural way to embody these norms. Instead, different versions and repetitions of gender norms reveal their flexibility and potential for change. By intentionally mixing elements associated with different genders, nonbinary people disrupt the binary framework, opening possibilities for more fluid and inclusive understandings of their gender identity. This aligns

with Butler's view that resistance does not lie in the outright rejection of norms but in their subversive repetition. Through these acts, unintelligible identities not only resist marginalization but also actively contribute to the reimagining and restructuring of societal expectations.

**Theme 3: Communicating Gender Identity in Various Contexts: "More than sharing, I insist on being seen and accepted"**

Communicating one's gender identity is deeply personal and each participant expressed unique motivations and ways to express themselves. For many, the act of communicating was not only about sharing but also about being seen and accepted authentically. Their decision-making processes were affected by social context and were tailored around factors such as accessibility of healthcare and societal expectations.

***Motivations to Communicate: "a burden was lifted from me"***

Participants had nuanced and complicated thoughts about the reasons for coming out and talking about their gender identity to others. Throughout the interviews, some participants explained that their nonbinary gender identity is an important part of their identity and that to have a meaningful deep relationship with someone, they need to be understood as nonbinary. Elvin explained, their nonbinary identity was crucial for them to have a close relationship "because, if it is a person who wants to learn about me, they should learn about me, including everything, and my nonbinary identity is one of the cornerstones of my identity." They said this is one of the first things they communicate, "if I attach importance to that communication, I indicate this from the very beginning." This is also tied to getting their gender recognized by people close to them. Some expressed that "Maybe, right now it doesn't matter that much, like I say, 'I am at peace with myself,' but of course, it is tiring on the other hand because why don't you acknowledge me?" Elvin explained that they want everyone

who they want to keep in their life to be informed about their gender identity and not to have the frustrations of being misgendered.

Similarly, for Nova, deep connections were crucial in deciding whether to come out. They highlighted the significance of being understood by those they have a meaningful connection with: “I care for the people that I have a deep connection with. I care that the people that I open to know who I really am and what I’m feeling.”

Mika highlighted the significance of talking about their gender and emphasized the need for increased visibility and recognition of nonbinary experiences. Mika said:

> When it comes to language, when it comes to being embodied in language, and when I hear it coming out of my mouth, I feel like it has a bit more meaning. That is why it is important to talk about such things so that they are discussed more so that visibility is increased. And maybe for us to get more used to it as we hear more and see more. Because the more we hear, the more we see, the more we’ll get used to it. This is a new thing for me, too, being nonbinary.

Odil stated, “I expressed myself better to them [to friends]; a burden was lifted from me. I came out in a short time anyway. I mean, I came out in a month or so.” This indicates that the act of coming out brought significant relief and alleviated the internal conflict Odil was experiencing about whether to disclose their identity or not.

A significant finding of my study is that interviewees felt that their authenticity increased with the coming out process. Participants expressed that they find it easier to express themselves and feel more comfortable in their communications with people to whom they had already come out. Nova’s experience is a good example for this: “I mean, I feel that I have started to express myself more comfortably as me in the environments where I started to come out. I can express when I am uncomfortable with something.” Coming out helps them to continue to “introduce myself more like me.” Nova further explained this:

> When I am with my parents, for example. I mean, when they say you are a woman, do this and that, I can say that I am not that kind of woman, but when one of my friends says that, it is more comfortable to say, ‘Watch your mouth, I am not a woman.’ So, I experience myself more like me.

Similar to Nova, Rüzgar's experience highlights the necessity of being understood in daily life encounters. They faced challenges with their partner's family, who struggled to understand nonbinary identities. Rüzgar explained that while the family could grasp the idea of binary trans identity, they could not understand nonbinary identities. There was a calculation going on by weighing the potential benefits, disadvantages and efforts related to coming out. Rüzgar felt they had to explain their gender to their family to ease future encounters: "I would prefer not to explain it to them, but unfortunately, they are the people I will see all the time, so, I had to explain and make them accept it."

Participants explained the complexities of their decision processes between coming out in a freer social context versus the need to live an authentic life. Bulut explained that they had tried to wait until they moved from Türkiye, stating, "I've been trying to move abroad for years actually. I always kept my process, my disclosure, always to when I will be abroad, to be honest, it was a bit of a way to protect myself, I guess." However, economic constraints have prevented this move and have led Bulut to confront the reality of their circumstances. Their longing for authenticity and freedom made them change their mind, "life is passing by and it's not possible for me to go abroad in the near future in this economy. And living like this started to feel like a burden. Later on, I came out in Türkiye."

***Selective Disclosure Based on Closeness: "a strange hierarchy"***

While for some people, coming out is a very calculated thing, mostly to avoid risks of backlash, for others, talking about their gender and gender-related thoughts can be an impulsive or casual decision. Pera explained that they have "a certain circle, a certain bubble" with whom they are out and comfortable, but they said that outside this bubble, they can also come out casually, even surprising themselves. For example, as they described:

> When I was working at a bar, or in a more cis-hetero environment, you know? Yes, like this, recently, I even saw someone from a place I used to work at, and they said something like, 'What happened to your voice? Did you just wake up?' The thing is, I said, 'No, dude, I'm on testosterone.' No, I didn't just wake up, and he was also a bit

> puzzled, actually a cis-hetero guy. He could have said something offensive. It wasn't really a very intimate thing, but I just said it out loud, and he didn't say anything like that back to me, and the moment passed.

Bulut articulated that their coming-out approach depends on the context and their emotional state. They described a scenario in which they anticipated not disclosing their identity immediately upon entering a new environment, explaining, "I will go tomorrow [to a new job] and most likely won't come out to anyone until I see someone I genuinely feel close to." They also expressed the unpredictability of their own responses, noting, "Sometimes, I just blurt it out, honestly, I can't predict myself well in these matters. Sometimes, this confidence and peace with myself just comes over me, and I directly say it, no matter the outcome, I don't care." Spontaneous disclosure contrasts with moments of caution and restraint, illustrating the fluidity in some participants' coming-out process.

