

“I Am Something Else. For Now”:
Exploring Youth Conversations about Gender Online
by

Elisabeth M. Mattie Walker
Bachelor of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria, 2013

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

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Supervisory Committee

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Supervisory Committee

Dr. Sibylle Artz, School of Child and Youth Care
Supervisor

Dr. Marie Hoskins, School of Child and Youth Care
Departmental Member

Abstract

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Dr. Sibylle Artz, School of Child and Youth Care

Supervisor

Dr. Marie Hoskins, School of Child and Youth Care

Departmental Member

Although Child and Youth Care research and pedagogy is committed to diversity, as yet this field has produced very little research that specifically focuses on supporting children and youth who do not identify with cis/heteronormative standards of gender. Further, despite that recent media attention to trans issues and gender diversity has sparked questions concerning how issues of gender are approached in practice, there continues to be a distinct lack of consensus on how best to talk about these issues, how to define gender, and how to approach these issues in practice. Through combining Situational Analysis (Clarke, 2005) with aspects of Relativity Theory this thesis makes a contribution towards filling the existing gap in the research. This study provides a descriptive exploration into the many ways language is being utilized by young people to shape, evoke, and construct the diverse understandings of what gender means in their lives by analyzing data gathered through the social media platform, Tumblr. This inquiry shows that these young people create unique terminology to describe, discuss, define and share their engagement with gender categories and identities. The findings of this study suggest that a creative, nuanced, and flexible understanding of the ways in which the language and terminology shape and influences how gender is lived and then discussed within specific contexts both on- and offline, will greatly assist practitioners to support youth with this highly complex topic.

Keywords: Gender, gender diversity, gender variance, youth, young people, gender nonconforming, trans youth, Situational Analysis

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Dedication

*For the youth who have found their voice and need to be heard
And for those who are still searching, who teach us new ways to listen*

Introduction

With diversity at the forefront of many discussions in Child and Youth Care today, practitioners continue to struggle with practical and effective ways to address diversity within their work. Despite Child and Youth Care research and pedagogy placing a major focus on diversity, in this field, there is a paucity of literature specifically addressing support for children and youth who do not identify with cis/heteronormative standards of gender. Although recent media attention to trans issues and gender diversity, as well as amendments to diagnostic categories, have sparked questions concerning how issues of gender are approached in practice, there continues to be a distinct lack of consensus on how best to talk about, define gender, and approach these issues in appropriate ways. This research project suggests that by better understanding how young people talk about gender, practitioners will be better equipped to make decisions about how to best support these young people. Exploring *how* young people talk gender is an essential first step.

Gender, is considered by some to be an ongoing discursive practice (de Beauvoir, 1953/1989; Butler, 1990; Gilbert & Scher, 1999). As “feminist theory’s most revolutionary concept” (Lenz Taguchi, 2012, p. 266), gender is a term connoting context, and therefore describes one’s social role and the complex interaction between culture, class, race, biology, and social environment (Butler, 1990; Drescher, 2010). The realities of social life are products of language and agreed upon meanings. As Davies states, “bodies learn to recognize themselves through clichés”, clichés that are created through social environments and discursive practices which become organizing principles in an individual’s life (Davies in Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 168). Gender is considered to be

one of these major organizing principles or “clichés” (Kaschak, 1992) as gender often dictates social expectations, roles, and behaviours. Nevertheless, the lack of a consistent understanding of what gender is and how gender identity is developed continues to spark debate and discussion for practitioners and academics (e.g., Braun & Wilkinson, 2005; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Fausto-Sterling, 2012; Jeffreys, 2012; Langer & Martin, 2004; Walker, 2014).

The work of understanding gender diversity is far from finished (de Finney, Little, Skott-Myre, & Gharabaghi, 2012). With recent legislative changes to marriage acts internationally, as well as continued media attention to trans¹ awareness and acceptance of sexual and gender diversity (e.g., Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2013; Dudash, 2013; Fleischer, 2013; Sheldon & Krop, 2013), the discussion of gender diversity has become a central issue in Child and Youth Care and other human services fields, but, concerns about gender are often lost in a confused conflation of gender and sexuality. For example, although diversity in practice often addresses issues of individuals who identify as LGBTQ*², “the T is often forgotten” (A. Devor, personal communication, May 2014). *Trans* is one of many gender categories; and speaks to the complexity and diversity of gender identity and expression. *Trans* is not a term regarding sexual orientation as are the other letters included in the common acronym LGBTQ: Lesbian

¹ *Trans* “is an umbrella term that attempts to capture the complexity and diversity of gender identity and expression by those who transgress gender boundaries. The term trans may encompass (but is not limited to) those who identify as transgender, genderqueer, trans, transsexual, androgynous, agender, bigender, two spirit and gender non-conforming. The asterisk is sometimes used (trans*) as a visible signifier of the diversity within trans* communities. Trans* people can be of any race, class, (dis)ability, faith, culture, sexual orientation, or citizenship status, and can have a vast variety of gender identities and expressions” (Trans* Awareness Project, n.d.)

² LGBTQ* is an acronym identifying Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Trans, and Queer as a means of describing a variety of sexual orientations. The asterisk acknowledges that this acronym does not include all possible sexual orientations or identities. The “T” is an often-debated inclusion in this acronym as many individuals who identify as trans do not believe that this is related to their sexual orientation or identity.

(L), Gay (G), and Bisexual (B). While Queer (Q) can be used as an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities, the uncertainty around the use of the terms Trans and Queer and the inclusion of trans and gender issues in practice with those of sexual diversity speaks to a greater perplexity around appropriate terminology and languaging in this area of practice. Haskell and Burtch (2010) cite uncertainty around terminology as a major reason why students and teachers in high school settings do not feel comfortable talking about queer issues or about people who do not identify with heteronormative gender ideals.

Given this uncertainty, I framed this study around the central research question: *How do young people, specifically youth who do not identify with cis/heteronormative standards of gender, talk about gender, their own and others?’* My intention was to explore *how* young people are talking about gender in order to learn more about the ways in which young people negotiate social relationships, construct identities and manufacture knowledge and language through discourses about gender. In order to expand this question, I identified seven sub-questions from which to guide the project:

- How do young people talk about and describe their own experience of gender?
- How do young people use language to describe their lived experience of gender?
- What influencing factors contribute to young people’s identification with certain experiences of gender, specific gender vocabulary, and identity labels? I.e. If gender is socially constructed – what factors have specifically lead to/influenced the construction of individual young people’s genders?
- How to youth find, utilize, and make sense of terminology and vocabulary that describe and identify gender in their own lives?

- What words, terminology, and vocabulary are being used by young people to describe and talk about their own experiences of gender and others?
- Do young people utilize diagnostic labels/language to describe and understand their own experiences of gender?
- How to young people create meanings for specific gender vocabulary and terminology?

By exploring how youth use language and terminology is to describe and understand gender in their own lives, this research project addresses gaps within the current literature on how dominant discourses of gender inform and shape individuals' experiences of gender in their own lives. It is my hope that this research project helps to create space for new understandings and meanings to emerge and that this research project will create a possibility for Child and Youth Care practitioners, as well as other human service professionals, to reconsider how to work with individuals around the complex issue of gender.

Considering the Use of Language in this Study

This study explores how young people talk about gender, and focuses on the use of language in the description and understanding of gender in their lives. After noticing limitations in the availability of language that adequately describe gender outside the typical hegemonic, cis/heteronormative standards of gender (i.e. binary male and female) in the academic and professional literature (Walker, 2014) as well as a lack of the presence of youth perspectives on gender terminology, this study was created as a means of exploring how young people are talking about gender and gender experiences that would not be considered to be cis/heternormative. Taking this into consideration, the

terms *gender variance/gender variant* and *gender diverse* are utilized throughout this study as a means of, however inefficiently, acknowledging the diversity of gender experiences outside cis/heteronormative standards of gender. Nevertheless, this term is also employed with the understanding that it is incomplete and inadequate in its ability to describe this complex aspect of individual experience. *Gender variance/variant* was selected as the term of choice as it suggests a diversity of experiences without specifically categorizing each experience. Although this term arguably suggests any gender outside of cis/heteronormative standards as disordered (i.e. a variant on what is considered to be normal), it has been chosen as the least pathologizing of the other available terms: i.e. *gender non-conforming*, *gender atypical*, *gender dysphoric*, and *non-normative gender*. However, due to the acknowledged lack of more suitable terminology, I utilize this term *under-erasure*, which Spivak, in St. Pierre (2010) notes means “using them even as attempt to escape their meaning” (p. 175). Thus, I am utilizing these terms with the understanding that while necessary because of the absence of other terms, they are at the same time inadequate.

For the purpose of recruitment for the interview portion of data collection, the term *non-heteronormative* was chosen out of a number of available terminology (e.g. non-conforming; gender variant, non-normative gender) as the term was the most neutral option as it allows for individuals of various and diverse genders to identify with this broad gender category. This term was also used with the understanding that it is not a complete and accurate description of the experiences of all individuals that individuals who have experiences and genders that would qualify them for participation in this

project would be familiar with this term, its limitations, and its use in the academic and non-academic sphere.

Definitions to Note

Several terms are used throughout this study to refer to hegemonic gender and biological sex assumptions. *Heteronormative*³ refers to the assumption that heterosexuality is the only expected sexual orientation for individuals. *Heteronormativity* also refers to the assumption that individuals will fall into a distinct, binary system of gender, that is to say male or female. *Cisgender* refers to individuals who identify with the gender that corresponds to the sex the individual was assigned at birth. *Cis/heternormative* combines these two terms to refer to the hegemonic ideals of a society that places *cisgender*, *heterosexual* individuals as the norm.

³ Definitions of *heteronormative* and *cisgender* found in Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2016).

Chapter 1: Gender in the Literature

With recent and continuously accelerating media attention to gender and trans rights and activism (e.g. Canadian Broadcast Corporation, 2013; Clifton, 2014; Dudash, 2013; Fleischer, 2013; Hampson, 2015; Matlow, 2014; Sheldon & Krop, 2013), the discussion of gender appears ubiquitous; nevertheless, *how* gender is defined and discussed varies considerably across the literature (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013a). With the presence of trans individuals in the public sphere rising (Dudash, 2013; Nelson, 2015; Teitel, 2015; Steinmetz, 2014), trans and gender issues are gaining attention and support on university campuses across North America (Grant, 2014; Scelfofeb, 2015; uicpride, 2015), local sexual assault centres (e.g., MacAdams, 2014), in the news (e.g. Hampson, 2015; Rosenberg, 2013; Smart, 2013) and continue to be debated across uncountable websites. Schools are re-examining policies on gender in the classroom and protocols for acknowledging and protecting the trans and/or gender variant identities of their students (Price Minter, 2012; Smart, 2015). However, with all of these advances in the discussion of gender issues, it appears as though a definitive understanding of what gender is and how individuals interpret and make sense of gender in their own lives is lacking within these discussions, with terminology and accepted definitions varying over time and within and between disciplines (APA, 2013a; Drescher & Byne, 2013).

While there is a vast amount of academic literature⁴ examining and deconstructing gender, particularly with regard to explorations of trans-gender experiences, identities,

⁴ Initial basic literature search using the University of Victoria's academic search database with keyword "gender" provided over 2million results, keyword "transgender" provided over 25thousand results. Search was further refined for the purpose of this project resulting in 84 articles selected for review, details on selection process outlined below.

and stories, discussions of gender variance remain highly contentious (APA, 2013a), with scholars and activists disagreeing regularly about how to approach and discuss issues of gender (Beemyn, 2013a; Drescher & Byne, 2013). Nevertheless, a growing number of researchers and professionals are suggesting a supportive and “affirming” approach to gender variance/gender nonconformity (Ehrensaft, 2012; 2013; 2014; Hill & Menvielle, 2009; Lev, 2004; Menvielle, 2012; Spack et al., 2012) that frames gender variance as part of gender diversity without focusing on norms or binary expectations (Pyne, 2014). Considering these perspectives, this literature review explores what terminology is available for individuals and professionals to describe gender diversity and variance in the current literature (published between 2003 and 2015) and helps to situate this research project by examining currently available language and terminology.

This literature review explores how gender is being discussed within the social sciences and human services fields (i.e. child and youth care, gender studies, psychology, social work, sociology, and other helping professions) within and about the “global North” (i.e. North America, Western Europe, and the United Kingdom as defined by Browne, Nash, & Hines, 2010). This literature review presents how this complex social phenomenon is being discussed in order to situate this research project within literature published between 2003 and 2015.

Structure of Literature Review

This review examines the research published between 2003 and 2015 that discusses gender and language in order to explore what words, language, and terminology are currently available and being used to discuss gender, particularly gender

variance/gender nonconformity. A twelve-year timeframe offers a significant span of the literature and was chosen in order to access the most recent publications regarding this subject available at the start of the research project (2015). A search was conducted using the key words: “gender”; “gender-identity”; “language”; “gender nonconforming”; “gender variant/variance” and “youth/children”. From these results, journal articles and books were selected based on relevance to the current study including language, definitions of gender, treatment, and practice implications for those working with children, youth, and/or adults regarding gender issues. For the purpose of this study, articles were selected based on the usage of gender as a term connoting or referring to social context and role, that may or may not relate to biological sex and/or sexuality (see subsection: *Gendering Bodies* for further discussion of the complex interactions of *gender as social* and *sex as physical/biological*) resulting in 65 works published between 2003-2015 inclusive.

Articles that referred to gender as synonymous with biological sex and/or did not differentiate between gender and sex (i.e. biological traits, hormones, physical genitalia, etc.) were excluded from review. After the initial review, sources that were commonly cited in the selected articles were also reviewed in order to include significant research that had been published prior to 2003. This added 20 more works and a total of 85 publications that were included for review. These 85 publications were also chosen for their location.

While gender variance has been documented across the globe, with individuals who resist or challenge gender expectations existing in many different cultures (Browne, Nash, Hines, 2010), in North American contexts, gender rigidity is often challenged by

drawing on examples of cultures around the world that name a third or even multiple genders, including but not limited to South American, Southeast Asian, Caribbean, and African Tribes (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2011, p. 7) and Hawaiian indigenous culture (Hamer & Wilson, 2015). This is further complicated by a growing acknowledgement of *two-spirit* individuals from First Nations cultures that are often used as exemplary models of gender fluidity, cultural acceptance, and celebration of gender diversity within Canadian and American contexts (Brotman, Ryan, Jalbert, & Rowe, 2002). However, despite the presence of gender diversity and expression across the globe, according to Browne, Nash, and Hines (2010), the majority of academic writings on the fluidities of gender, and trans lives and bodies are located within the “global north” (i.e. North America, United Kingdom, and Western Europe) in which the cultural and social standard dictates a binary, heteronormative understanding of gender. Further, Browne, Nash, and Hines (2010) also argue for spatially specific examinations of diversity and trans experiences, “rather than eroticiz[ing] other ‘more fluid’ or ‘diverse’ cultures/contexts” (p. 574) in order to provide contextualized insight into specific areas.

With all this in mind and given that context is of particular importance in this research project, the focus of this review is therefore on discussions of gender variance and gender nonconformity within North American contexts. Literature was selected from works published within and about the “global north” (Browne, Nash, & Hines, 2010) to speak to the context and situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988) that stem from spatially located experiences, within particular hegemonic culture, social expectations, and political climates.