Although it contains spontaneity, what Bulut explains next shows how much they try to be prepared for every reaction. They continued, "I guess it depends on how open you are to getting hurt by the other person, I mean, how ready and strong you feel." Bulut, here, indicates the emotional vulnerability involved in sharing something personal and not being taken seriously or being blindsided by negative or hurtful reactions. Further, Bulut elaborated on the sensitivity of their identity, describing it as their "very existence," and the need to be prepared for hurtful remarks, even if unintended by the speaker: "you have to be prepared for the worst thing they might say. They don't even realize they are saying hurtful things."

Most participants had a specific social circle where they felt comfortable and understood in terms of their gender identity. Beyond this familiar space, they explained that they might encounter challenges, particularly in environments like workplaces or schools, which are usually more cisgender- and heterosexual-dominated. Decision making about coming out and communication might be different in these places and situations. It is up to

the participants to come out and try to communicate their gender identity, and every encounter shared by participants was marked by the uniqueness of each interaction.

For participants, the will to communicate with people about gender identity is not uniformly applied to everyone in their lives, rather, it is selective, prioritizing deep connections over broader societal recognition, because it takes a lot of effort to come out. Participants almost all unanimously emphasized that they would disclose their nonbinary gender identity to their close circle. As Odil said: “If it’s my close friend, my very close friend, or if there is something related to this topic, then I inform them, but if not, it’s not very important whether they know or don’t know.”

Many participants explained a situation where they established a certain hierarchy regarding to whom they were coming out. Rüzgar said that they felt like communication of their gender was important in places where the service they received was essential or significant. In contrast, they did not see the need to come out or discuss their gender with people they would only see once. Rüzgar emphasized the importance of this in certain situations, saying: “for example, it is important in health.” In contrast, they note that their gender identity feels less critical in other contexts or infrequent interactions: “But in the bank, for example, the man in the bank does not feel important, or you know, I don’t know, in a place where I am with hetero and with the elderly.”

Rüzgar used this hierarchy to decide to whom they disclose their identity: “If they are people I care about, people I share my life with, it can be anything. I mean, it can be a family member, it can be partners, it can be friends and so on.” This prioritization is driven by a desire for recognition: “More than sharing, I insist on being seen and accepted in that way.” For more distant relationships, Rüzgar has decided to either distance themselves or chosen not to disclose at all: “It has evolved into something like, for example, more distant people

(*üçüncül beşincil kişiler*) or, you know, in the family, I just kept my distance, and I don't talk about things with them anymore."

Rüzgar's approach changes depending on the context and the relationship, highlighting that coming out is not a one-size-fits-all process: "That's why I don't have a single answer; it's always fluctuating." Similarly, Nova emphasized that "it's important for me depending on my closeness." Within their close circle, including family, it is vital for Nova to be recognized and accepted for their true self. Similarly to Rüzgar, Nova was indifferent to strangers or distant acquaintances: "So it doesn't matter to me whether any outside person knows that or not."

Deniz emphasized the practicality and context-dependence of their coming-out strategy. They stated, "In more everyday things, I don't express it. There isn't really such a situation where it is needed," sticking to a strategic approach of not coming out in situations perceived as inconsequential. For example, they mentioned, "when dealing with a clerk I will never see again in my life, there's no point in correcting them if they call me 'sir' (*bey*)." Participants were considering the necessity and potential impact of disclosing one's identity, carefully weighing the social context and the nature of each interaction. Deniz further clarified that they are selective about when and where to disclose their gender identity: "I express it in places where I spend regular time and depending on the context, but in much more everyday things, I don't express it, and I don't feel the need to."

Participants commonly expressed that communicating their gender identity is easier in LGBTQ+ circles since people have the vocabulary and are used to talking about these topics. The choice to come out in these contexts emphasizes the importance of a supportive and knowledgeable environment for nonbinary individuals. Deniz explained, "Mostly, I'm open, you know, I think. For example, in LGBT+ spaces, and civil society spaces, I express myself as nonbinary easily." All participants explained they were a lot more comfortable coming out

as a nonbinary person or correcting other people's acts of misgendering in LGBTQ+ environments. Deniz said: "For example, I express myself as nonbinary in the LGBTQ+ spaces and non-governmental spaces."

Similarly, Ekin explained that the amount of effort they put into explaining their gender to others was dependent on the people; saying that if that person is not a "*lubunya," (*a slang word that can be translated as queer), they do not fully explain their nonbinary gender identity. Ekin says: "I also directly tell people who are *lubunya* that I am nonbinary." Fikret reinforces the distinctions in disclosure in an LGBTQ+ space or not by saying: "I don't really come out to my cis friends because they don't also really ask."

With this said, not all participants felt LGBTQ+ environments made it easy to come out or communicate their nonbinary identities. Iraz mentioned hearing at an LGBTQ+ event: "now young people have come up with something called nonbinary, I don't know what that is." Also, Iraz was afraid of what happened in the past to their friends:

> My friends who went through the medical transition (*trans uyum süreci*), you know, when they came out as nonbinary in Facebook groups years ago, they were ostracized in trans men's groups. Or they said that they were not seen as trans enough, so they moved away from groups and circles.

Therefore, Iraz said: "I was afraid of experiencing this too, to be honest. That's why, for example, I don't add trans nonbinary to all the people I come out as trans." But depending on the context, if they feel "a little more comfortable or when I am one-on-one, I say that I am nonbinary."

***Tailoring the Disclosure: "because nonbinary is not intelligible to my boomer father."***

Choosing to disclose only certain aspects of their identity was a common pattern among participants. Due to the unintelligibility of nonbinary gender identity in Turkish society, some participants said that they choose to come out as "binary trans" because it is more easily understood by general society. Moray described the lengthy conversations associated with explaining their gender identity, leading them to simplify their disclosure process in certain

contexts, saying, “people don’t know much, including LGBT+s, especially when opening up to cis heterosexuals, you know, it’s like pulling teeth until you get your point across (*anlatana kadar insanın canı çıkıyor*).” They expressed that the effort to articulate their identity can be taxing, “because sometimes explaining it really feels like a burden to the person. So, I say, forget it, just move on. I say, ’I’m trans, let’s move on.” This exemplifies how they sometimes hide certain aspects of their gender identities to avoid lengthy explanations. Moray said “people get confused. It’s difficult, you know, I’m struggling. So, actually, moments like when I call myself trans or women, as we mentioned earlier, emerge.” Similarly, Pera said: “I mean, sometimes in some environments, to be more easily understood, I just say I’m a trans man and move on, or something like that.” Lastly, İndigo gave up coming out as a nonbinary person and came out as a binary trans, because nonbinary was not intelligible to their family. They said:

> In the family, the reason why I recently came out to my father was because I wanted to start hormones. And you know, I couldn’t come out as nonbinary because I had to come out in an intelligible way in order to start hormones. Because nonbinary is not intelligible to my boomer father! And I mean, of course, there are people who would prefer to do that. I don’t have that much patience.

Participants’ approach to coming out was highly adaptive and tailored to the people around them, reflecting a strategic navigation of social contexts. While talking about if societal expectations and cultural norms in Türkiye were affecting their understanding of their gender identity, Ekin said: “sometimes I try to define myself according to that person’s opinion. For example, I don’t say I’m a nonbinary transmasculine, I just say I’m nonbinary, or I don’t even say it.” Similarly, Fikret described a practical process of disclosure, choosing to identify as a trans man in certain situations because “it is easier” and provides a level of comfort. However, they also noted a complex approach when interacting with individuals who have a deeper understanding of gender concepts. In such cases, Fikret opted for a more explicit explanation of their nonbinary identity, stating, “if they will understand more easily when I

say nonbinary, I define it that way." They preferred a flexible and situational strategy for coming out, balancing ease of interaction with the desire to represent their gender identity accurately.

Some participants, like İndigo, explained that their gender presentation can vary between queer and safe environments and cis- and hetero-dominated spaces. They noted that on the street, "a passerby will assign you to the gender they see closest" making it difficult for them to be perceived as nonbinary. İndigo shared that being perceived as a woman in this binary categorization causes them dysphoria. As a strategy, they prefer to present in a more masculine way to "at least be masc passing." They concluded by reflecting on the broader implications of this strategy, "people who have a serious dysphoria or discomfort related to their assigned gender are pushed towards a binary transness. I don't really think that you can exist as nonbinary on the street, in the bazaar." This quote shows that it is harder to express nonbinary gender identity when it is not recognized or known and rather than more severe gender dysphoria, participants can choose to compromise in the way they share their gender.

*Access to Healthcare*

Coming out can create change in various relations and interactions, for example, Rüzgar expressed it changed their "relationship with the hospital." They explained that in the Turkish healthcare system, if one wants to take hormones, or have trans affirming surgeries one has to come out as a binary trans saying, "there is an obligation to go through that whole process right now." For many research participants, this was a compelling reason to misrepresent themselves to access the care they need.

Rüzgar did not express their nonbinary gender identity within the medical setting, and, as a result, had to navigate the healthcare system while being treated according to their assigned sex at birth. Rüzgar explained that the doctor performing their "top surgery" refused to perform a complete removal because it was seen as part of the gender-affirming process.

So, they told to the doctor: “do the smallest and the vaguest thing you can do,” which resulted in Rüzgar having a breast reduction rather than a full mastectomy. Despite these challenges, the surgery provided Rüzgar with a sense of relief and improvement, although the experience of having to hide their true identity caused them discomfort.

Iraz, Fikret, and İndigo had to hide part of their nonbinary identity and came out only as a binary transman within the medical setting. Iraz explained this as follows:

> In order to be able to have surgery, there are designated hospitals where you can start the gender affirmation process (*trans uyum süreci*), they can prescribe you hormones, etc. When I first went there for permission for surgery, I didn’t tell them that I was nonbinary because I thought that I wouldn’t be accepted as nonbinary and I wouldn't be able to get permission for surgery. And it was difficult for me in that process, I mean, I have been pretending all my life to fit in, now I want another fit to be comfortable and to be myself, but for that I have to lie again that I am a man.

Fikret was relating their treatment in the health care system with the invisibility of the nonbinary gender identity, saying, “there is definitely a visibility problem for nonbinary individuals in society.” This lack of recognition becomes particularly evident when accessing gender-affirming healthcare. Fikret shared their experience of needing to conform to a binary transmasculine expression to receive appropriate medical care:

> Whenever I want to go through any process, let’s say when I want to start hormones, I am expected to display a transmasculine identity. I might be a trans man as well, but I have to display it and say that I am only a trans man.

This expectation forces Fikret to present themselves in a way that aligns with a binary understanding of gender, to receive care, despite identifying as nonbinary.

The consequences of not conforming to these expectations can be significant. Fikret notes that they heard “how transmasc individuals’ processes are prolonged because they have not displayed masculinity.” They recount a specific incident where their nonbinary identity was questioned and scrutinized by healthcare providers: “Even when I paid for mastectomy, I’ve heard doctors saying ’your mind is confused’ when I said I’m nonbinary.” Fikret further remarked, “it’s like you’re being erased, like you don’t exist.” Fikret concludes by saying that

medical professionals, “They think of this as a trend-like thing. At least, that’s what I see in Türkiye.”

***Prefer Not to Communicate: “I don’t think I owe them coming out.”***

Participants discussed the safety concerns that can prevent someone from coming out, especially to family members who may react negatively. Ekin avoided coming out to their family due to their known negative reactions, noting that their mother dismisses the situation and their father, concerned about Ekin’s sexual orientation, has reacted aggressively. As Ekin explains, “That’s why I don’t open up to them because I know their opinions more or less.” Nova and Moray both discussed how perceived inclusivity in environments affects their decision to come out. Nova mentioned, “I don’t prefer to open up much in environments where I don’t think I will be understood or will be judged.” Moray added, “I was experiencing the difficulty of coming out a lot in feminist spaces. Because those places, I don’t know, at least some of them are exclusionary and very binary”

Participants expressed fatigue related to explaining their nonbinary identity and the constant negotiation of identity within social contexts, where they weighed the benefits of authenticity against the potential challenges and effort. Mika, who said they are willing to talk about their gender to other people if they are willing to listen and understand because it is important for visibility, stated: “In environments where I anticipate whether I’ll be understood, I act openly and more like myself. Because otherwise, I’m already 30 years old, you know. I’m already tired of these things.” They expressed a sense of resignation, noting that they don’t feel compelled to correct others when they are misgendered or misidentified in their everyday life interactions within society. Fikret similarly said: “I don’t feel the need; I mean, I live in such a society that, for example, if someone says ‘lady,’ there isn’t someone around me in the general community who can understand it when I correct it.” This was

coming from the realization that there isn't anyone in their immediate environment who would comprehend their correction or acknowledge their gender identity.