The following sections explore how gender is being defined, or not, within the current literature, how gender variance/gender nonconformity is being discussed and addressed, and if professionals are incorporating young peoples' voices and experiences into their practice standards and approaches to supporting individuals who identify outside the existing heteronormative standards of gender. Several common themes were drawn from the literature, including possession of single gender, gendering bodies, diagnosis of gender variance, and risks of marginalization and victimization for individuals who identify with non-heteronormative genders, but most salient was the absence of a definition and an understanding of gender that encompassed all interpretations of the concept. A particularly noticeable gap in the reviewed literature was the absence of youth voices in the discussion of gender and gender variance. While several articles examined the experiences of trans and gender nonconforming children and youth (e.g., Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Ehrensaft, 2011; Pepper, 2012; Brill & Pepper, 2008; Wells, Roberts, & Allan, 2012) and have highlighted the "dramatically different" (Beemyn, 2013b, p. 160) experiences of children and youth in contrast with adult experiences, few articles specifically addressed the terminology and language youth are using to describe and discuss gender, particularly gender variance and material on gender nonconforming children continues to be scarce (Beemyn, 2013a).

Defining Gender, Complicating Gender

“You have taken away the identity I have worked all my life to build . . . Who am I if you take this away?”

“I was pained for my desire was to deconstruct gender, not erase her identity”

(Kaufman, 2010, p. 104)

The categories of male and female are arguably central to social thought, “entering virtually every domain of human experience and structuring human relationships . . . [g]ender categories serve to label, define, and rank” (Hare-Mustin & Mareck, 1990, p. 184). Individuals cannot be signified within language without the mark of gender⁵ (Wittig, 1984). Nevertheless, defining gender continues to perplex scholars and researchers, as complete and consistent definitions of this complex social phenomenon continue to be debated (Drescher & Byne, 2013). In the 85 works selected for review, clear definitions of gender were lacking and those that were offered were far from consistent. Several of the articles specifically defined gender (e.g. Cardon, 2010; Diamond, 2002; Ehrensaft, 2014); however, several did not (e.g., Beemyn, 2013a; 2013b; Browne, Nash, & Hines, 2010; Calhoun Davis, 2009).

While Cardon (2010) touts the term *gender* as “extraordinarily lending itself to almost infinite variations” in its emptiness and its richness (p. 140), scholars, activists, and individuals find themselves with minimal available terminology to express and define their own lived gender experiences thus leading to a lack of consistent

⁵ Although new pronouns have been introduced within certain communities (see Gender Neutral Pronoun Blog, n.d. for explanation of new pronoun uses), extensive and consistent usage of these pronouns has not become widely accepted, with use of these pronouns usually limited to within certain social communities (Gender Neutral Pronoun Blog, n.d.). More recently, the usage of *they/them/their* as a singular pronoun has become acceptable; however, this is not always widely understood and is not traditionally grammatically correct.

understanding of what gender is and how normative and non-normative genders are clearly defined (Pyne, 2014). Hines (2010) argues that, “queer theory [and feminist theory] importantly detaches gender from ‘sex’ and furthermore, examines the ways in which ‘sex’ itself is a social and cultural formation” (p. 598, quotes in original)⁶. That is to say, queer and feminist theories view the physical, or biological, sex characteristics as separate from gender; so for example an individual may identify as a male and live as a man, but have some or all of the physical characteristics of an individual that would typically be assigned a female gender (i.e. vagina, vulva, breasts). By detaching sex from gender, we challenge the pathologizing of minority identities (e.g., transgender identities) by claiming that gender is social and not necessarily linked to underlying biological indicators of difference (Hines, 2010); therefore, a gender that does not align with the physical body is not disordered (APA, 2013b) and should not be treated as such.

While Hines (2010) focuses on queer examinations of trans and gender, Hines also acknowledges that this has long been an area explored and discussed within feminist theories and points out the problems inherent in assuming a correlation between sex and gender (e.g. Kessler & McKenna 1978; West & Zimmerman 1987). However, while this distinct separation of gender and sex appears to be the widely accepted understanding of gender, sex and gender have only recently begun to be thought of as separate concepts (Cardon, 2010, Erickson-Scroth, 2014). Simmons and White (2014) do acknowledge that, “it is an oversimplification to think of sex as biological and gender as social” (p. 3); nevertheless, broad definitions of terms such as sex and gender can, arguably, help to

⁶ A complete discussion of this complex topic is beyond the scope of the current literature review, for further discussion of social and cultural construction and formation of sex see Fausto-Sterling (2000), *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*.

communicate more clearly about unique experiences of gender, particularly when the gender an individual lives as and their physical body do not align in ways that are considered to be normative according to binary, cis/heteronormative standards (Erickson-Schroth, 2014). Despite queer and feminist theorists deconstructing the ties between gender to sex, others argue that this separation both complicates and simplifies gender in ways that fictionalize gender experiences as non-realities, for instance, it is argued that this simplification of gender as strictly and only socially constructed would allow individuals to change their genders or mold their genders at will in order to serve personal or political agendas (Serano, 2013). This perspective has arguably been perverted and is the basis of negative and controversial “treatments” to gender variance/nonconformity that seek to train individuals to change their genders or sexual orientation into the socially acceptable standards (Pyne, 2014; Serano, 2013).

Within literature that discusses and explores gender, there continues to be debate about whether or not gender is a result of social influences, social role requirements, and social expectations (*gender-as-performative* or gender is performed within social relationships) or a result of underlying biological differences that dictate gendered behaviours and identification (*gender-as-a-trait*) (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008). The debate about what is *learned* from the social environment and what is natural (i.e. biological/physical) continue to perplex scholars and practitioners who work with gender, especially in the area of treatment and support for individuals who identify as gender variant or gender nonconforming (Drescher & Byne, 2013). Ehrensaft (2014) states that she has yet to find conclusive evidence explaining the “*why* of gender” (p. 574, italics in original) (i.e. why individuals identify with the gender that they do) with studies

Ehrensaft has reviewed suggesting that both nature and nurture have a strong role in the process of gender.

Despite these critiques and unresolved debates, gender understood as a social role appears to be the most consistent interpretation of this complex concept (Diamond, 2002; Erickson-Scroth, 2014) and although this may not offer a complete understanding of gender, the notion of social role offers insight into how gender is seen to be at least, partially if not fully, constructed by social expectations and interactions in peoples' lives. The following section explores what is meant by gender as a social role.

Gender as Social Role

Feminist theorists posit that gender is a learned behaviour, a social role gleaned from context and experience (Butler, 1990; de Beauvoir, 1989); however, Butler (1990) reminds us that “to claim that gender is constructed is not to assert its illusoriness or artificiality” (p. 45) but to state that gender is an ongoing process of relational, discursive practice. This relational practice of gender is considered to be separate from sex, but related to the body in such a way that gender is the social role enacted within the medium of the sexed body such that, “one is a sex and one does gender” (Diamond, 2002, p. 323).

Despite this accepted understanding of gender, Connelly (2003) and Serano (2013) argue that individuals in the public sphere understand this intellectualization of gender as an insult to the reality of their lived experiences. Serano states that transgender individuals argue that discussing gender as a performance with no basis in physiology dismisses their experiences as fictional or non-realities, which configures their very personal and real, lived experiences as being malleable and alterable so as to best suit political and personal agendas. Serano suggests that this can be likened to the claim that

some women may choose to be lesbians based on a feminist, political stance which places sexual orientation as a choice that may be altered based on political or personal goals.

The highly debated contrast between *gender-as-performative* versus *gender-as-a-trait* creates a controversial differentiation between what is *natural* and what is *learned*. This debated distinction between gender as a learned social role and gender as an expression of innate biological traits, adds complexity to the discussion of what constitutes appropriate support practices for individuals who identify outside of heteronormative standards, eluding to the highly debated area of “treatment” of individuals who identify in gender variant ways (see sub-section below: *Diagnosing difference*). Ehrensaft (2011; 2012; 2014) further complicates this by suggesting that gender can be understood as a three-dimensional web, “woven together with threads from nature, nurture, and culture” (Ehrensaft, 2014, p. 533).

Gender continues to be an integral aspect of self-concept and living within a social world. Although the focus of discussions on gender as a social role has largely been on the performative aspects of gender (i.e., gender as a social role), Ehrensaft (2014) and Serano (2013) argue that gender cannot be reduced or simplified to solely the social aspects of one’s role or experience, arguing that to accurately represent peoples’ lived experiences, gender must be conceptualized in a “holistic” (Serano, 2013) manner, taking into account complex interactions between physical, social, biological, and psychological factors (Ehrensaft 2014).

While gender can be understood as performatively constituted (Butler, 1990), this is a compulsory performance and cannot be compared to the idea of “radical free agency such that we can ‘get up and put on a new gender today’” (Salih, 2004 in Calhoun

Davies, 2009, p. 102, quotes in original). For example, Halberstam (1998) posits that “the revelation that gender is a social construct does not in any way relieve the effects of that construction to the point where we can manipulate at will the terms of our gender” (in Calhoun Davis, 2009, p. 102). Calhoun Davis (2009) reminds readers that several postmodern, queer theorists have rejected framing gender as voluntarily constructed. While Serano (2013) argues that this intellectualization of understandings of gender arguably creates an inaccessible approach to understanding these concepts that leaves individuals who are struggling with these ideas feeling isolated, scrutinized and fictionalized. Nevertheless, Butler’s idea of “. . . gender performativity, which grounds much theorizing on gender fluidity, is conceptualized as a site of active, agentic disruption” (Calhoun Davies, 2004, p. 102). That is to say, Calhoun Davies argues that the idea that gender is performed can be interpreted to mean that gender can be a site of disrupting social norms and expectations and that gender can be seen as fluid (i.e. not stable/static) and fluctuating and that gender may change/fluctuate across situations. As Shott (1999) argues, “the notion that gender is troubled (that is, constituted as ambiguous or contradictory) is turned into the notion that one is troubling gender (that is subverting it)” (p. 157), meaning that gender as a social performance can be taken up as a means to challenge social order and transform power and authority structures. Calhoun Davis (2009) notes that the intentions and implications of postmodern theorists’ and trans activists’ emphasis on destabilizing gender categories may differ. While theorists may focus on the potential for gender as a site to examine social order, power, and authority, trans activists strive to destabilize gender categories in order to highlight the diverse possibilities and ways that gender can be embodied and enacted. While theorists

typically focus on elaborating the theoretical underpinnings of gender, trans activists emphasize the fluidity of gender, and the performative and social construction of this contentious topic in an effort to reject gender regulation (Cardon, 2010). As Serano (2013) warns, either platform can push those who are contemplating gender complexity to distort the infamous “personal is political” in an understanding that gender, as a socially constituted aspect of identity, can be molded to fit personal, political agendas. Despite this destabilization of gender categories, there appears to be a need when defining gender, for individuals to embody and possess a single gender at any given time (Dreger, 1998 as cited in Fausto-Sterling, 2000), this is explored further in the followed section.

A Single Gender

Despite an elusive definition, possession of a single gender (and sex) continues to be a necessity of social order cross-culturally (Dreger 1998 as cited in Fausto-Sterling, 2000)⁷. As language is considered at its most basic to be a system used to label and define, linguistic practices and social roles are delineated along the available binary definition of gender and sex (i.e. grammar that requires gendered pronouns of he/him/his or she/her/hers) (Barthes, 1979, as cited in Hare-Mustin & Mareck, 1990). As Calhoun Davis (2009) notes both formally and informally, individuals are located within a gender dichotomous framework within their everyday lives, included but not limited to filling out forms, legal classification, and gender-segregated situations. Within the current

⁷ The majority of works referenced in this literature speak to the possession of single gender at a time, while there is terminology that describes individuals who identify as more than one gender at a time available colloquially (e.g. bi-gender or gender fluid), no articles reviewed and referenced contained this terminology, leading to the purpose of this research project: to explore what other terminology and understandings of gender is available particular amongst youth as there continue to be on-going social changes in how gender is discussed and understood within North American and, specifically Canadian, contexts.

academic language that is available to describe gender and non-heteronormative experiences of gender, single terms are available to describe an individual's gender – i.e. *gender variant*, *gender nonconforming*, or *transgender*. Few of the terms available in the academic literature speak to a fluidity of gender, or an individual's ability to hold, experience, and express multiple gendered traits, for example one trait/behavior speaking to a male gender while simultaneously expressing traits and behaviours that speak to another gender. Ehrensaft (2012) offers some terminology to express gender fluidity; however, these terms have not been widely taken up, for example: *gender prius* and *gender hybrid* are suggested and defined by Ehrensaft (2012) but were not found amongst any of the other articles reviewed. While terms expressing gender fluidity and other gender nonconforming identities do exist colloquially (for example: bi-gender or gender fluid), the definition and confirmation of their existence in the academic realm has not occurred, nor is it present within literature discussing treatment and support for individuals who identify as such.

The concept of *transgender* can be seen as highlighting the idea that an individual may move between genders (i.e., transition from male-to-female or female-to-male); however, whether transgender can be understood as deconstructing or destabilizing rigid gender categories in favour of gender fluidity or in contrast as strictly adhere to moving from one distinct gender to another equally distinct gender is arguable. Elliot and Roen (1998) argue that theories that highlight the deconstructive potential of transgenderism tend to oversimplify the difficulties and desire of trans lives, while several theorists question the reality of and transexed individuals' desire for fluidity (Elliot & Roen, 1998; McKenna & Kessler, 2000). In a study that explores the contextual regulation of

transgender diversity and the production of situated difference through interviews and observations, Calhoun Davis (2009) notes that trans individuals do not necessarily fully or primarily identify as men or women. Despite complex gender experience and varied full or primary identification as either a man or a woman, Calhoun Davis notes, however, that most of the trans individuals in the study still publically presented themselves as *either a man or a woman* and hoped to appear as such. Calhoun Davis states that trans individuals present themselves as men or women as a way of delineating how they should be treated in a public, social world. However, this public presentation of either male or female is brought into question both in that it may be understood as hiding “their incongruent gender history” (p. 107) and may be perceived by observers as “pretending to be something they are not” (p. 107). This idea of *passing* highlights that trans individuals are often perceived as not truly being the gender they present themselves to be, placing an individual’s maleness or femaleness as socially questionable (Calhoun Davis, 2009, p. 107). This places trans individuals in a precarious position of managing their persona in order to be viewed as “authentically gendered” (Calhoun Davis, 2002), but nevertheless, gendered as one gender or the other, but never both or neither. Calhoun Davis (2009) found that, according to the participants in the study, the focus on “destabilizing gender not only ignores the social pressures and presentations that may hide gender diversity but also disregards individuals’ subjective attachments to identity and discounts their desires for a sense of sexed/gendered location” (Calhoun Davis, 2009, p. 117). As Ehrensaft (2012) explores in a case study of a young child wishing to transition, there was no fluidity in the child’s gender identity, but in contrast a very stable identification with one gender despite this being different from the gender than was

assigned at birth. Nevertheless, Edwards-Leeper and Spack (2012) remind readers that those working with transgender children must accept the fact that gender may be fluid. These contrasting positions speak to the complexity of gender categorization and highlight that fact that both possibilities exist; however, fluidity is far from widely accepted and those individuals that transgress gender norms are often limited in the gender categories that are available to them. Calhoun Davis (2009) argues that these “ritualized repetitions of gender categorization further solidifies and naturalizes gender dichotomization” (p. 114) and that these ““normative gender expectations organize and limit possibilities of representation and interpretations” (Calhoun Davis, 2009, p. 112).