Over time, Indigo explained that they have chosen to minimize their efforts to explain their identity to others. They have grown weary of the repetitive and exhausting task of self-explanation, leading to a strategic withdrawal from such conversations. Indigo said: "Losing this hope is also not something I really love about myself, honestly. But, I mean, from an individual place, I really have started not even trying to explain my problem to people anymore."

Some participants also explained that their thoughts about coming out had changed, and that their priorities had shifted. Elvin explained, "At first, this was very important, and you know, being in the midst of this struggle," for them this was an important thing to fight for, "but afterwards, this, you know, this significance somewhat faded." In Elvin's case, they explained that they "started to get into a mindset of not fighting from a place of having to prove" themselves, but rather "not needing to fight at all." They felt like they could just exist the way they were.

> I'm saying this from a somewhat privileged position here. Because in daily life, maybe I don't have too many struggles that need constant monitoring. So, I don't have a lot of struggles that, for example, I'm still a male passing person, or I don't currently need a financially demanding medical surgery. […] So, what initially felt like a personal 'battle' has shifted towards a place of 'I am happy with myself.'

An interesting aspect of their experience was the absence of overt misgendering, which Odil attributed to the nature of Turkish grammar, where gender-neutral language is more common, especially in environments like university life. Odil said, "I may not have felt the need not to tell because there was no misgendering." They indicated that without misrecognition or discomfort, they might not go out of their way to communicate their gender identity.

Finally, Deniz also explained they do not come out to their family because "we already have a somewhat troubled communication with my parents, and we have very little communication. Therefore, I am not open in any way because they do not even accept more basic things." In the case of Pera, they have chosen not to disclose their gender identity to their family, citing practical considerations. They mentioned that even significant changes went unnoticed by their family: "for example, when I started hormones, they didn't notice". This reinforced their decision not to come out, because they do not perceive it as necessary or beneficial. They explained their thought process as "I see them once a year for 5 days. What do they know about my life, and why should I come out?" They articulate a sense of autonomy over their decision, grounding their choice in the nature of their familial ties. They said, "I don't think I owe them coming out. Because I don't have that kind of relationship with them."

**Discussion of the Third Theme**

A main requirement for participants in terms of communication and a prerequisite for nonbinary individuals to express themselves is their desire to do so. Therefore, I began my research by trying to understand whether nonbinary people living in Türkiye wanted to share their gender identity with others and the conditions under which they chose to do so. The guiding sub-question for this discussion was: Do nonbinary people in Türkiye want to communicate to other people that they are nonbinary, and if so, why, why not, and under what conditions do they want to communicate?

In my study, participants' decision-making was primarily influenced by social context, such as access to needs and societal expectations. The closeness of the relationship was the most significant factor when deciding to come out to someone. When discussing their motivations, participants talked about wanting to come out for reasons such as forming authentic relationships, establishing deep connections, and experiencing relief from the

burden of hiding their identity. This can be rooted in the need to come out to create genuine, reciprocal connections while feeling like they are their true self in daily social interactions. Nonbinary people, like others, have a need for recognition and visibility, and coming out plays a huge role in this (Heiden-Rootes et al., 2023).

Communicating one's gender identity is personal and about being authentically seen and accepted. For nonbinary individuals, coming out can be seen as aligning their self-understanding with their perceived social identity to achieve an authentic self-representation. To have meaningful relationships with others, participants explained that they needed to be understood and recognized as nonbinary. For the participants, their form of relationship with the person, their expectations from that relationship, and the closeness they felt played a significant role in their desire to come out. My interviews suggest that nonbinary individuals view coming out as a crucial step toward deepening their social relationships, because misalignment between how they see themselves and how others perceive them creates emotional dissonance.

Participants often choose whether to disclose their identity based on their assessment of the social environment and the level of acceptance they anticipate, echoing Goffman's conceptualization of dramaturgy. Erving Goffman's (1956) dramaturgy views social interaction as a theatrical performance where individuals engage in "impression management" and present different "fronts" depending on the audience and social context. Nonbinary individuals may strategically perform their gender identity to manage impressions and navigate social interactions. Impression management means that people try to control the impressions others have of them. Nonbinary individuals sometimes need to manage others' perceptions through selective disclosure and tailoring of their communication. Goffman discusses how passing and covering strategies parallel to "the arts of impression management, the arts, basic in social life, through which the individual exerts strategic

control," equip individuals with means to manage the image others perceive of them (Goffman, 1963, p. 130).

Nonbinary individuals employ impression management strategies to navigate the unintelligibility of their gender identity within Turkish society. They may selectively disclose or withhold information based on their assessment of others' understanding and acceptance. Most of the time, participants spoke of coming out selectively based on closeness in a very controlled manner, though two participants still mentioned there were some instances they unexpectedly came out when they could not hold it in any longer. This indicates that the coming out process, no matter how calculated, can still contain impulsive and spontaneous elements.

One of the strategies that participants used was the selective non-disclosure of certain aspects of their gender identity. This strategy is connected to the challenges of being perceived as nonbinary in a binary-centric society, particularly within the context of Turkish culture. Parallel to the literature, nonbinary individuals whose gender identities do not fit within the male/female binary, often experience unintelligibility of their gender (Darwin, 2020; Fiani & Han, 2018). Their identities challenge binary gender understandings, leading to difficulties in recognition and validation within a cisheteronormative society.

According to Butler, what we understand as physical sex is not a pre-existing or fundamental reality of our bodies but rather a product of cultural norms. They explain that bodies acquire meaning in "the domain of cultural intelligibility," where gendered norms shape how we understand physical sex and our identities (Butler, 1999, p. 2). It is essential to understand this notion is time and place dependent because what is intelligible and hegemonic today in one culture may not be the same in different times and places. In Türkiye, binary conceptions of masculinity and femininity are closely tied to national identity, religion and cultural traditions, which explains why nonbinary individuals choose to

selectively disclose their identity or tailor their coming out process according to their needs and societies' expectations and norms.

According to Butler (1999), the coherence and continuity of people's gender identities are shaped by socially established and sustainable norms of cultural intelligibility. This intelligible domain is composed of certain norms, such as the norms of masculinity and femininity. What is intelligible is meaningful, recognizable, and livable. As Foucault (1990) pointed out, being outside the norms pushes people to an uncertain, unintelligible place in terms of identity. For nonbinary people, disclosure strategies are adaptive, varying based on the audience's understanding and also pragmatic concerns. Simplifying or omitting details helps manage the complexity of explaining nonbinary gender. Participants often choose whether to disclose their identity based on intelligibility to the audience. Because nonbinary gender identity is often misunderstood and requires lengthy explanations, participants explained that they delay coming out, or come out as binary trans for simplicity and reducing confusion, or do not come out at all. While participants often avoided coming out in non-inclusive environments, they were much more open to coming out only in supportive settings. For example, participants felt much more comfortable coming out to LGBTQ+ individuals, because their gender identity was more intelligible and understood.

McDonald's (2021) study on how nonbinary people navigate inclusion and exclusion, focuses on vulnerability inherent in gender unintelligibility and experiences of erasure. For McDonald, nonbinary people experience misunderstanding and invisibility within binary categories and physical/verbal violence as punishment for gender transgression. Unintelligibility means that nonbinary people's daily lives are not intelligible to institutions such as their families, their schools, or health workers. My most prominent finding about navigating unintelligibility was participants' decisions to tailor their disclosure of their gender identity to access health care. Today, in Turkish hospitals, cisnormativity and

heterosexuality are the dominant norms that shape people's ideas and identities about their gender (Apalı et al., 2020). The Turkish health system considers individuals to be male or female according to the sex on their government identification. This means that nonbinary gender is not recognized in health institutions. Turkish healthcare often requires one to come out as binary trans for gender affirming surgeries and hormones; otherwise, scrutiny and extended processes arise for those who are not conforming to binary expectations (Sunata et al., 2022).

Participants' lack of words to describe themselves reflects wider ideological views about gender in Turkish society, and also contributes to a lack of legal recognition and protection. The healthcare sector is at the forefront of these challenges, as this lack of recognition can lead to difficulties in accessing services, rights, and protections under the law, leaving nonbinary individuals vulnerable to discrimination without legal recourse. The lack of recognition of nonbinary identities in healthcare institutions forces conformity to binary identities; and five of my participants chose to hide or misrepresent their gender identity to access gender-affirming healthcare. They came out as binary trans to health care providers and to family members to facilitate access to gender-affirming care, given the lack of understanding of nonbinary identities. Also, one participant explained that they did not disclose their nonbinary or trans gender identity as a strategy for getting gender affirming care, breast reduction surgery, in their assigned birth sex. Their common explanation was being afraid of the prolonged waiting, and denial of access to gender-affirming health care, if they were found to lack binary conformity. This is not uncommon in the health care settings, Lykens et al. (2018) found that even in clinics specializing in gender-affirming care, nonbinary participants experienced that transgender competency did not necessarily extend to genderqueer/nonbinary patients, and some patients had to "borrow" a binary transgender label.

This hiding of their gender identity to access gender-affirming healthcare makes the situation very ironic, as participants had to omit/hide their gender identity to reach out to the gender-affirming healthcare they need so that they can feel more authentic; consequently, it adds an additional mental burden. Identity concealment causes psychological distress among nonbinary individuals (Flynn & Smith, 2021). Moreover, it is not unusual to see nonbinary individuals choose to avoid general healthcare, hide their identity, or find providers who share their gender minority status (Bindman et al., 2022). In Türkiye, Toraman (2024) also found that this was a strategy adapted by nonbinary individuals to access health care since doctors approached their patients with a binary lens when providing gender-affirming care. In my research, participants reported experiencing emotional and psychological strain from pretending to be binary trans for medical care but still felt compelled to continue hiding in order to access care. This added stress from concealing or misrepresenting their gender identity is not uncommon and contributes to their overall burden.

Lastly, coming out is not always a possible or desirable endeavor. Safety concerns and fear of negative reactions from others can prevent coming out. According to all thirteen participants, tiredness and shifting priorities lead to minimizing their efforts to explain their gender identity. The lack of gendered grammar reduces the perceived need to disclose gender identity. When nonbinary individuals are not misgendered in their daily interactions, they might not feel compelled to assert their nonbinary identity explicitly. This aligns with Taube and Mussap (2024), who find that nonbinary individuals, whose gender identity may not align with traditional binary frameworks, may find coming out less relevant and beneficial compared to their binary counterparts. My interviews indicate that over time, fatigue and strategic withdrawal from self-explanation become common, leading nonbinary people to prioritize their mental and emotional well-being over continuous identity clarification. Some choose not to come out to family due to minimal and strained communication, not seeing

disclosure as necessary or beneficial. This is a strategic decision, often based on a cost-benefit analysis where the perceived risks and potential negative outcomes or labor of coming out outweigh the benefits.

## Conclusion

This section provides an overall discussion that synthesizes my research findings and discussions while situating the research in a broader context. I explore and discuss the implications of the research along with its limitations and conclude the chapter with some recommendations for future research.

In this study, I focused on understanding how nonbinary individuals in Türkiye communicate their gender identity, focusing on the influence of the Turkish language and the verbal and nonverbal strategies they use. I also examined the challenges they face in expressing their identity and the specific contexts in which these expressions occur. While this research addressed the process of "coming out," it also looked at the broader, ongoing aspects of communication beyond initial disclosure. The framework of my approach was qualitative research based on the theoretical perspectives of symbolic interactionism and queer theory.