Hines (2010 in Browne, Nash, & Hines, 2013) argues that research into trans experiences from a queer perspective often gloss over the complexities of trans identifications, in order to celebrate “trans as a ‘symbol’ of transgression” (p. 575, quotes in original). Edwards-Leeper and Spack (2012) note a shift in available terminology to describe trans individuals, suggesting a shift in languaging to *affirmed female* or *trans-woman* instead of *MTF*, suggesting that this changing terminology reflects the idea that transgender and gender variant individuals’ gender does not change (i.e. affirmed female versus trans female) as “his or her brain (or soul) has always been his or her affirmed gender” (p. 322). This shift in terminology reiterates this theme of the possession of one single gender, erasing the identity that may be part of transitioning socially, and otherwise.

Gendered Bodies

While feminist understandings present gender as an interactive, social construct (Bem 1993; Butler 1990; Fausto-Sterling, 2000, 2012), gender is further complicated by

the interaction of biological sex and gender (Bem, 1993). Biological sex often acts as a “looking glass” through which individuals make decisions about how to conceptualize, categorize, and interact with others (Bem, 1993). Gender can be understood as a “mixed and entangled cultural-natural phenomenon” (Lykke, 2010), with considerable variance in how individuals embody and enact gender within their lives (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Ehrensaft (2014) suggests that gender can be thought of dialectally, as “tension between body and psyche, body and culture, psyche and culture” (p. 574).

The terms *gender* and *sex* continue to be used interchangeably in medical, academic, and colloquial contexts (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). With on-going discussion of the constructs of sex and gender, gender continues to be “assumed to be predicated on the prior existence of dichotomously sexed bodies” (Braun & Wilkinson, 2005, p. 509). Fausto-Sterling (2000) cites the wide variation in physical bodies and culturally specific gendered behaviours in order to dismantle the continuous conflation of sex and gender. Despite various scholars contending for the acceptance of gender as separate from sex (e.g., Butler, 1990; Fausto-Sterling, 2000, 2012), Paetcher (2003) claims that although theorists may want to separate bodies from behaviours, they remain connected: the physical body must be considered as a medium from which gender is performed. Several studies (e.g., Braun & Wilkinson, 2005; Carr, 2007; Collier, Bos, & Sandfort, 2013; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008) have found complex linkages between gender, sexuality, and biological sex. These studies claim that while gender can be considered a social role, biological, physical features may be a determining factor in how individuals consider their gender.

The difficulty in solidifying the definition of gender is obscured by the pervasive cultural belief that gender differences and gendered behaviours are the result of underlying biological differences (Hare-Mustin & Mareck, 1990). This distinction of sex (biological, physical features) from gender (social role) is furthered complicated by the continued intertwining of medical procedures and the treatment of gender disorders (Gender Identity Disorders and Gender Dysphoria). Medical interventions are sought to “align” physical selves with experienced gender (Drescher, 2010).

For some theorists and researchers (e.g. Elliot & Roen, 1998; Kaufman, 2010), embodiment is the central issue of trans experiences, embodiment is neither sex nor gender, but an embodied experience of difference. From this understanding, many transgender theorists call on the body to secure transsubjectivity (Kaufman, 2010). This is complicated by queer and feminist theoretical approaches to gender that often deconstruct gender in attempt to understand the complex phenomenon; however, as Kaufman (2010) warns this theoretical exercise risks doing so at the expense of erasing the subjects’ embodied experience. Kaufman (2010) speaks to her subject’s need to overcome the differential between sex and gender by deconstructing the “sex-gender binary and visibly perform[ing] a variety of embodied experiences” (p. 111). This directly challenges some understandings of gender as strictly a social role, having little or nothing to do with the body as some would argue that the body continues to be an integral aspect of performativity, a medium in which gender is performed; an embodied aspect of self and social role.

Culture often dictates what aspects of the physical body are considered to be gendered and what secondary sex traits are key in identification, “culture mediates and

gives meaning to gender” (Ehrensaft, 2011, p. 533). There has been a shift, according to Ehrensaft (2011), from a focus on physical gendered features to the primacy of identity being one’s concept of one’s self, identity is in the brain and one’s ability to conceptualize and articulate this identity both personally and socially. Ehrensaft (2009; 2011; 2013) speaks to the complexity of interactions of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, hormone receptions, genitalia, secondary sex characteristics, brain, and mind, that leads to the first signs of a ‘true gender self’. These complex interactions between multiple physical and psychological factors are also shaped by culture and personal experiences, so much so it is seemingly impossible to separate the two; gender can be considered a “dialectical creation between the organism and the environment” (Ehrensaft 2014, p. 538).

While Edwards-Leeper and Spack (2012) recognize that “gender atypical behavior in children is not unusual” (p. 233), Beemyn (2013), suggests that the “nature of gender itself is undergoing fundamental changes, as the gender assigned to individuals at birth becomes increasingly irrelevant to how they live their lives” (p. 159). However, a distinction is drawn when there is a shift from usual experimentation and exploration of gender when there is a dissatisfaction with one’s sexual anatomy, thus, *sex* and *gender* continue to be intertwined throughout diagnosis, treatment, and support of what is deemed to be difference.

The Language of Gender

Although this literature search generated a wide variety of articles discussing a range of issues related to gender and gender identity development, a common theme throughout the literature was an absence of terminology allowing individuals to describe

themselves outside of heteronormative, binary ideals of gender (Carr, 2007; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Drescher, 2010). Language describing any variance in gender outside of heteronormative standards almost exclusively falls into diagnostic categories within the academic and scientific realms (Carr, 2007; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Drescher, 2010; Drescher & Byne, 2013) with the exception of a few articles that specifically outlined utilization of language to express support of gender diversity (e.g. Ehrensaft, 2012; Pyne, 2014). While scientific narratives continue to adapt to the evolution of cultural and social expectations of what it means to be normal, they also continue to inform and dictate what is believed to be normative and deviant by being a privileged discourse within the public sphere (Cardon, 2010).

While Ehrensaft, who has presented a variety of new terminology to describe gender diversity (e.g. Ehrensaft, 2012; 2013; 2014) suggests that, “a new discourse of gender has been introduced into the public domain, and language is now available for a phenomenon that historically remained unspoken or spoken of only in pejorative terms” (2014, p. 573), there appears to be inconsistencies amongst scholars and practitioners about what language and terminology is available and most appropriate to describe gender diversity outside of diagnostic and pathologizing terminology. For example, several articles utilized the term *gender nonconforming* to describe gender experiences that did not fit within binary, male/female ideals (e.g., Beemyn, 2013a; 2013b; Ehrensaft 2011b; Sing, Meng & Hansen, 2014); however, others stated that *nonconforming* was inappropriate as it pathologized gender diversity and instead chose utilized *gender variant* (e.g., Drescher & Byne, 2013) while other utilized both interchangeably (Edwards-Leeper & Spack, 2012).

Ehrensaft (2011) emphasizes the insufficiency of existing terminology and language to describe gender identities providing insight into the complex ways that young people make sense of gender (Beemyn, 2013). Nevertheless, the terminology provided in Ehrensaft's (2011) book has not been adopted or taken up in other materials or works discussing gender variance outside of Ehrensaft's own work. Beemyn's (2013b) review of Ehrensaft's (2011) terminology critiques the terms for being "overly cutesy"; however, Beemyn touts Ehrensaft's efforts at underscoring the inadequacies of existing language to describe gender identities, particularly nonbinary identities. While some of the terminology may have been co-created with the young people with whom Ehrensaft works, it appears as though the terminology has been created and solely utilized by Ehrensaft in her own work as it cannot be readily found in other works discussing working with gender nonconforming youth. Ehrensaft's work does provide new terminology and definitions that may provide some individuals with added methods of defining their complex experiences; the terminology's utility remains unclear at this time. Ehrensaft (2011) argues that therapists and those working with gender nonconforming children and youth too often impose the therapist's own view on children rather than allowing the young people to tell their own story, arguing that all children embark on a "gender journey"; nevertheless, the new terminology that Ehrensaft (2011) presents arguably imposes her own view of what is possible for young people. As Janssen (2013) states in a review of Ehrensaft's (2011b) book, while the utility of Ehrensaft's newly created terminology is questionable, she does, however, encourage professionals who work with children and youth to listen more attentively and with less rigidity about gender.

As Calhoun Davis (2009) notes, language that recognizes or refers to trans experiences is limited in the mainstream, so too is language that acknowledges or refers to gender experiences that may differentiate themselves from trans, male, or female categories. Language and terminology that acknowledges gender experiences outside of heteronormative standards almost exclusively falls into diagnostic terminology or trans terminology (Walker, 2014), however, gender nonconforming behaviour, identity, or expression, does not necessarily speak to a trans identity or a diagnosable disorder (Ehrensaft, 2011b; 2012; 2014). As Calhoun Davis (2009) notes, outside of queer/gender studies and communities, there is a limited understanding of trans terminology and concepts and terminology need constant explanation. “This range of linguistic options directly affects individuals’ ability to make the complexity of their gendered histories understandable” (Calhoun Davis 2009, p. 113). As Fausto-Sterling (2012) states, “because language choice betokens a theory of origin, people dispute the very language used to describe these children” (p. 105); with language often speaking to an underlying belief about what something is or how it has come about, language used to describe gender diversity in children is often highly debated. For example, labelling a child with a gender identity disorder would imply that gender nonconforming behaviour is pathological; whereas, Ehrensaft (2011b; 2012; 2014) would argue that gender nonconforming behaviour in children is not necessarily indicative of trans identities or a diagnosable condition and can be labeled as gender creative, gender diverse or simply gender nonconforming. While there are several terms that are used amongst professionals to describe children and youth that identify with non-heteronormative genders (i.e. *gender identity disorder, gender dysphoria, gender variant children, and gender*

nonconforming), these terms are at times used interchangeably to refer to *transgender* individuals (Edwards-Leeper & Spack, 2012). These terms can also refer to an individual who does not identify as transgender but does identify with a different gender identity or engages in gender variant/gender nonconforming behaviours with no intention or desire to transition socially or otherwise (Edwards-Leeper & Spack, 2012; Fausto-Sterling, 2012). If specifically defined with consistently used understandings, each of these terms could suggest different behaviours that may or may not warrant clinical treatment (e.g. therapy, hormone therapy) (Fausto-Sterling, 2012); however, there continues to be a lack of consistency in the usage of these terms.

Calhoun Davis (2009) notes that specific subcultures (for example: *female-to-male* [FTM] community) have developed ways to deal with or make sense of gender diversity by utilizing alternative gender labels (e.g. “boychick” “boi” in Calhoun Davis, 2009). These alternative gender labels are attempts to make public the varied and different experiences of trans individuals. Nevertheless, the meanings of these terms vary and remain part of the subcultural lexicon. The ways in which these terms have not been adopted in broader communities or social contexts speaks to “. . . the extent to which our society is willing or able to recognize gender complexity in public” (Calhoun Davis, 2009, p. 113). This speaks to the ways in which communities, cultures, and subcultures develop specific lexicons to describe gender variance and gender diversity; however, these vocabularies are often limited to within specific social contexts and are not always broadly adapted leading to a variety of terms to describe gender nonconformity and a lack of consistency in the understanding of these terms between communities.

Cardon (2010) states that some individuals “escape from this binary trap” (p. 139)

by utilizing terminology such as *MtF* (male transitioning to female), *transinity*, and *transism*; nevertheless, similar to the terminology presented in Ehrensaft's (2012) work, these terms while perhaps useful in offering a variance in descriptors, have yet to be adopted by the larger community, both academic and public. Pyne (2014) one of the few who address and explore young people's own words for discussing gender variance, recommends a shift in languaging of gender nonconforming children and youth, to *gender independent* while Ehrensaft (2012) insists that *gender nonconforming* is the less pathologizing choice over *gender variant*. Pyne (2014) suggests that *gender independent* has recently joined the growing lexicon of terms to describe gender nonconforming children and youth and allows for more space to encompass a range of expressions and identities; however, as indicated by the lack of consensus amongst prominent researchers in the field, agreed terms and their definitions are far from consistent.

Simmons and White (2014) who write from a trans perspective and provide the introductory chapter in Erickson-Scroth's (2014) edited work, *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves*, that they as writers and trans individuals are frequently creating and changing the terminology that best fits or describes who they are. Acknowledging that this, at times, can create complications inside and outside different trans communities, Simmons and White (2014) observe that factors such as culture, location, and class influence what is agreed upon as the definitions and understandings of certain terminology. Kaufman (2010) highlights the power of the terminology utilized to describe an experience, how each term is fraught with theoretical underpinnings, context, and history, and how although conceivably all capable of describing a similar experience (i.e. trans or gender nonconforming identity) each term functions in a unique way, speaking to the power of

the words which are chosen to identify and discuss individuals' lived experiences. Transgender and gender variant individuals and communities, as well as healthcare providers continue to differ with respect to the most accurate definitions and preferred nomenclature (Edwards-Leeper & Spack, 2012). These differences in how gender nonconforming identities are described and defined lead to debates on what is considered to be normative and what is non-normative leading to disputes on how best to support individuals who present with gender nonconforming identities and other diverse gender identities along a spectrum of diversity, as well as complexities in how, or if, and when to provide medical intervention (Ehrensaft, 2011b; 2012; 2014; Menvielle, 2009; 2012; Pyne, 2014). As Fausto-Sterling (2012) states, "the question becomes is there a normative line along this spectrum [of gender identity] and where should it be drawn" (p. 105); with no clear answer, the question remains, how or should practitioners diagnose difference.

Diagnosing Difference

"Is Gender Dysphoria a psychopathology?"

(Reiner & Reiner, 2013, p. 250)

Gender is considered by some as a core construct that impacts health and health promotion (Wilson et al., 2010); however, terminology to describe a variety of gender experiences outside of heteronormative, binary ideals of gender almost exclusively promote the understanding of gender variance as a treatable condition, eluding to the belief that only heteronormative, binary understandings of gender are normative and healthy (Jeffreys, 2012; Wise & Davidson, 2012). As more young people seek support for concerns regarding gender nonconforming identities and practitioners gain experience

working with these young people and their families, “. . . the benefits of a supportive, nonpathologizing approach are becoming increasingly clear – as are the dangers of pathologizing these identities” (Price Minter, 2012, p. 131). Much of the discussion regarding gender variance/gender nonconforming behaviour revolves around the idea that some gendered behaviours and gender expressions are normative and some are not; though, the question remains: how do we quantify what is or is not considered to be a normative gender when what gender is remains elusive? The debated distinction between gender as a learned social role and gender as an expression of innate biological traits, complicates the argument of what constitutes appropriate support practices for individuals who identify outside of heteronormative standards, eluding to the highly debated area of *treatment* of individuals who identify in gender variant ways.

Despite the recent removal of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)* (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013a), the manual continues to include a markedly similar diagnostic category of Gender Dysphoria. This highly debated and controversial removal and replacement of these diagnostic categories have been paralleled to the previous inclusion of homosexuality in the *DSM* (Drescher, 2010; Jeffreys, 2012; Langer & Martin, 2004; Wiseman & Davidson, 2012). Despite recent amendments to the languaging of this diagnostic category (APA, 2013b), this newly included dysphoria continues to be a widely debated inclusion in the manual (Drescher, 2010; Jeffreys, 2012; Langer & Martin, 2004; Wiseman & Davidson, 2012).

Many researchers argue that medical models and diagnoses utilizing binary conceptualizations of gender, as well as sex, create a dilemma for practitioners (Wiseman

& Davidson, 2012) in that practitioners are forced to work within a model that pathologizes and marginalizes non-binary expressions of gender (Drescher, 2010). Thus, practitioners come into contact with these individuals through the need for treatment due to high levels of stress, depression, self-harming behaviours, and other poor mental health outcomes (Bandini et al., 2011; Drescher, 2010; Edwards-Leeper & Spack, 2012) and treatment is often sought in the form of medical diagnosis (i.e. Gender Dysphoria). Seeking medical interventions and support for these experiences is cited as one of the principle reasons for seeking a diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder or Gender Dysphoria (Drescher, 2010; Wiseman & Davidson, 2012); however, it is unclear if the experience of these mental health issues is directly related to experiences of dissatisfaction with one's gender or a causal factor from experiences of victimization, marginalization based on one's gender (Drescher, 2010; Leeper & Spack, 2013). This is further complicated as research has shown consistent links between receiving mental health diagnosis and social stigmatization (Wiseman & Davidson, 2012). Edwards-Leeper and Spack (2012) attribute the commonality of co-morbid psychological disorders and distresses, particularly as children reach adolescence, to the fact that children "cannot escape the harsh reality of their biological sex" (p. 327); however, Edwards-Leeper and Spack (2012) suggest viewing these diagnoses as "secondary to their gender issue" (p. 327) and state that many patients are "cured" of these disorders through medical interventions for the gender issue.

Treatment versus Support

While gender variance continues to be ". . . a stigmatized condition, there is an increased, albeit gradual, acceptance of transgender people in [North] American society"

(Edwards-Leeper & Spack, 2012, p. 321). The treatment of individuals who are gender nonconforming, trans, and/or gender dysphoric remains a highly contentious area of discussion (Jeffreys, 2012; Vice, 2015). Although in the past some treatment methods have traditionally focused on extinguishing atypical gender behaviours and/or identification (Malpas, 2011; Meyer-Bahlburg, 2002), many practitioners and medical professionals are moving towards a more affirming perspective, in which gender nonconforming behavior and identification is viewed as healthy and normal human variation (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Cohen-Kettenis & Pfafflin, 2003; Cohen-Kettenis, Delemarre-van de Waal, & Gooren, 2008; Ehrensaft, 2012; MacNish & Gold, 2011; Hill et al., 2007, 2010; Lev, 2004; Malpas, 2011; Mallon, 2009; Menvielle, 2009; Rosenberg, 2002; Saeger, 2006; Vanderburgh, 2008). Clinical interventions from this perspective focus on affirming the young person's confidence and increasing social integration, while reflecting on choices related to gender expression. Other interventions include creating support networks for these children by supporting parents to become a resource for their child in their gender journey (Malpas, 2011).

Menvielle (2013) notes that it is becoming increasingly common for practitioners to encounter parents who accept and take for granted that gender identities that vary from cis/heteronormative standards are not pathological, acknowledging that not all people are meant to be heterosexual or fit into narrowly defined norms of gender. Nevertheless, these behaviours continue to be addressed and treated as pathological prior to providing support and/or treatment for co-occurring distress or co-morbid psychological disorders (Menvielle, 2013). As Price Minter (2012) suggests, "once clinicians accept that transgender children and youth are part of the normative spectrum of gender expression

and presentation, the goals of therapy change” (p. 133).

Ehrensaft (2011b) emphasizes the complex needs of children and youth who identify as trans or other non-conforming gender identities. As they approach adolescence, many young people experience crisis as their bodies begin to change in ways that are “unsettling if not abhorrent to them” (Beemyn, 2013, p. 161). Ehrensaft (2011b) argues that gender confirmation surgeries should be made available to minors, assuming they have parental approval, arguing that it is cruel and inhuman to deny these individuals the ability to be “whole” in their bodies until they reach the age of majority and are able to consent for their own surgeries.

Access to gender confirmation surgeries is an on-going discussion in Canada currently, with many barriers facing individuals who seek medical interventions (Vice, 2015). Despite some practitioners advocating for gender confirmation surgeries and access to gender confirmation practices (social or otherwise) (e.g. Ehrensaft, 2014), there is evidence to suggest that many children who may be assessed as gender dysphoric in early life do not remain so in later years. Based on work from a clinic in Amsterdam, Cohen-Kettenis & Pläffin (2003) suggest that some practitioners may employ a “wait and see” approach as “the vast majority of children they assessed as gender dysphoric in early life did not remain so at adolescence” (p. 577 in Ehrensaft, 2014). Ehrensaft (2014) instead suggests a gender affirmative model that promote early social transition as the “wait and see” approach was causing stress to children and families and leading children to feel unheard, and misunderstood, as well as continuing to display higher rates of mental health concerns, self-harm, and suicidal-ideation. Edwards-Leeper and Spack (2012) acknowledge the continued hesitancy to support early transitioning; they claim

that they have seen little to no detrimental effects of early transitioning.

In several studies (Cohen-Kettenis & Pläffin, 2003; Steensma, McGuire, Kreuls, Beekman, & Cohen-Kettenis, 2013) regarding supporting early transitioning for children and youth, the language the young people used to describe themselves emphasized as an important indicator of the individuals true gender identity. Kettenis and Pläffin (2003) released findings that suggested that one of the ways “persisters and desisters” (i.e. those who continue to be assessed as gender dysphoric into the later years of their youth, and those who do not) can be distinguished earlier than previously thought by the way that they refer to their gender identity. Persisters will often identify that they believed themselves *to be* the other gender, as well as expressing a greater discomfort in their physical bodies and incongruences between their body and gender. While desisters showed a greater fluidity in their gender identities, and stated that they *wanted to be* or *wished they were* the other sex rather than *they were* the other (Steensma, McGuire, Kreuls, Beekman, & Cohen-Kettenis, 2013).

Ehrensaft (2014) suggests, in the approach entitled “gender affirmative approach” that all gender in all its variations is a sign of health, not illness. Treatment for children and youth with this approach is not to fix gender, but “provide the space for children to explore and establish their authentic gender self; and to build or strengthen gender resilience in the face of a social world not always ready to accept these children” (Ehrensaft, 2014, p. 570). Ehrensaft (2014) suggests that in order to effectively work from a gender affirmative model, therapists must not be afraid to initiate conversations about gender with their clients, to create safe spaces to explore gender possibilities. While parents and caregivers may feel uncomfortable with the ambiguity of the situation

and possibility of continued gender fluidity, supportive caregiver response is critical for positive outcomes for gender nonconforming young people (Edwards-Leeper & Spack, 2012; Ehrensaft 2014).

Heralding the recent and substantial changes in how children who challenge gender norms are treated by professionals, and their caregivers and peers, as well as their communities, Pyne (2014) suggests that gender nonconformity has shifted from pathology to be celebrated as part of human diversity, a “paradigm shift from disorder to diversity” (p. 1). Although many practitioners and scholars are recommending and promoting this affirmative approach (for example: Ehrensaft, 2011, 2012; Hill & Menvielle, 2009; Lev, 2004; Menvielle, 2012; Spack et al., 2012), there continues to be a lack of readily available language to discuss these new approaches.

On the Margins: Marginalization and Victimization

Words continue to be weaponized as a means of harassment, with youth utilizing these “barbed words” before they are even sure of what they mean (e.g. *fag, queer, gay* etc.) (Blumenfield & Raymond, 1993; Haskell & Burtch, 2010). Issues of sexuality are often conflated with issues of gender, leaving research specific to gender-based bullying and harassment largely lacking. Gender plays large role in what is considered homophobic harassment (Haskell & Burtch, 2010), as perceived difference is often a principle risk factor for victimization and marginalization within social groups (Collier et al., 2013). Embodied experiences of gender difference or gender expression often precipitate violence on the body (Namaste, 2000). With gender being a severely policed form of identity expression (Carr, 2007), individuals make assumptions based on gender expression (Haskell & Burtch, 2010; Reiger, Linsenmeierm Gyax, Garcia, & Bailey,

2010). Edwards-Leeper and Spack (2012) posit that many of the co-occurring psychological disorders that gender nonconforming youth experience (e.g. depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, etc.) are a result of children and youth feeling uncomfortable in their bodies and experiencing marginalization and social stigmatization as a result of being viewed as different.

While research does exist that examines the role of gender in marginalization and victimization, particularly in relation to school-based bullying (Haskell & Burtch, 2010), there is an acknowledged difficulty in completing research in this area due to the variety of factors outlined by Haskell & Burtch (2010) including: lack of data within Canada; *difficulty with language*; and the risk of tarnished identities for both student and teacher participants.

Current language of appropriate practices for working with individuals who do not identify with dominant, heteronormative standards of gender are framed as either “treatment” (Drescher & Byne, 2012) or “inclusive” practices (Serano, 2013). Braun and Wilkinson (2005) suggest that everyday taken-for-granted talk and practices sustain a dichotomous gender system, further marginalizing individuals who do not identify within these binary categories.

Several studies have noted that amongst available literature, there continues to be lack of knowledge about gender identity and trans health amongst health care and counselling professionals (Bockting, Robinson, Benner, & Scheltema, 2004, Grant et al, 2011; Singh, Meng, & Hansen, 2014), as well as a distinct lack of literature that focuses on youth resilience to resist prejudice against trans identities, as well as pervasive

‘adulthood’⁸. Perceived and actual differences in gender are cited as possible risk factors for peer victimization and childhood maltreatment (Bandini et al., 2011; Collier et al., 2013). Burgess (1999) states that “trans youth are among the most neglected, misunderstood groups in our society today” (p. 35), and schools continue to be “among the least affirming environments of all for gender-variant children” (Mallon, 1999, p. 58). Multiple studies suggest that “. . . gender nonconforming youth may experience harassment at higher rates than some of their queer counterparts” (Haskell & Burtch, 2010, p. 33).

Ehrensaft (2011) suggests that upon examination the rates of high suicide and suicidal ideation amongst queer youth is not necessarily because of ostracization due to their sexual orientation but instead due to gender presentation. Ehrensaft (2011) defines this behavior as *genderist*, that is to say, behavior stemming from a set of beliefs that assume that there are only two genders and that those who stray from their “gender boxes, male or female, should be challenged, chastised, or cajoled toward normativity” (p. 529). Trans youth are increasingly at risk for victimization in school settings, including both physical and verbal bullying and abuse (D’Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2006; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006; Tommey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, & Russell, 2010) with upwards to 96% of trans youth experiencing physical abuse and 83% being verbally harassed or assaulted (Sausa, 2005).

While school settings are often a site of focus when discussing the discrimination faced by trans and gender nonconforming youth, high incidences of discrimination and

⁸ *Adulthood* is defined as the system of oppression that places adults in a greater position of power regarding decision-making in their lives than young people (Bell, 2003).

abuse continue to be recorded in both the workplace, and more importantly, the homes of trans and gender nonconforming children and youth (Grant et al., 2011; Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing, & Malouf, 2001; Grossman, D'Augelli, Howell, & Hubbard, 2005). According to Grossman et al. (2005) one of the most critical barriers to resilience faced by trans and gender nonconforming youth is the presence of negative family reactions and a lack of support or involvement based on the youth's gender identity or expression (Grossman et al. 2005).

Gender nonconforming and transgender children and youth are differentiated from other minority groups, according to Ehrensaft (2011), as they may face aspersion from their very own families, who are supposed to be their protectors. Ehrensaft (2011) boldly states that “gender nonconforming, transgender, along with gay, bisexual, and queer youth, are one, if not the only, group of minority children who cannot count on the love and support of their own families in their minority identities” (p. 529). Although this statement is arguably an exaggeration, it does speak to the unique challenges faced by gender nonconforming individuals throughout their childhoods. Ehrensaft (2011) speaks to the high prevalence of homelessness and foster involvement for transgender, gay, and lesbian youth; many of these young people flee their homes of origin or are thrown out due to their gender or sexual identities. This risk factor is even higher amongst gender nonconforming and trans youth than for gay and lesbian youth (Ehrensaft, 2011).

While these statistics are beginning to be recognized spurring research in many areas regarding support gender nonconforming and trans individuals, some argue that this focus is not without its negative ramifications (Serano, 2013). Serano (2013) strongly

articulates an intense frustration with the continued focus on trans individuals in academia, stating that there continues to be many misconceptions, appropriations, and exploitation propagated by academia. While bringing trans experiences into the broader view, in favour of increasing awareness of gender diversity, has increased in the past few years, with many studies and personal stories being written by and for trans individuals and trans communities (Clifton, 2014 December 31), there continues to be an intense focus on those that straddle the margins of gendered possibilities. Serano (2013) argues that being viewed as an exemplary member of a marginalized community creates continued marginalization with many trans people being subjected to “deeply personal questions about surgeries, genitalia, sex, etc.” (Serano, 2013, p. 30) under the guise of “good intentions” of research, that, while intended to better inform the public, often propagates limited understandings of diversity and possibilities of identity. In an attempt for academia to move forward in the thinking and understanding of gender, this intense focus on trans individuals may in turn continue to subjugate individuals, placing them as subjects of scrutiny where an entire complex social being is defined by one aspect of their identity in all realms of their life and where individual experiences become the definition of all experiences of those who identify with a variety of diverse communities. While this focus on transgender research has importantly, “brought questions of gender diversity to the fore of contemporary social and cultural enquiry” (Hines, 2010, p. 597), focusing solely on trans experiences of gender variance, arguably continues to marginalize, and pathologize, gender difference as discussions about transgender identification often lead to treatment recommendations or considerations (Drescher & Byne, 2013; Ehrensaft, 2011).

A Need for Research

Despite much research and academic discussion in this area, cis/heteronormative categories of gender continue to be a dominant force in the understanding and interpretation of gender in human services fields (Mallon & DeCrescenzo, 2006). As Diamond and Butterworth (2008) state, the “difficulty in making sense of individuals with multiple identities, multiple subjectivities, and multiple social locations is manifested in the lack of language to describe such experiences” (p. 373). This lack of consistent definitions of what gender is, how gender identity is developed and the role gender plays in the lives of individuals creates a problematic gap in the literature that informs practice standards and policy development in human services fields such as Child and Youth Care. Currently, language describing gender difference and gender variance typically falls into diagnostic categories that pathologize variance from prescribed social norms (Walker, 2014). Nevertheless, there is a continued push by academics and activists to reach a wider understanding of gender and identity outside of the dominant, dichotomous categories and heteronormative, binary ideals (Devor, 2002; Drescher, 2010; Langer & Martin, 2004; Wiseman & Davidson, 2012).

Throughout the review of the literature, a clear and consistent definition of gender was elusive; however, a general theme of gender as a *social construct* and gender as related to a *social role* was common. The majority of articles categorized gender experiences that did not fit with male/female, heteronormative binary ideals as either *nonconforming* or *gender variant*. The term *transgender* was utilized to specifically describe individuals who felt as though their physical bodies did not align with their felt experience of gender or as an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of gender experiences. Current research suggests a need for language and terminology that

describes gender outside of binary categories (Wiseman & Davidson, 2012) as well as continued work in the exploration of what gender is and how gender is expressed, embodied, and discussed within individuals' lives. While clear and consistent understandings and definitions of gender appear to be lacking in academic and professional literature, the definitions and understandings that are available are dictated by adult professional and academic understandings of this complex and elusive concept. While Child and Youth Care professionals, and others who work with young people, may educate themselves on current standards of practice influenced by academic studies and build upon theories of gender, how young people talk about, understand, define, and name gender in their own words is widely lacking in the currently explored literature. Singh, Meng, and Hansen (2014) found that an "ability to self-define and theorize one's gender" was a key component to fostering resilience amongst trans and gender nonconforming youth (p. 211) with youth participants expressing that being able to use their own words and expressions that were "in alignment with their gender identity and expression" (p. 211) was crucial to their own resilience. In order to provide effective and necessary support for gender nonconforming youth it is essential to learn and understand how youth are talking about gender.