My data analysis found several recurring themes in the ways nonbinary individuals in Türkiye convey their gender identity. My first theme shed light on the relationship between the Turkish language, cisheteronormative social norms and expectations, and gender identity construction and communication. Participants highlighted the gender-neutral characteristics of the Turkish language, particularly in pronoun use, which offers more freedom compared to other languages they used, such as English, Kurdish, and Spanish. However, they also pointed out that the Turkish language is predominantly used in a binary way, making it challenging for nonbinary gender identities to be communicated or recognized. The lack of standardized terminology also led to confusion and invisibility.

Second, participants described various strategies they use to communicate their nonbinary identity, such as adopting specific language styles, borrowing terms from other languages, and using humor to ease conversations. They also said that they frequently

educated others about gender-related terminology. While clothing was not seen as central to their identity, it still played a role in communication.

Lastly, participants emphasized that communicating their gender identity was about more than just sharing; it was about being seen and accepted. Their approach to expressing their identity varied depending on the social context, societal expectations, and accessibility of supportive resources. A recurring theme was the selective disclosure of specific aspects of their identity; many participants gave examples of healthcare settings.

Previous research on nonbinary experiences in predominantly English-speaking or binary-language contexts has emphasized similar challenges. This study is among the first to specifically examine how nonbinary individuals navigate these issues within the Turkish language. This research was situated to understand the complex relationship between language, social interactions, and identity expression in the context of the cisheteronormative Turkish culture that has Islamic nationalistic values and is situated between Europe and the Middle East with influences from both (Özbay & Ipekci, 2024). The findings suggest that, in a context where language is theoretically designed to be gender-neutral, the interactions of gender identity communication reveal significant insights into how socialization influences individuals' language use, emphasizing the complex relationship between societal norms, personal identity, and linguistic expression.

**Continuous Coming Out**

Coming out about gender is, in simple terms, communicating one's gender. It is often perceived as a more formal and deliberate act of disclosing one's gender identity. This can involve specific conversations or announcements to family, friends, or colleagues, marking a significant moment in the individual's life. The act of coming out carries substantial emotional and social implications, as it often represents a pivotal point in the person's life where they seek recognition and acceptance from those around them (Thorne et al., 2023).

Although much of my analysis is centered on the process of communication or "coming out" as nonbinary, the research looks beyond this singular process. This research is supported by the literature about how coming-out experiences capture a broader and ongoing exploration (Klein et al., 2015; Zimman, 2009). It shows how nonbinary individuals continuously negotiate and communicate their identities in various interactions, examining both the immediate act of disclosure and the long-term implications of their communicative strategies.

Participants need to continuously come out in order to convey their nonbinary gender identity. This process involves coming out when meeting new people, joining new social spaces, or changing identity labels, but participants also face the challenge of repeatedly coming out to the same individuals. The lack of intelligibility in their explanations of their own gender expression often leads to misunderstandings and questions about their "true" gender identity. This means that most of the time, rather than being one time a single or significant moment of knowledge transmission or disclosure, continuous coming out implies that there is ongoing communication, which involves navigating and expressing their identity in various social contexts, not just during initial disclosure (Zimman, 2009). The everyday communication of their gender identity remains an ongoing effort to maintain visibility, intelligibility, and authenticity. Not limiting one's communication as "just" coming out is beneficial to understanding how nonbinary individuals experience communicating their identities in a world that often demands clear-cut binary definitions.

**Intersectionality**

Through an intersectional analysis of the interviews, I observed that participants had layered experiences in a variety of contexts. Class dynamics and elitism, especially the need to know a certain degree of English, speaking a minority language, having feminist and nonbinary identities, and other intersections are among the important factors determining the layered

experiences of communicating one's gender identity. By revealing the intersectional dimensions of language and gender, this study becomes an example of the critique of universalist assumptions about gender. Universalist assumptions about gender tend to oversimplify gender and often suggest that gender operates in the same way across different cultures, languages, and social contexts.

This study shows how, in Türkiye, nonbinary gender identity and the creation and use of gender terminology that people use to identify and express themselves develop both in relation to global influences, especially English-speaking media, and literature, and in relation to local political history and context. Savcı (2021) encourages queer studies to consider "how homolingualism has shaped its epistemological unconscious" and emphasizes moving beyond homolingualism and considering language in a more heterolingual and historical context (p. 14).

**Limitations of the Study**

In conducting this study, I encountered several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, I did not examine online communication, which restricted my ability to explore how queer identities are expressed and negotiated in digital spaces. This omission may limit the applicability of my findings to broader contexts, as online platforms significantly shape identities and communities.

Additionally, due to the characteristics of my small sample and the snowball sampling method's constraints my results cannot be generalizable. My sample is limited in terms of educational background, the diversity of cities represented, and the high prevalence of English speakers among participants. These factors may influence the perspectives I gathered and may not accurately reflect the experiences of a more diverse population of non-English speaking nonbinary individuals.

Technological limitations also posed challenges, particularly regarding remote interviews, which may have impacted the depth and quality of the data I collected. Some participants may have faced barriers related to technology access or familiarity, potentially influencing their ability to engage fully in the research process.

Finally, as a nonbinary Turkish person, my positionality presented certain limitations in this study. My identity brought pre-existing ideas and assumptions that could have influenced how I interpreted the research topic. While my experiences allowed me to empathize with participants and understand the experience of nonbinary individuals living in Türkiye, they also introduced biases in my analysis and interpretation of the data. My background might have led me to prioritize certain themes or perspectives that resonated with my personal experiences while potentially overlooking others that did not align with my narrative.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research in this area should employ a diverse range of data collection methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of nonbinary identities and communication. Utilizing approaches such as diaries, social media analysis, blogs, and photo essays can provide deeper insights into how nonbinary individuals express their gender identities and navigate their social contexts. It would also be valuable to conduct further comparative studies to understand the relationship between gender and language. Comparing different languages can also give more insight about the impact of the grammatically or semantically embedded gender in a given language on gender identity communication.

Lastly, the intersection of queer identity, Muslim culture, and non-English speaking societies should be examined in further studies to gain a deeper understanding of their intersections. Queer identities in non-Western societies require careful exploration that takes

into account the specificities of these societies and their relation to dominant Anglophone queer discourse.