Chapter Two: Methodology and Methods

In planning this project, the main objective was to explore the key research question, “*How do young people, specifically youth who do not identify with cis/heteronormative standards of gender, talk about gender, their own and others’?*” The intention was to explore *how* young people are talking about gender in order to learn more about the ways in which young people negotiated social relationships, construct identities and manufacture knowledge and language through discourses about gender. As noted in the introduction, in order to expand this question, I identified seven sub-questions from which to guide the project:

- How do young people talk about and describe their own experience of gender?
- How do young people use language to describe their lived experience of gender?
- What influencing factors contribute to young people’s identification with certain experiences of gender, specific gender vocabulary, and identity labels? I.e. If gender is socially constructed – what factors have specifically lead to/influenced the construction of individual young people’s genders?
- How to youth find, utilize, and make sense of terminology and vocabulary that describe and identify gender in their own lives?
- What words, terminology, and vocabulary are being used by young people to describe and talk about their own experiences of gender and others?
- Do young people utilize diagnostic labels/language to describe and understand their own experiences of gender?
- How to young people create meanings for specific gender vocabulary and terminology?

Further to my earlier mention of this, current understandings of gender within the social sciences and human service fields typically describe gender as socially constructed (Butler, 1990; de Beauvoir, 1989; Diamond, 2002). At the very early stages of this project and prior to undergoing the data analysis, my approach and theoretical frameworks were grounded in this foundational notion. With my research questions in mind as a guiding framework, I looked for research methodologies that would allow for an exploratory approach to this project; I sought a methodology that specifically examined discourse *and context* while allowing room for new information to emerge from the analysis. As Koro-Liungberg (2008) and Hook (2005) suggests, “knowledge is located in the ‘surface of emergence’” (p. 228 quotations in original). Because this project is a descriptive exploration, I was not testing a hypothesis, or attempting to gather quantitative data nor was I attempting to test the fit between a particular already known theoretical framework and the experiences of my participants. The goal of this project is to look at *how* young people are talking about gender in order to explore, describe, and better understand the ways in which they do this. I wanted a methodology that allowed for an interplay between data collection and analysis where the initial analysis would suggest the direction for further data collection and the data that was collected would direct the analysis; therefore, I chose a nonlinear methodological framework and within that paradigm, utilized Situational Analysis developed by Clarke (2005).

Situational Analysis (SA) offers a way in which to organize and frame research on discourse (Perez & Canella, 2015) and allows this qualitative inquiry to focus on the ways in which discourses are negotiated in social relationships and interactions, and through this, construct identities and subjectivities (Clarke, 2005), and manufacture power,

knowledge, ideologies, and control (Clark, 2005; Perez & Canella, 2015). Situational Analysis also allows space for exploration and for the data to direct the research. The emergence of themes and interplay between data collection and analysis facilitate a rich and deep exploration of the conversations that young people are engaging in when talking about gender. Given the emergent nature of this methodology and its reliance on the situational aspects of the research process, I will first describe the process of finding my participants and the need to seek additional data sources and then describe my application of situational analysis.

Finding the Participants and Other Data Sources

Recruitment

Recruitment for the study was done via three recruitment methods: posters, email listserv, and word of mouth in-class invitations to participate. Throughout all recruitment, the term “non-heteronormative” was used out of a number of available terminology (e.g. ‘non-conforming’; gender variant, non-normative gender) as I wanted to use a neutral term that allowed for individuals of various and diverse genders to identify with this broad gender category. The term “non-heteronormative” is necessarily vague in order for the recruitment process to not impinge upon the results (i.e. offering terminology to define and identify gender to potential participants with which they may not be familiar). The term “non-heteronormative” is used *under-erasure* (Derrida, 1974; Heidegger, 1995; Spivak 1974; St. Pierre, 2010), that is to say, it is used with the understanding that it is not a complete and accurate description of the experiences of all individuals; however, it was one of the only terms available to me, as a researcher during this project, that somewhat accurately spoke to the desired salient characteristics of potential participants in this

research project. The term ‘non-heteronormative’ is used with the assumption that individuals who have experiences and genders that would qualify them for participation in this project will be familiar with this term, its limitations, and its use in the academic and non-academic sphere.

Posters (see *Appendix A: Recruitment Materials*) calling for individuals who identified with, or had experience identifying with, a non-heteronormative gender to participate in a research project to explore how young people talk about gender were distributed across the campus, in both university department buildings, community bulletin boards, and the student union building.

A recruitment email (see *Appendix A*) was distributed through the School of Child and Youth Care undergraduate listserv calling for participants in the study. This email included a copy of the poster.

Recruitment was also conducted via word of mouth, in-class initiations to participate in three undergraduate, Child and Youth Care classes. Posters were distributed during these in-class presentations.

The initial poster and recruitment response yielded 10 potential participants; however, due to scheduling conflicts and withdrawal by some potential participants, the final participant count was only 3, which (as noted above) led to modifications in the data collection methods in the study.

Interview Participants

At the onset of this project, participants were recruited based on age, university year, and gender-identity, and language spoken. Participants were between the ages of 18-21 in first-, second-, or third- year university at the University of Victoria, fluent English

speakers, and identified or had experience identifying as non-heteronormative in their gender identities.

As the focus of the project was on exploring how young people talk about gender, by recruiting individuals of this description, I was hoping to have participants that would be able to recall their high school experiences with relative ease as well as speak to their current experiences as a young person in a new environment (i.e. university). Participants of this age are able to consent to research participation without the involvement of a parent/guardian, which was preferable considering the potentially sensitive and/or personal nature of the topic of inquiry (gender) as not all individuals have discussed their gender and experiences of gender with their family or guardians.

By recruiting individuals who identify with non-heteronormative genders I believed that participants would have a variety of experiences with utilizing language in unique ways to describe their experiences of gender. Early year undergraduate students are often in a stage of identity development that promotes self-exploration and reflection. It is therefore expected that this population will have thought and talked about a diverse range of gender-related experiences in their identity exploration and formation.

The final participant group consisted of three individuals between the ages of 18-21, in first-third year university in a range of programs at the University of Victoria (participants requested that program information not be included in the project). All participants self-identified with non-heteronormative genders including “male/man”, “agender”, and “female/fluid”, two participants utilized he/him pronouns, and one utilized she/her pronouns. All participants were fluent English speakers. All in-person interview participants signed a consent form prior to participation (see *Appendix B: Consent Forms*).

Ethical Considerations.

As this project involved data collection from in-person interviews, this project received approval from the Human Research Ethics Board prior to the start of data collection. Throughout the course of the recruiting and interviewing participants, it became clear that I would need to seek additional data sources, as participation was limited with only three final interview participants. As all three interview participants stated that Tumblr was a source of conversation and information for them regarding gender, I chose to pursue data collection from this online source. Due to this change, ethics approval was revised to accommodate for the change in data collection techniques and include data collection from online source, Tumblr.

For the in-person interview participants, I expected that the probability and magnitude of possible harms of participated in the interviews were minimal and would be in no way greater than the risks participants may encounter in their everyday lives communicating with peers on a university campus. I knew that it would be possible that participants may, at times, feel emotional or psychological discomfort as talking about personal experiences with gender may bring up negative experiences or emotions from the participants' past or unresolved issues/concerns surrounding the participants' gender-related experiences. I also kept in mind that participants may feel discomfort if a question is too personal or sensitive. Because of this, efforts were made to minimize and prevent the possibility of risk during the individual interviews by clearly outlining the possible sensitivity of the subject matter and the possibility of the discussions bringing up past or current unresolved issues for the participants. I did my best to create a safe and respectful environment for participants to share their personal experiences. I received signed consent from all interview participants prior to interviewing them and informed

them that the individual interview that their participation is voluntary, that they may withdraw their consent to participate at any time, and that they reserve the right to decline answering a question that they do not feel comfortable answering. I was prepared to provide participants with information about resources if they required support after the interview.

Interviews

Interviews were semi-structured based on a set of prepared questions; however, based on interview participant responses, I asked additional questions to clarify or expand on the ideas shared. I began the interviews by showing participants 7 images that I had retrieved (with permissions) from The Identity Project (Deragon, 2014). These 7 images consist of portrait photos that have been posted online with each person's self-identified terminology and gender identity label printed below. Participants were shown the images one at a time (without the self-identified identity label) and asked if the participant could identify the person's gender. Participants were told that this was not a test and that they could guess if they wanted to, or chose not to respond. Once the participant named or discussed the gender of the individual in the image, the self-identified label was revealed. The images were used as conversation starters in order to engage participants in discussions about how one identifies the gender of others, what terminology the participants were familiar with, if the participants believed that gender could be identified visually/without talking with the person, and other thoughts about gender. From this point forward, the interview questions focused on the participant's knowledge of gender and gender-related terminology, how the participant learned and used this terminology, and on their understanding of what gender is. As the interview progressed, I asked questions

about the participants personal experience with gendered language, particularly their experiences in high school, in order to access ideas, thoughts, and discourses about gender by young people in their high school years. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The interview questions and images used in the interviews are included in *Appendix C: Interviews*.

Restructuring Data Collection to look at Tumblr

During each of the interviews conducted in the initial stages of the project, participants identified Tumblr as a key source of information and discussion for them and their peers, particularly when it came to information relating to gender diversity, gender language, as well as peer support and conversation regarding gender nonconforming and gender variant experiences. Interview participants noted that Tumblr served as a resource for them, especially if they were not in large communities with easily accessible LGBTQ resources. They utilized Tumblr for self-expression, self-exploration, and learning about gender experiences and gender variance. I therefore amended my approach to include Tumblr as a data source in addition to the interviews.

Tumblr.

Tumblr is a popular, international blog site with over 75, 000, 000 million posts to date, and over 20 billion page views a month (Mendoza, 2014; Rifkin, 2013). This microblogging platform, designed for creative self-expression, is considered a mindful alternative to Facebook and other social media websites where users blog on a myriad of topics (Techopedia, 2016).

How is Tumblr used?

Tumblr is used in a variety of ways. As it is both a social network and a blogging platform, users can create personal blogs/accounts from which a user *follows*⁹ or *reblogs* other users' posts, thus interacting with other users via chat or *notes* on posts in order to find or make friends, follow interests, post personal art, hobbies or knowledge, or to interact with other individuals online. Tumblr can also be used for business or community websites and is a flexible platform for sharing content with others.

Key points about usage of this platform:

- Blogs are created and modified by users – blogs can be customized by each user and many users have either a personal blog or themed blog
- A user has a homepage or *dashboard* that displays possible activities, recent posts from other blogs the user is following, and suggested other blogs that the user may be interested based on recent activity
- Users can *follow* blogs that they are interested in
- Users can *re-blog* and comment on other posts in order to share content or save content on their own blog *walls*. Re-blogs and notes are tracked via *threads* so other users can see how often a post is commented on or re-blogged
- Users can converse with other users via notes (comments on posts), chat, or private messages
- Users can *like* content (using a heart icon)
- Tumblr tracks users' activity including blogs that are being followed, conversations, re-blogs, and likes

⁹ Tumblr uses a number of specific terms to refer to actions users may engage in – all terms are italicized in this section to emphasize the Tumblr-specific use of these terms.

- Tumblr will suggest pages and posts to follow or view based on a users' *likes* and activity. Suggestions provided by Tumblr are presented in the user's dashboard and are based on previous activity and similar activity by other users.

Engaging with Tumblr as a researcher.

In order to collect data from Tumblr, I created a username and blog page titled *Gender Complexity*. After setting up my user profile, I began to search for relevant pages and blogs to follow. First, I typed "gender" into the search and began to follow and explore posts from users and pages that mentioned "gender nonconformity", "trans" and "alternative genders" in the title of the page or name of the user. I followed a total of 30 pages, which posted content relating to gender diversity, trans issues, gender variance, and non-cis-heteronormative gender identities and expression. Within these 30 blogs, I explored posts and threaded conversations (appearing beneath posts) to examine the conversations that are occurring on these platforms, I "liked" posts (using the heart icon) that contained information that would be utilized for data analysis. By "liking" these posts, Tumblr provides suggestions for posts to view and pages to follow, based on likes and usage of the platform. The posts that I "liked" lead to the discovery of further posts and pages containing information relevant to this project.

I continued to explore, view, "like" and re-blog, content on Tumblr over a three-month period. During this time, I looked for posts and content that was specifically designed to be helpful and/or informative as well as posts that were specifically for and by gender variant/trans/ and/or gender non-conforming individuals and groups. By accessing these posts specifically, I was looking for areas that users would access if they themselves were looking for support, direction, or information about how to talk about

gender, what terms to use, and specific language to discuss gender experiences. Overall, I followed a total of 30 blogs, “liked” 60 posts and re-blogged 18. I viewed a total of 142 conversations that emerged from comments, notes, and threads. This Tumblr data was then added to the data from my 3 in-person interviews and analysed through Situation Analysis.

As Tumblr provides its users multiple layers of anonymity, the identifying features of the participants were largely unknown. However, based on the selection of the blogs to be reviewed and the user-ship of Tumblr as a communication platform, it is assumed that selected posts are from participants from a wide variety of identities with a high likelihood that the participants will be under 34, with approximately 70% of users between 16-34, based on user-ship statistics noted in Mendoza (2014). No users of Tumblr are under 13 years of age as stated in the Terms and Conditions of Use (Tumblr Inc., 2013).

Consent.

As data collected from Tumblr was collected from posted content, individual users of the site were not considered to be participants in the project and no consent was required. The data was collected from conversations posted by anonymous users of the online social site, Tumblr. No direct recruitment, consent, or in-person data collection was conducted for this portion of the data collection. Due to the privacy policies of Tumblr and the anonymity of the user group, the users of this site/blog posts to be reviewed were not be considered participants in this research project. As per the Tumblr Privacy Policy (Tumblr Inc., 2013), all posts to the site are considered to be public. Therefore, risks to the blog users whose posts were analysed are considered to be minimal

as the site users posted to the site willingly and with the knowledge that their posts are public and able to be viewed and used by anyone who visits the site. This group of blog users is not considered to be a group of participants in the study; however, their posts will be understood as a site of discourse and context of conversation in which data may be gathered. All posts that were analysed have had any personal identifiers, including usernames and blog titles, excluded in order to protect the identities of the individuals who are posting to this site.

Methodology: Situational Analysis

Situational Analysis (SA) is an extension of grounded theory, made known by Clarke (2005) in *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory after the Postmodern Turn*. SA has been widely taken up across disciplines as it provides a unique approach to mapping the complexities present in social research (Clarke, 2015). Both grounded theory and SA are rooted in social constructionism and seek to explore the “multiplicity of perspectives and processual and contingent nature of social life through a relational ecological framework” (Clarke, Friese, & Washburn, 2015, p. 12). Unlike other forms of qualitative inquiry, “in SA, the situation of inquiry itself broadly conceived becomes the key unit of analysis” (Clarke, Friese, & Washburn, 2015, p. 12) with a focal shift from social processes to the relationships between situational elements, perspectives/positions, and discursive practices. Situational analysis is utilized in this study because of the emphasis SA places on context and the importance of viewing discourse in context.

Context

As I outlined above, in the initial stages of the project, I had planned to interview participants and conduct a follow-up conversation group in order to collect data for this

study, however; given the low number of respondents and the fact that all three interviewees had identified Tumblr as a key resource for them in learning about and discussing gender, I chose to collect data from this source. Tumblr became the context in which the discourse was occurring and the blogs chosen for review became the situation of inquiry, or the unit of analysis (Clarke, 2005). With one of the youngest user groups of all popular social media sites (over 70% of users between 16-34), Tumblr is increasingly a site of conversation and discourse for young people (Mendoza, 2014). Clearly, in today's technology driven world, youth are accessing online communities and social sites for conversation about pertinent social issues and personal expression (Rifkin, 2013).

Mapping

Post-structural assumptions and strategies of inquiry are integrated in Situational Analysis, emphasizing the analysis of discourse and power relations (Clarke, Friese, & Washburn, 2015). Differences, complexities, and contradictions are articulated, thereby allowing the illustration and mapping of multiple positions. Situational Analysis uses three kinds of analytical maps, *situational maps*, *social worlds/arenas maps*, and *positional maps*. Through the use of these maps, one is able to elucidate key elements, materials, discourses, structures, and conditions that characterize the situation. Mapping plays a key role in the analysis and visual representation of data within this study; by mapping situational elements, this visual tool captures the complexities present in the situation of inquiry and in the findings of the research questions.

Situational Analysis offers three modes analysis and data mapping: *situational maps*, *social worlds/arena maps*, and *positional maps*. These techniques help the researcher to think systematically through the design of the project as well as the vast

amounts of data collected throughout the process (Clarke, 2005). Clarke (2005) suggests that these techniques can be used together and simultaneously as data is collected, read and re-read, and analysed which is how this methodology was taken up in this project. Understanding of the situation of inquiry comes from examining the complex interactions between situational elements. By identifying situational elements, social worlds/arenas, and positions taken, the researcher can better describe and understand the context of interest.

This approach requires multiple readings of the discourse and reflexivity on the part of the researcher (Clarke, 2005) to address complexity, differences, and contradictions (Perez & Canella 2015). Through the mapping and remapping of data, the researcher must reflect on their own subjectivity, read and re-read the data and examine, identify, and articulate the complexities within the data through the mapping. The goal is to map complexity by outlining and describing the many elements of the situation rather than develop a formal theory.

Situational Analysis does not require strict adherence to rules or methods; as it only provides guidelines for mapping data and not every map must be utilized (Clarke, 2005). For this research project, I used the Situational Analysis analytical mapping methods not only to outline the situational elements but also to identify themes. I adapted the idea of visually mapping the data (i.e. the analytical maps used in SA) and applied this to the themes I found, providing a visual tool to capture the themes present in the data in order to identify significant patterns and relationships within the situation of analysis (i.e. the situation of inquiry) (Perez & Canella, 2015). Through this analytical process, the goal was to describe the elements of the Situation of Inquiry (i.e. the blogs within the

context of Tumblr and the interview data) in order to provide an in-depth description of this context, from which themes could be identified. The goal is to map the complex relationships and interactions between situational elements, visually displaying how complex the context, or situation, of inquiry may be.

As this methodology allows for interplay between data collection and analysis, the final adaptation of this technique did not come until the final stages of data analysis and collection while I was searching for a visual mapping technique that would capture the complexity of what was emerging from the analysis. This adaptation of the mapping techniques is described further in the sections below in the section entitled, *Relativity and Mapping Gravitational Waves*. The following sections briefly outline the purpose and structure of the three mapping techniques¹⁰ suggested in Situational Analysis (Clarke, 2005) in order to provide a brief outline of the techniques employed during the initial stages of project development, data collection, and data analysis.

Situational Maps.

As the focus of analysis in this methodology is the situation, the first goal of the research process is to “descriptively lay out” (Clarke, 2005, p. 86) the elements of the situation, both human and nonhuman. The questions that frame this mapping technique are:

- Who and what are in the situation
- Who and what matter or are of importance in the situation

¹⁰ For the purpose of this project, a brief outline of each mapping technique is provided in order to offer some basis of understanding of the methods employed within this methodology. This section does not act as guide or prescription of these techniques. For a full description and guide of these mapping techniques see Clarke (2005) and Clarke, Friese, & Washburn (2015).

- What elements impact and influence the situation and situational elements

Once these situational maps are drafted they can be used for processing relational analysis, examining the situational elements and how they relate, or not, to each other and the situation as a whole. Situational maps should include significant human, nonhuman, material, and symbolic/discursive elements of the situation of interest (Clarke, 2005). Clarke (2005) suggests that all, or as many as possible, situational elements must be laid out in the initial steps of the research process. Not all elements will remain of interest but identifying all elements is suggested as an important step to framing the situation on inquiry.

Messy or abstract situational maps are completed in the early stages of the research process in order to frame the research goals and outline the situation of inquiry by mapping in abstract or unstructured ways as many situational elements as the researcher can identify. These maps are referred to as messy or abstract by Clarke (2005) as later, the research may order these maps into categories, creating Ordered Situational Maps. After this the initial maps are completed, relational analysis can be conducted in order to structure and map relations between situational elements. From this relational analysis, more structured or ordered relational situational maps are created which can help the researcher identify and clarify what relationships within the situation can be examined further and help the researcher to create questions from which to guide the research (Clarke, 2005). Only once initial mapping processes have been accomplished can the researcher determine what further data should be collected.

Initial Situational Maps.

I created messy and abstract situational maps in the early stages of this research project to frame the goals of the project and outline the situation of inquiry, i.e. the individual context from which young people were engaging in discourse about gender. Prior to data collection, I thought about and mapped as many different possible situational elements that I imagined might be present in the situation of inquiry based on my experience with the topic area and my knowledge of the context prior to data collection. As suggested by Clarke (2005; 2015), by mapping out possible situational elements and categories, I was able to frame the goals of my inquiry and identify areas that I could pay attention to as I started my data collection. As I mapped and re-mapped these messy situational outlines, I identified key elements of the situation of inquiry and soon realized that outlining and specifically naming each factor of the contexts would be impossible. I instead chose to name and identify categories of factors that existed within the context, coming up with many broad categories including:

- Language spoken
- Geographic location
- Social location
- Family/home
- Peers/social groups
- School/Education
- Culture – both family and broader social culture
- Technology
- Media

- Political climate
- Religion/Spirituality
- Education/groups/conversations regarding gender diversity

From these broad categories, more specific ideas and elements were identified as shown below in *Figure 1: Situational Map Ordered Working Version*. This map is presented in this section, as it was a part of the data collection method and less a part of the analysis.

This map helped with structuring of the project, identifying research questions, and outlining interview questions for data collection. By identifying categories of situational elements as well as specific elements, these maps helped guide me with regard to what to pay attention to and what to consider when collecting and analysing data. As messy and abstract situational maps are an initial stage of the research process, Clarke (2005) suggests that they are not necessary to include in the presentation of data. Clarke (2005) suggests that initial situational maps should be abstract and not ordered into lists or categories; however, as I mapped out situational elements utilizing this method, I found it most helpful to list situational elements under the identified broader categories of the situation. One example of an ordered Situational Map is shown above. I developed many versions of these maps as the project evolved in the early stages that I did include in the final presentation of the data. I utilized these maps as working versions to guide data collection and analysis.

INDIVIDUAL HUMAN ELEMENTS/ACTORS

- Interview participants
- Researcher
- Individual teachers/profs
- Parents/caregivers
- Important individuals/role-models/mentors
- Key figures
- Celebrities

COLLECTIVE HUMAN ELEMENTS

- High schools
- Post-secondary schools
- Student groups - friend groups, peers, class groups, clubs, student unions,
- Teachers/profs - as collective group
- University/high school regulatory boards
- Sports teams/clubs
- Families
- Town/city
- Province
- Country
- Media groups
- Advocacy Groups
- Political parties
- Support groups/services
- Pride groups - LGBTQ groups
- Religious groups

DISCURSIVE COONSTRUCTIONS OF INDIVIDUALS AND COLLECTIVE HUMAN ACTORS

- Trans/gender variant as different or abnormal
- Cis/heteronormativity as normal
- Youth as not fully knowing who they are yet
- Youth as not complete individuals
- Youth as inexperienced
- Sex and gender as different or the same
- *More to be found through project*

POLITICAL/ECONOMIC ELEMENTS

- Canadian federal election
- Canadian Conservative government - newly Liberal government
- American political climate
- American legalization of gay marriage
- International political climates
- Provincial government

TEMPORAL ELEMENTS

- History of LGBTQ in Canada
- History of feminism
- History of gay rights
- History of trans rights - Canada and International
- Colonization

MAJOR ISSUES/DEBATES

- Youth transitioning
- Gender as fluid
- Gender as stable
- Trans identities
- Washroom use
- Pronouns
- Gender versus biological sex

NONHUMAN ELEMENTS

- Physical Technologies - phones, tablets, computers
- Social media platforms
- Internet
- Print media
- Digital media
- TV/Movies
- Literature
- Clothing
- Jewellery/makeup/hair dye
- Spaces/buildings/areas
- Visible articles/items for LGBTQ- cross-walk at urvic
- Stickers/signs denoting LGBTQ spaces/allyship

IMPLICATED SILENT ACTORS

- Non-supporters
- Internalized heteronormativity

DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF NONHUMAN ACTANTS

- *To be found through project*

SOCIOCULTURAL/SYMBOLIC ELEMENTS

- Dominant religion - Christianity
- Religion/spiritual beliefs of participants
- Culture of participants
- Dominant cultural values of Canada
- Cis/Heteronormativity

SPATIAL ELEMENTS

- Safe spaces versus unsafe spaces
- Virtual spaces (online)
- Sectorized and policed spaces
- Mediated and moderated spaces
- Self-run spaces
- Group run spaces

RELATED DISCOURSES

- Biological sex
- Surgeries/hormone therapy
- Medical interventions
- Corrective surgeries
- Youth transitioning
- Privilege and power
- Feminism

Figure 1. Situational Map Ordered Working Version.

The first ordered Situational Map (as shown above in *Figure 1*) was created in order to plan the research project and helped to lay out, as Clarke (2015) recommends, everything “that might be worth a peek in terms of data gathering” (p101). I used this map to guide the data collection and analysis, by identifying situational elements that may be of interest while data was collected in the situation of inquiry (i.e. from the contexts of the interviewees). This map outlines the elements that I could identify in the situation prior to speaking to my interview participants and before data collection processes were amended to focus on Tumblr as the situation of inquiry. As data was collected, analysed, and data collection methods altered, I re-mapped the situation incorporating the situational elements found through Tumblr data collection. This map is presented in the following section, *Data Presentation and Analysis*, for further discussion as this map was used as method of presenting the situational elements that were identified within the situation of inquiry and along with the possible relationships between these elements. These possible relationships and interactions between situational elements, were then further explored through the other mapping techniques of Social Worlds/Arenas, and Positional Mapping. Through the process of creating the situational maps, I noticed common themes within the data as well as user identified themes, this led to an additional mapping technique not typically employed in Situational Analysis: Thematic Mapping.

Thematic Map.

Using both the elements identified through Situational Mapping and user identified themes, I mapped common themes that I found in the data, with a technique that displayed the relationships between the situational themes and the data driven themes so that I could show the overlap and interaction of some of the most common themes. This work is

captured in the following section *Chapter Three: Data Presentation and Analysis, Figure 7*.

Utilizing Tumblr as a source of data collection allowed for an interesting approach to identifying themes, as users of this social media platform theme their own posts through the usage of hashtags. A simplified definition of hashtags is that these are keywords that can be used to organize content and posts on social media (Samawi, 2013). Hashtags are a type of metadata tag used on social networks, such as Tumblr, which makes it easier for users to access and find certain content or messages with a particular theme (Chang, Hsia-Ching, Iyer, Hemalata, 2012). Hashtags can be used to search for certain content and identify trending topics, particularly on social media platform Twitter. On Tumblr, hashtags are referred to as *tags*, but more commonly still called hashtags across the wider social media context, and can be used to maximize engagement with a user's posts. Utilizing popular tags/hashtags will bring a user's posts into the *explore* section of other user's who tag or search with the same hashtags.

Hashtags are used to categorize messages. Users of social media platforms tag their own posts with hashtags as either a means to formally identify content so that this can be found when searched for and included in larger conversations about a certain subject (i.e. trending topics), or to informally identify themes and content within the users posts or to convey a certain message (Scott, 2015). On Tumblr, users either ended their posts with a series of hashtags identifying themes, for example: #nonbinary #positivity #reblog #queer or they would incorporate hashtags right into their posts, for example: "Feeling so #dysphoric today". During my collection of this data, I found that it was much

more common for users to end their posts with a series of hashtags than to include the tags directly in the post text.

By paying attention to the hashtags users were posting and to how they were employing these hashtags, I was able to identify themes within the situation of inquiry and the context of Tumblr. Drawing from these user-identified themes, I mapped the most common themes visually, using a technique that displayed the relationships and overlap between and amongst themes. These themes are illustrated and discussed further in the following section, *Data Presentation and Analysis* and are displayed in *Figure 7*.

Social Worlds/Arenas Maps.

Social worlds/arenas maps are “cartographies of collective commitments, relations, and sites of actions” (Clarke, 2005, p. 86). That is to say, this approach which is grounded in social constructionist theory and the premise that individuals and groups participate in and influence social constructs, expectations, and discourses, social worlds/arenas maps examine and illustrate the level of social action. These maps serve to identify power and organizational structures, and illustrate the ways in which power arenas interact with social worlds (Clarke, 2005, p. 195). This mapping technique helps to pull out and identify discourses, power relations, and knowledges that are present in the situation of inquiry, thus helping to illustrate the ways in which these elements interact and overlap. Clarke (2005) clarifies that discourses are not explicitly represented on the social worlds/arenas maps because the social worlds that are included in the map are themselves, “universes of discourse” (p. 114) with shared understandings, knowledges, and norms. Social worlds exist in and interact with arenas, which are broader sites of social action and both are created and maintained through discourse (Clarke, 2005).

Specifying the key social worlds created by collective social action (i.e. socially constructed discourses and knowledges) is the major goal of this mapping technique (Clarke, 2005). In order to engage in this mapping process, Clarke (2005) suggests examining the data by describing and exploring each social world/arena that was mapped within the situation of inquiry by asking questions such as:

- What is the work of each world?
- What are the commitments or beliefs of each world?
- How does this world present or describe itself?
- How does it describe other social worlds present in the arena?
- What are the sites of action of these social worlds?

Perez and Canella (2015) suggest that this mapping technique requires employing constant analysis by reading and re-reading the data, revisiting situational maps and drafting multiple versions of the maps. With this in mind, I identified 10 social worlds and 6 main arenas. Using the social worlds/arenas mapping technique I outlined the 10 social worlds and how they overlapped with each other, from this I layered the 6 main arenas over the 10 worlds in order to visually represent which worlds were present within the discourse on each given arena, how each arena overlapped and interacted with other arenas and in that way, also showed both which worlds were present in and which worlds were absent from these arenas of discourse. I created 8 final maps in total, one that outlined the 10 social worlds present in the situation of inquiry, one that incorporated all the layers of social worlds and arenas, and six that individually layered one arena at a time over the social worlds to clearly display how the social worlds engaged in the arenas. Each of these maps can be found in the following section, *Data Presentation and Analysis*.

Positional Maps.