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**Appendix A**

University of Victoria
Victoria BC, Canada

# Looking for Research Participants

Thesis Topic: Breaking Boundaries: Life Experiences of Nonbinary Individuals in Türkiye

## Criteria for Participation:

- Identify as nonbinary (your gender identity is not always and exclusively male or female)
- Aged between 18 - 30
- Use Turkish as the main language in their daily life
- Currently living in Turkey for at least 5 years
- Consciously giving consent to participate in the study

## Looking Forward to Your Participation

**Researcher:** Şansal Güngör Gümüşpala
**Contact:** sgumuspala@uvic.ca
To maintain your confidentiality, kindly reach out to me privately via email rather than publicly through the platform.
**Supervisor:** Dr. Aaron Devor

200 tl
Honorarium

## Appendix B

# Letter of Information

**Project Title: Breaking Boundaries: Life Experiences of Nonbinary Individuals in Türkiye**

**Principal Investigator:**
**Şansal Güngör Gümüşpala**
Department of Sociology
University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

**Supervisor:** Dr. Aaron Devor
**Email:**
**Committee:** Dr. Katelin Albert

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**1. Why am I being invited to take part in this research study?**

You are being invited to participate in a research study because you identify with a non-binary gender (that is, your gender identity is not always/exclusively male or always/exclusively female).

**2. Why is this research being done?**

The intent of the proposed qualitative study is to describe gender conceptualizations and life experiences of nonbinary individuals in Türkiye by utilizing symbolic interactionism and queer theory. Nonbinary gender is defined as any gender identity that is not always and exclusively male or female. My research question is:
How do nonbinary people speaking Turkish and living in Türkiye try to communicate to other people that they are nonbinary? With this question, I want to explore and describe nonbinary people's perceptions of sex and gender roles and understand how daily life is shaped by nonbinary gender identity. Also, I wish to learn about daily life experiences by focusing on the use of language.

In Türkiye, even though there is a handful of studies that have incidentally included nonbinary people, I am aware of no such studies having been conducted concerning specifically nonbinary people, their issues, and their experiences.

**3. How long will I be in this study?**

We expect that individuals will spend about one hour participating in an online Zoom interview.

If you consent to be contacted to review your interview transcript of notes, you will be contacted again following the one-time interview.

**4. Am I eligible to participate in this study?**
You are eligible to participate in this study if you:

- identify your gender as non-binary (that is, your gender identity is not always and exclusively male or female
- use Turkish as the main language in your daily life
- Are currently living in Türkiye for at least 5 years

- give your informed consent to participate in the study

Note: You can still participate if you use more than one gender label, such as transmasc nonbinary. For the purpose of this study, participants do not have to identify as transgender or trans+. The main gender criterion is identifying your gender as non-binary.

**5. Am I eligible if I don't identify as nonbinary but I identify as an ally?**

The aim of this study is to understand the views and lived experiences of people who are nonbinary and living in Türkiye speaking Turkish. For this reason, allies who do not identify as nonbinary or nonbinary people who do not currently live in Türkiye for at least 5 years are not eligible to participate.

**6. What are the study procedures?**

Participating in the study involves a one-time, one-on-one interview with me, Şansal Gümüşpala. The interview will be conducted via Zoom video conference, the UVic-licensed version, on a day and at a time that's convenient for you. You will be asked questions about your gender experiences and gender expressions. You will also be asked about your experience with speaking in Turkish while talking about your gender.

The interview will take approximately 60 minutes, depending on how much you have to say. You can share as much or as little as you feel comfortable sharing.

The interview will be audio-recorded with your consent. You may still participate in this study if you choose not to be audio-recorded. In this case, the interviewer (I) will take notes during the interview.

For the session, please try to find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed and use earphones or a headset if you can. It's a good idea to test out the system a few minutes before the session to make sure the connection and sound are working. It is recommended that you use your home computer or personal device and not a shared or work device to ensure privacy.

You will be offered a 200 tl digital gift card for your time and contribution to this study. You may choose to decline the gift card.

You may choose to decline to answer any question and/or may withdraw from the study at any point without impact on receiving your gift card.

**7. What are the risks and harms of participating in this study?**

Talking about your gender identity and your experience with gender may (or may not) be a subject that can be tied to past negative experiences or could bring up painful memories. You should be prepared for any emotions that may accompany discussing these topics and know that the researcher (as a non-binary trans person) will treat the interviews with care, empathy, and respect.

If you feel uncomfortable at any point in the interview, you have the right to decline to answer any interview question. The interviewer (I) will remind you at the start of the interview and at various points throughout the interview that you can decline to answer any question. You can protect your identity and increase the protection of your personal information while using Zoom. You can sign only a nickname or a substitute name and not use your camera. You also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time up to 2 weeks after completing the interview or 2 weeks after reviewing

your de-identified interview notes/transcripts. If you choose to withdraw, all your personal information and data will be deleted.

**8. What are the benefits of participating in this study?**

You will not benefit directly from participating in this study. However, the interview process will give you an opportunity to reflect on and give voice to your experience with regard to your gender and may prove to be a gratifying process in that way.

**9. What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can leave the research at any time it will not be held against you. If you choose to withdraw within two weeks after your interview or 2 weeks after reviewing your de-identified interview notes/transcripts, all your data will be deleted.

**10. How will participants' information be kept confidential?**

Your interview will be audio recorded with your consent and typed out word-for-word to produce a transcript. This will ensure that we have an accurate record of the interview. You will not be asked to provide your name while the interview is being conducted and audio recorded; however, you will be asked to state your name when providing verbal consent. All identifying information will be removed from the final thesis. The following measures will be taken to keep your information confidential, which means people will not be able to identify you by the information you provide: All participants will be informed that all identifying information pertaining to themselves will be protected indefinitely; pseudonyms will be created for identifying information such as names, community partners, places of employment, and all other information that could link a participant to the stories and experiences they share.

The recordings from the voice recorder will be downloaded to my password-protected laptop. The Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and the transcripts will be stored in University Systems 'personal home file storage' and my password-protected laptop. Contact and interview details for participants will be securely stored on a password-protected Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and destroyed immediately from my laptop and from the University Systems 'personal home file storage' after all participants have confirmed their receiving of the honorarium. All recordings and transcripts will be saved on a secure, password-protected file on my password-protected laptop. Lastly, the transcripts from this research will be imported to a password-protected NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis file, where it will be thematically coded.