Positional maps serve to illustrate the range of positions found in discourses within the data (Perez & Canella, 2015). This includes outlining issues, contradictions, opinions, and beliefs with the main goal of representing the “heterogeneity of positions” (Clarke, 2005, p. 126) within the situation of inquiry. Clarke (2005) suggests that these maps provide an opportunity to examine positions within the discourse without associating these positions to particular individuals, groups, or institutions. Drawing from Foucault (1973 cited in Clarke, 2005), this method of analysis seeks to “move beyond the knowing subject” (p. 126 in Clarke, 2005). Clarke (2005) emphasizes the importance of not viewing these positional maps as representing individuals or groups. The goal of this mapping technique is to illustrate the various positions, emphasizing differences rather than similarities. This was an important perspective for my utilization of this technique as I found that individual users and groups could often hold different positions on the same topic based on the context of the conversation and other situational elements. Mapping the positions as separate from individual users in the Tumblr context was a key way to illustrate the complexities present in this context. Clarke (2005) suggests that in other qualitative research, correlating positions with specific groups or individuals focuses on similarities rather than differences, which often leads to the erasure of complexity and multiple perspectives and therefore frames situations and contexts and individuals and social positions as binaries. Through outlining the positions taken and not taken within the situation of inquiry, I was better able to articulate and illustrate contextual positions, interactions, and socially influenced perspectives. As Clarke (2005) suggests, the concept of positionality “creates an important ‘space between’” (p. 127, quotations in original) from which diversity and difference can be emphasized and the researcher can move

beyond “the knowing subject” (Clarke, 2005, p. 126) in order to fully explore the context and situation of inquiry.

Utilizing this technique, I created four positional maps, focusing on the most salient topics I saw within the data. These maps are presented in the *Data Presentation and Analysis* section. By mapping the positional data in tandem with the mapping of the other areas of focus, I was able to read and re-read the data, and incorporate my analysis from other maps into the mapping of the positions that were being taken in the situation of inquiry. Thus, as positions were drawn out of the data, I was able to incorporate these ideas into the mapping of social worlds/arenas as well as incorporate ideas from the positions maps into the other representations of the data.

Looking for other possibilities of visually representing the data.

The mapping process of Situational Analysis provides an analytical method that leads and directs further data collection. As the project developed, I used the initial data that I collected via my interviews to guide further data collection, and as it became clear very early in the project that these interviews would not provide an enough data, I adapted to focus the inquiry on Tumblr as the context and situation of inquiry.

Furthermore, while my initial situational mapping provided information about contextual elements that I wanted to include in the analysis and data collection, as I continued my mapping process, it became clear to me that that outlining every contextual element that could have influence or importance in this situation would be nearly impossible and that different contextual elements were important to different people. I identified, therefore, broad categories of contextual elements in order to capture these elements without naming each one. These categories included culture, spoken language,

access to technology, peers, school/education, family of origin, religion, geo-socio-economic location, and others (as noted above in *Initial Situational Mapping*).

As I mapped and re-mapped the data, I found that although each of the analytical maps captured a unique perspective on the situation of inquiry, the connections and relationships between the data captured in each of the maps was lost. This process isolated the situational elements from the social worlds/arenas, positions and the overarching themes they presented from the other data presented in the other maps. While the positional maps were helpful in separating the positions taken from the individual and/or the group (i.e. the knowing subject), this separation isolated the position from influencing factors on why this position was being taken/or not taken. Within SA, the positional maps are completed specifically *to* separate the positions from the knowing subject; however, while mapping separated the positions from the individuals or groups taking the positions, I found that the influencing factors and situational elements were key to understanding how specific positions came about, particularly because the same individual may have vastly differing positions on the same topic based on the site of conversation and what other situational elements were influencing the individual at that time.

The SA approach is helpful in visually representing the data in separate and two-dimensional ways; however, as the data emerged from the collection processes, I saw a level of complexity that was not being captured by the SA mapping. This led me to take the idea from SA of mapping data in order to describe it, and look for a visual medium that could speak to the relationships I was seeing between the data captured in the multiple maps I had produced.

As I undertook the analysis, I explored different ways to visually represent the complexity and the relationships between all of the situational elements, the positions taken, and the social worlds/arenas. As I worked on this, researchers in other fields were discovering for the first time, material evidence of gravitational waves in our universe (Abbott et al., 2016; Mosher, 2016). Since this was a momentous discovery in astrophysics, it prompted a multitude of press releases in which many images of gravitational waves and how they influence and impact the universe around us were made available to the public through the internet, news broadcasts and social media (for example: Cho, 2016; LIGO, 2016; Radford, 2016; Reuters, 2016). I saw these visual representations of Einstein's (1916) relativity theory and gravitational waves and began to see a correlation between the way researchers visually capture the ideas of relativity theory through maps of gravitational waves and how the situational elements, positions, and social worlds/arenas overlap and relate within this study. I saw an opportunity to adapt the visual representations of gravitational waves in order to explain the complexity that I was seeing in the data and situation of inquiry in this study. As this process was both part of the methodology as well as the analysis of the data in this project, I outline below the ways in which these ideas were utilized in this study in order to provide an explanation for utilizing a theory and approach not typically employed in social research. While SA maps capture the *who* (i.e. social worlds), *what* (i.e. situational elements) and *where* (i.e. Tumblr) about youth conversation about gender, the illustration of *how* and *why* these conversations are occurring the way that they do was lacking. For this reason, I took imagery employed to illustrate Relativity Theory and used this to visualize the influential relationships between the elements I was seeing in the data. Using this lens, I

found I was better able to visually capture and describe *how* youth are talking about gender.

Relativity and Mapping Gravitational Waves.

The theory of relativity (Einstein, 1916), although not typically utilized to understand social phenomena, has remarkable applicability to understanding the complexities of human interaction. The theory itself is deceptively simple, in that there is no *absolute* frame of reference; that is to say, any time anything is measured or considered it must be seen *in relation* to something else (Emspak, 2017).

Einstein's (1916) theory of relativity¹¹ explains that the laws of physics are the same everywhere. It explains that there is no absolute frame of reference; every time that an object's velocity, or its momentum, or how it experiences time is measured, it must be measured in relation to something else. Einstein also proposed that massive objects could distort spacetime¹², similar to the ways in which a heavy ball would cause a trampoline to curve inward, so too could an object with extreme mass, like a black hole, pull down and impact the fabric of spacetime, causing a ripple throughout the fabric of spacetime.

¹¹ The term relativity theory is utilized throughout this project to refer to key concepts in both Einstein's Special and General theories of relativity. As this theory is used as a metaphor to capture and visualize the complexities that were found within the data of this research project, this is in no way meant to be a comprehensive summary or in-depth discussion of this complex theory in physics. The implications of this theory are profound and have helped researchers explain many complex scientific phenomena, including the existence of black holes, the orbits of Mercury, and time dilation (Emspak, 2017). Einstein proposed that space and time were interwoven into a single continuum known as spacetime, and that events that occur at the same time for one observer could occur at a different time for another (Redd, 2016). It was not until 100 years after Einstein proposed the idea of gravitational waves, that researchers were able to detect evidence of their existence (Abbott et al., 2016). In 2016, researchers at the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO), detected gravitational waves for the first time since Einstein had theorized their existence in 1916. Because of this discovery, there were media releases and imagery of gravitational waves readily available to me in a completely different field of study.

¹² Redd (2016) defines spacetime as the idea that space and time are interwoven into a single continuum. It is an idea that fuses the three-dimensions of space and the one-dimension of time into one four-dimensional concept.

As I explored this theory, I saw that the imagery employed to illustrate the push and pull of gravitational waves in relativity theory could also capture the intricacies of influence various situational elements have on any given position taken, social world present or arena of conversation. The idea that all positions taken (or not taken), all social worlds/arenas, and situational elements must be seen *in relation* to one another can be visually presented using the imagery found in relativity theory, which allows me to capture the complexities that I saw within the data emerging from the situation of inquiry. Using relativity theory as a lens through which to view the data, I found it helpful with the task of representing relationships between situational elements, positions, and discourse, especially when it came to trying to depict how different situational elements influence and impact each other.

Einstein (1916) proposed that massive objects would produce ripples in spacetime¹³ when they change shape in time and that the ripples will propagate through spacetime at the speed of light, causing a radiation of gravitational waves that ripple through the fabric of space (Chung, 2015). This effect is often likened to that of ripples in a pond when a stone is dropped into the water; however, they differ in that the waves radiate in all directions and are not limited to one linear plane. Gravitational waves are depicted in this way, as ripples impacting the fabric of spacetime (see examples: Cho, 2016; Mosher 2016).

¹³ Within the fabric of spacetime there are black holes, “regions of spacetime exhibiting such strong gravitational effects that nothing—not even particles and electromagnetic radiation such as light—can escape from inside it” (Smith, 2017). Gravitational waves are mapped by depicting a binary (i.e. two mass) system of black holes that are orbiting each other in pattern that will eventually lead to their collision, the force that is created by the orbiting and eventual collision of these black holes creates the ripples in spacetime (LIGO, 2016).

I took this concept and associated imagery and used them as a lens through which to view the social phenomena I was researching. In the visual representations of the data, I utilized the 'black holes' to represent a highly influential or weighted idea, position, or situational element. The influence they have on the situation can be likened to the effect that the gravity of black holes has on spacetime and other objects and masses present around the black hole: in effect, the gravity is representative of influence and the black holes representative of influencing factors. In essence, the application of relativity theory to this data is an allegory: black holes are the influencing situational elements and gravity is the force of influence, other elements orbit and interact with the larger masses of influence within spacetime, which is the social context. Still, in order to represent this without making the maps incomprehensible or visually overwhelming, I simplified what I saw in the data to match the representations of gravitational waves and black holes, and displayed two to three 'black holes' in any given map, to show two to three typically polarized, but dominant, ideas within the situation of inquiry. This enabled me to capture the complexities of the relationships I was seeing in the data. In the same way that typical representations of the fabric of spacetime and gravitational waves rely on a two-central mass visualization, I represent the data by simplifying the influencing factors down to a two-central factor system; however, as I saw in the data, this push and pull of gravitational influence could be, and arguably is, coming from a multitude of forces at any given time.

From there I mapped various positions taken on these ideas, as well as other situational elements that have an impact on these positions being taken. Visual representations of gravitational maps were then adapted and overlaid with data and made

into new maps in an attempt to capture some of the complexities in the discourse around polarized issues, where individuals may find themselves appreciating or identifying with the very different sometimes opposing ideas based on different situational elements. I saw Tumblr users and my interview participants navigate through the waves of discourse, with each individual perspective being slightly different from the other depending on the point at which an individual finds themselves. Situational elements that may impact an individual's perspective include elements of culture, institutions (schools, work place), dominant discourses, social groups, etc. The notion that relativity may be helpful to our understanding of the interplay of ideas and experiences is further explored in the following *Discussion* section. I chose to use the imagery from relativity theory in addition to the maps from Situation Analysis, as I found it added a new way to visualize the data, combining all the information present in the analytic maps of situational analysis. The imagery used in relativity theory adds a tool and different lens to take the information displayed in a two-dimensional map through SA into a multidimensional understanding of the relationships between the data.

Chapter Three: Data Presentation and Analysis

Situational Analysis seeks to analyse a particular situation of inquiry through re-representation, specification, and examination of the most salient elements (Clarke, 2005). This chapter presents the data maps that were created in order to analyse the situation of inquiry¹⁴, i.e. the combination of the interview data and the online context of Tumblr, in order to explore how young people are talking about gender. As mentioned previously, data was mapped and remapped concurrently with analysis and further data collection. The maps that are presented in this section are the final versions of the different map types and are presented alongside the analysis in order to provide an explanation of the different elements contained within each map. Although mapping was done concurrently, the following sections present each map one map at a time along with an explanation and analysis of the data presented. The final map, which is based on relativity mapping, incorporates ideas from each of the preceding 4 maps (situational, thematic, social worlds/arenas, and positional) in order to capture and represent the complexity within the situation of inquiry. The maps presented in this section are based on data collected from the 3 in-person interviews as well as the Tumblr content. Tumblr content includes a total of 142 conversations viewed from comments, notes, and threads from 30 blogs that were followed, 60 posts that were “liked”, and 18 re-blogged posts.

¹⁴ For clarity, *situation of inquiry* is utilized to describe the combination of the interview data and Tumblr data. As mentioned previously, Tumblr became the site of focus after the interview data specifically named Tumblr as a key source of information for interview participants. The interview data was included in the analysis; however, much of what interview participants shared was echoed in the Tumblr data and therefore, for clarity and brevity Tumblr is referred to as the primary context of the research and *situation of inquiry* refers to the combination of both interview data and Tumblr data. As all interview participants shared that they accessed Tumblr their data is considered part of the Tumblr context.

Situational Maps

In Situational Analysis, situational maps are the first maps to be created.

Situational maps help to identify situational elements to which you must pay attention during data collection, as well as help to direct the collection of data. As discussed in the previous section, *Methodology and Methods*, I created initial situational maps prior to data collection to outline the situation of inquiry and identify elements of the situational prior to conducting the interviews. The first ordered Situational Map is shown in the previous chapter in *Figure 1* and lists the situational elements that I identified prior to starting the interview process. This Situational Map helped to provide a structure for the initial interviews by outlining many of the elements of the situation that I noted to be present.

As I conducted the interviews, data was collected and analysed and as noted previously, I altered my data collection methods to include Tumblr as the site of inquiry. I re-mapped Figure 1 to display the situation incorporating the new situational elements found through Tumblr data collection as shown in *Figure 2*.

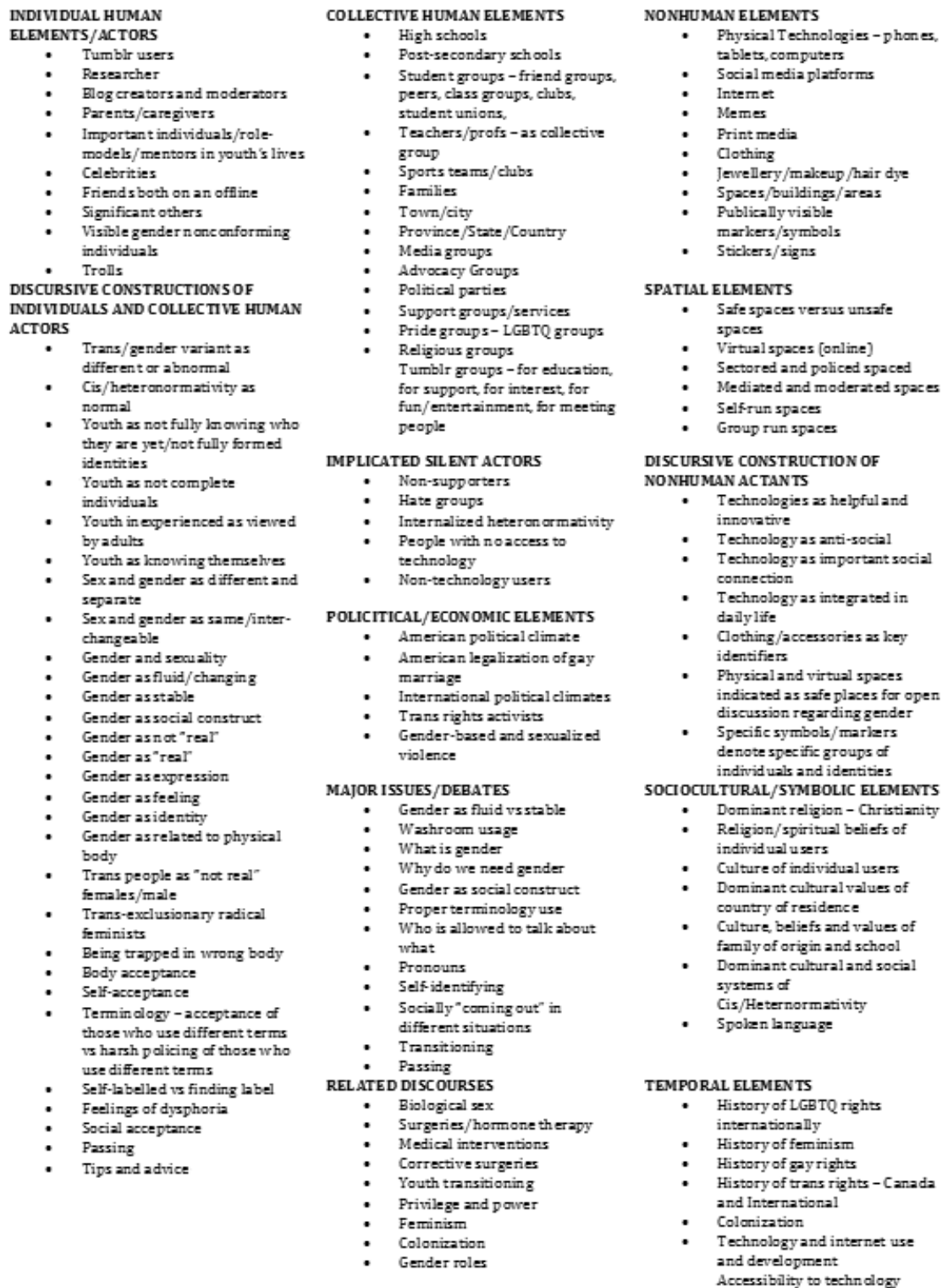


Figure 2. Ordered Situational Map with Tumblr Data.