**11. Are participants compensated for being in this study?**

After completion of the one-on-one interview, you be offered a digital gift card worth 200 tl to thank you for your time and contribution. You may choose to decline the gift card.
If you choose to withdraw before the interview is completed, you will still be offered a digital gift card.

**12. How will participants be able to review their answers?**

After the interview has been transcribed and de-identified, if you consent, you may review your interview transcript to ensure that it captures what you want to say. If you have not consented to be audio recorded, you may consent to have an opportunity to review the interviewer's notes. You will have an opportunity to provide feedback to the researcher following your review of the transcript or notes. You will be asked to provide any feedback within one week of receiving your transcript or

notes. If you require more time, you may ask the researcher prior to the end of the week for additional time.

Please note that information and attachments sent via email cannot be guaranteed to be secure.

**13. How the dissemination of the research will be done?**

The data (de-identified interview transcript or interviewer notes) from this research will be used to complete my MA thesis in the Sociology Department at the University of Victoria. This data may also be used for future presentations or publication opportunities such as for research memos, technical summaries, academic papers to be submitted for peer review, conference presentations, and lectures/public talks on this topic.

**14. Whom do participants contact for questions?**

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact:

Şansal Güngör Gümüşpala
Sociology Department - University of Victoria
sgumuspala@uvic.ca

You may verify the ethical approval of this study, raise any concerns you might have, or ask any of your questions about the ethical approval of this study by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria by phone 1-250-472-4545 or by email ethics@uvic.ca.

**Thank you for your interest in this study.**
**This letter is yours to keep for future reference.**

***VERBAL CONSENT FORM***

**Breaking Boundaries: Life Experiences of Nonbinary Individuals in Türkiye**
***NOTE: to be completed with the interviewer prior to beginning the interview***

*Please note: prior to beginning the verbal consent process with the participant, the interviewer will ask the participant if they consent to being audio recorded while obtaining verbal consent and will inform the participant that both the participant's and interviewer's name will be recorded in the consent audio file at the completion of the consent process.*

**Please read prior to the verbal consent form:**

*Please feel free to ask if you have any questions about the Letter of Information and Verbal consent form to clarify or get further information.* If you want *you can take a moment to read the Letter of Information and Verbal consent form again and ask your questions.*

You may verify the ethical approval of this study, raise any concerns you might have, or ask any of your questions about the ethical approval of this study by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria by phone 1-250-472-4545 or by email ethics@uvic.ca.

**VERBAL CONSENT FORM**

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**Principal Investigator:** Şansal Güngör Gümüşpala

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Do you confirm that you have read the Letter of Information and have had all questions answered to your satisfaction?
☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

Do you consent to participate in this research?
☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

Do you consent to have your interview audio recorded as part of this research?
☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

Do you consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research?
☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

Do you consent to the use of your data for future presentations or publication opportunities, as outlined within the Information Letter?
☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

Do you consent to be contacted by the interviewer after the interview if there is any need to clarify anything that you have said in the interview?
☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

Do you consent to be contacted by the interviewer after the interview to be asked if you would like to review your de-identified interview transcript or interviewer notes?
☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

_____ _____

Name of Participant | Date of Participant Verbal Consent

_____

Name of Interviewer

# Resources

If you are experiencing distress, please reach out to the resources listed below. This list includes helplines that are available in Türkiye in Turkish.

**SPoD LGBTİ+ Consultation Line**

We provide free support for questions and issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity. Our volunteers are available from Tuesday to Friday and on Sundays between 12:00 PM and 6:00 PM.

0850 888 5428

https://spod.org.tr/

**Pink Life Psychological Counseling Line**

Psychological Counseling

05491000688 (Mon-Wed-Fri/12:00-18:00)

psikolojikdanisma@pembehayat.org

**Trans Istanbul Initiative (TRANSIST), Trans Therapy Group**

https://transkimliklervardir.wordpress.com/hakkinda/

# Appendix C

University of Victoria
Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board
Michael Williams Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada
T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research | ethics@uvic.ca

## Certificate of Approval - Annual Renewal

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: | **Aaron Devor** (Supervisor) | **ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER:** Board member review - delegated | **23-0128** |
| PRINCIPAL APPLICANT: | **Sansal Gumuspala** **Master's student** | ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE: | 12-Oct-2023 |
| UVIC DEPARTMENT: | **Sociology SOCI** | APPROVED ON: | 23-Sep-2024 |
| | | APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE: | 11-Oct-2025 |

PROJECT TITLE: **Breaking Boundaries: Life Experiences of Nonbinary Individuals in Türkiye**

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS:
Katelin Albert - MA thesis committee member, University of Victoria

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING:
Chair in Transgender Studies at University of Victoria, Chair in Transgender Studies (UVIC)

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:
tcps2_core_certificate (1).pdf - 09-Mar-2023
L. Semi-structured interview guide 20-Jul-23.pdf - 20-Jul-2023
L. Email script for review of transcript or notes 20-Jul-23.pdf - 20-Jul-2023
O. Resource list 20-Jul-23.pdf - 20-Jul-2023
O. Email script, Letter of Information and Consent Form 06-Oct-2023.pdf - 06-Oct-2023
K. Recruitment Post 06-Oct-2023.pdf - 06-Oct-2023
K. Recruitment Poster 06-Oct-2023.pdf - 06-Oct-2023

## Conditions of approval

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

**Amendments**
To make changes to the approved research procedure in your study, please submit "Amendments" or "Annual renewal with amendments" form. You must receive research ethics approval before proceeding with your amended protocol.

**Renewals**
Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a “Request for Renewal” form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

**Project Closures**
When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a “Notice of Project Completion” form.

## Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria's policies for research involving human participants.

Dr. Sandra Gibbons
Chair, Human Research Ethics Board

Dr. Cindy Holder
Vice-chair, Human Research Ethics Board

Certificate Issued On: 23-Sep-2024