This map (*Figure 2*) lists the situational elements that I identified as I collected data from Tumblr. I took information shared during the initial interviews to guide my data collection from Tumblr as well as continued to map and re-map what I was seeing on Tumblr. Tumblr itself became the situation of inquiry, or the context, that I was exploring for this project. The situational map depicted in *Figure 2* outlines the most salient situational elements in the situation of inquiry. Using the categories suggested by Clarke (2005), the following sections describe each category of situational element below.

Individual Human Elements/Actors

Individual Human Elements/Actors, or key individuals and significant people, in this category included human elements present and active in the online sphere of Tumblr, as well as human elements whose influence was present on Tumblr without an active presence or engagement. Human elements present and active in the online sphere included individual Tumblr users that were interacting with and posting on the platform as well as blog creators and moderators that acted in a slightly different capacity in that they were creating content and actively moderating blogs and groups. Individual users are differentiated from blog creators and moderators as they interact with the content, posting notes/comments, and liking content without creating it whereas blog creators and moderators create original content, share content from other pages with a specific purpose, and/or moderate content added to their sites including comments and notes. Additionally, human elements not actively engaged but present, included parents/caregivers of the users, important individuals in the users' lives, significant others and friends both on and off-line.

An important human element that is present in online spheres is that of *trolls*. Wikipedia (2017) and the Collins Dictionary (2012) define a *troll* as an individual who seeks to start discord on the Internet by posting deliberately inflammatory comments, starting arguments, or upsetting people. The intent is to provoke an emotional response from readers and instigate online debates and otherwise disrupt normal on-topic discussion for the entertainment of the *troll* (Indiana University, 2008). While the situation of inquiry included very few active trolls, as most blogs were strictly moderated and hateful or negative commentary was deleted and disallowed, the presence and possibility of negative comments and online bullying, harassment, and aggression is an ever-present part of online communities and many blogs and groups specifically addressed this behaviour in the description of what activity was allowed or not allowed on their blogs.

Collective Human Elements

Collective Human Elements are important aspects of the situation of inquiry as they presented unique group cultures that interacted in this online context. Individual users are part of multiple groups or collective human elements both on and off-line and brought unique information to the situation of inquiry. Collective Human Elements include Tumblr groups for entertainment, advocacy, support, or education, including specifically gender nonconforming groups, trans advice groups, trans community, and gender fluid support groups. Other important collective human elements to note were references users made to school activity groups, sports teams, families, peer group (both on and off-line), schools, cities/towns of residents, countries of residence, sub-cultures and sub-communities both on and offline.

Data revealed that individuals interacted with different collective human elements in unique ways across situations; the same individual may talk about their gender openly in one group, for example online in their Tumblr groups, and not acknowledge their gender identity in other groups, such as family or school. Where some individuals posted comments about feeling supported by their schools or their teachers, many comments and *notes* expressed feelings of not being able to be their true self in these group contexts. One interview participant stated that while on the one hand, they did not feel that their sports group would accept them if they were to share their gender identity (gender fluid), on the other hand, they felt that they were able to openly talk about their gender with online friends. Other comments and posts showed that the groups that individuals engaged with directly impacted the language and terminology they use with regard to different gender terms and ideas. Certain terms and acronyms were used within certain groups on Tumblr while other groups had not adopted these terms. Tumblr users also commented about how they were able to talk about gender in certain ways online that they were not able to do within some other aspects of their off-line lives, such as with their families.

Nonhuman Elements

Identified Nonhuman elements included the physical technologies that individuals used to access Tumblr (laptops, phones, tablets, ipods), the Internet, print and online media, as well as memes. *Memes* are an important situational element to note as they are very present in online communications and entertainment and serve as a method of sharing knowledge, connecting with others, and expressing feelings in relatable ways. *Memes* in online spheres are defined as “an amusing or interesting item (such as a captioned image

or video) that is spread widely online especially through social media” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). *Memes* are often images that can be adapted or re-captioned to express a relatable emotion, thought, or experience and trend across social media platforms, some examples

When you're trying to relate to other human beings the only way you know how.

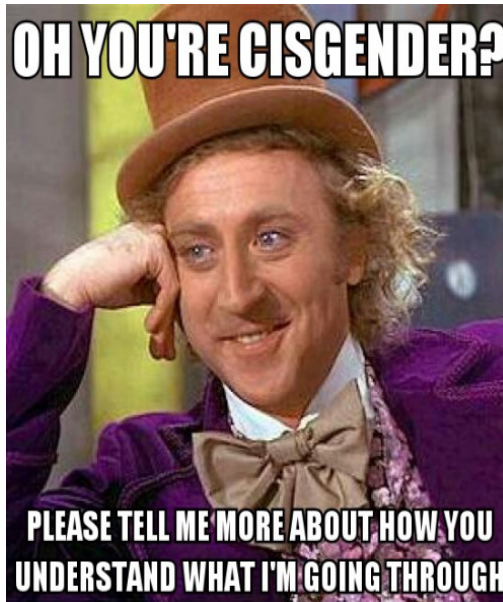


Figure 3. Examples of memes.

Both memes depicted above can be found across social media platforms and in different groups within Tumblr. The image on the right was a very common meme through 2015-2017 and is utilized to express sarcastic or incredulous reactions to information or opinions that are contested or about a subject about which misinformation is widely spread. The image on the left shows that memes are thought of by online users as an accessible way to relate to other online users.

of which can be seen in *Figure 3*. Nonhuman technology-based elements play an integral role in the situation of inquiry as they not only make the situation possible through providing the platform on which individuals engage, but they also provide tools for expression, engagement and connection.

Other non-human elements present in the situation included everyday items that individuals identified as having an important role in their genders, their discussion of gender and how they navigate their lives both on and off-line. These included clothing, jewellery, make-up, spaces and buildings, stickers, signs, markers, and symbols. Many

Tumblr users identified clothing and make-up as being a key part of how they presented themselves and integral in how they presented and expressed their genders.

Wearing certain clothes was associated with certain genders for some users and users noted feelings of dysphoria associated with having to present differently than what their gender is. Users specifically described their experiences and feelings using terminology such as “dysphoria” and “dysphoric”. Users also tagged their posts with “#dysphoria”. Clothing also served as a signifier to others for pronoun usage. For example, one post answering a question regarding different ways of using multiple pronouns set suggested that individuals could signify which pronoun they would prefer based on what clothing they were wearing using the example of “when you wear skirts, you’re a she, and when you wear pants, you’re a they”.

Users also identified symbols, stickers, and signs as important to discussions of gender, particularly flags associated with certain subgroups of gender diverse communities such as non-binary flag, trans flag, pride flag, and the gender fluid flag.

Implicated Silent Actors

As I collected data from Tumblr, I specifically accessed groups and blogs that were supportive of and created for individuals with diverse genders. Because of this, the content that was viewed and included in the data only consists of active voices and participants in communities that were supportive of diversity, wanted to create and share knowledge, and/or were seeking connections with other similar individuals. Non-active and negative participants also known as Implicated Silent Actors, are important to note in this situation of inquiry because although they are not active participants in posting comments, the attitudes and ideas that they represent could arguably influence and impact

how individuals interacted on Tumblr. The Implicated Silent Actors that I identified included: non-supporters, hate-groups, and internalized cis/heteronormativity. The ideas and belief systems that are propagated through these Silent Actors influence the active participants in that individuals would talk about anxieties around heteronormative standards in society, being targeted by hateful or non-supportive groups, and other fears for physical and emotional safety. Therefore, although I did not search for ways to locate these actors, I remained aware of their influence as this emerged in the discourses of the interviewees and Tumblr users' posts.

Discursive Construction of Individuals and Collective Human Elements

As the focus of this project was to explore how young people are talking about gender, this category of situational elements is crucial to my exploration of this research question and I dedicated the most time with the data identifying these discursive constructions. As outlined in *Figure 2*, this was the largest category of situational elements and included many different discursive constructions within the situation. The discursive constructions of what gender is, are particularly present in this situation, for example gender as "real" or "not real" or gender as "stable" or "fluid". As *Figure 4* illustrates, many posts involved conversations about users' opinions, ideas, and experiences about what gender is, including the idea that gender is something someone is as compared to only a part of one's identity, the image on the left in *Figure 4* speaks to the construction of diverse genders as not being as "real" as cisgenders.

Cis people get genders, we only get "gender identities". They get pronouns, we get "preferred pronouns". They ARE, we "identify as".

tumblingdoe:

tormans-space:

teeveedinner:

needlekind:

[tweet source](#) / [natalie reed's tumblr](#)

ive never hit the reblog button so hard

Drag us tbh

Well, didn't that just tip my brain into a new pot of thinking differently?! Well said!

To all the people whose gender changes:

If you're genderflux, genderfluid, or any other identity (or no label at all)- if you're gender feelings/identity change over time, this is for you.

The sun rises and falls.

The moon has phases.

The tide comes and goes.

Seasons turn.

The only thing that does not change is change itself.

Do not let anyone convince you that you are unnatural.

You are as the universe is.

#positivity #queue #genderfluid #genderflux

5,722 notes



Figure 4. Examples from Tumblr posts discussing gender fluidity and gender identities.

Life as a gender fluid person

identifies as a guy

Mom- oh is this just a way of telling me you want to be a boy all the time? Is this how you're going to do now? Could you not do this today?

identifies as a girl

Mom- oh so you're back to normal now huh? I knew it was just a phase. Sometimes you scare me. I worry that I'll lose my daughter.

identifies as a guy

Mom- I thought you were over this

#gender fluid #gender fluid problems #every time #lgbtqia

202 notes



Figure 5. Examples from Tumblr posts of adults not viewing youth as knowing their own identities.

Also pervasive throughout the context were constructions of young people as not fully knowing who they are yet or not having fully formed identities versus young people feeling as though they truly know themselves. As shown in *Figure 5*, many young people posted on Tumblr about how adults in their lives did not validate or recognize the young person's gender. The post in *Figure 5*, illustrates a young person feeling as though their mother views gender fluidity as a phase and that the young person does not truly know who they are yet and will eventually be "over this".

Much of the data reviewed contained explicit reference to how gender terminology was to be used, definitions of terms and identity labels, pronoun usage, and specific questions relating to gender identities, experiences related to gender and which words to use to explain gender experiences. As illustrated in the three posts shown in *Figure 6*, users post questions about what a certain term means and other users will comment with definitions, validation, or other experiences of the term. Users will also post what a certain term means to them and how it defines and articulates their experience of their gender.

anonymous asked:
What is non binary? What what falls under that category?

The definition I have found for nonbinary is:
Genderqueer (GQ), also termed non-binary, is a catch-all category for gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine—identities which are thus outside of the gender binary and cisnormativity.
Essentially it can be anyone who is not exclusively male or female like agender, demigender, genderfluid, queer and bigender are just some example of what falls under the nonbinary category
I hope this helps and if it still isn't clear there is wiki page for non-binary that you could check out: http://nonbinary.org/wiki/Nonbinary_gender

anonymous asked:
Hey I'm kinda confused about the whole gender thing. I mean biologically I'm a girl but I feel in general I'm just a person and that my gender doesn't define me I mean most the time I feel like neither but sometimes I'll feel like a girl and others more like a guy. What is this?

Perhaps genderfluid or genderflux. And your gender doesn't define you, no ones does, but it's nice to have a word to fit how you feel gender-wise, just like it's nice to have a word to describe what emotions you feel...
Labels don't define us, they help to describe different parts of us.
Stay lovely~

Ask confession-of-a-genderfluid a question

14 notes

How being genderfluid feels to me

Sometimes I feel like an actual female, Sometimes I feel male, Sometimes I feel like both (Bigender), Sometimes I feel neither male or female (Agender), Sometimes I feel like all of the genders no matter what people say (Omnigender/Pangender), Sometimes I just wanna stab a bitch because they say I can't be genderfluid.

#non binary #nonbinary #nonbinary problems #non binary problems
#gender fluid #genderfluid #genderfluid problems #gender fluid problems
#gender queer #genderqueer #gender queer problems #genderqueer problems
#gender #agender #bigender #omnigender #pangender #male t... [See all](#)

487 notes

Figure 6. Examples of discursive constructions of gender terminology.

Many posts were questions posed anonymously to blog moderators asking about what terminology meant or which words to use to describe their own gender. Other posts were statements regarding how a certain identity or term feels for the user.

Discursive Construction of Nonhuman Actants

The situation of inquiry included many discursive constructions of nonhuman actants/elements. Some of the more common constructions included technology, clothing, symbols and markers. Some of the more salient discursive constructions described technologies as being helpful and innovative but at the same time anti-social. Users on Tumblr posted about how adults in their lives viewed technology as purely anti-social whereas the youth users talk about technology as a source of social connection and as integrated into their daily lives.

Clothing was also discussed as a key identifier and constructed as an element of identity. How an individual dresses and presents themselves was talked about as relating to how the individual felt about their gender and their identity. For example, users would post questions about how to access certain items of clothing, including binders (to make breasts less visible under clothing), as well as post pictures of the user in their preferred outfit or makeup feeling the most like themselves.

Throughout the data, reference was often made to physical versus virtual spaces and how young users view these two spaces as integrated while adults talk about the “real world” versus a “virtual world”. A key distinction was also made between safe space and unsafe spaces for open discussion about gender, and while young users posted more about online and physical worlds as being integrated, many still have very separate lives and presentations in their online spheres versus their physical worlds. For example, a user may post about how they feel safe about talking about their gender, posting pictures, commenting and referring to themselves as their gender in online contexts, whereas in their physical or offline world, they were not open about their gender and were therefore

mis-gendered (i.e. identified by the wrong gender and/or pronoun) by their school, families, or other members of the communities.

Political/Economic Elements

Political and economic elements were not specifically found within the data; however, I identified some major political changes in the North American context prior to collecting data and have included these in *Figure 2*. The only specifically political element that was named within the data was gender-based and sexualized violence. There was a wealth of posts that offered support and validation for individuals who have experienced violence, aggression, or harassment based on their gender, as well as groups that specifically advocated for rights of gender nonconforming, trans, and non-binary individuals.

Temporal Elements

Temporal elements, as with political and economic elements, were not specifically referenced in the data reviewed; however, the historical contexts that the individual users find themselves in may impact and influence how they view gender and how they gain access to technologies such as Tumblr. For this reason, I identified several temporal elements that were possibly present or influential in the situation on inquiry, including history of LGBTQ rights internationally, history of feminism, history of trans rights in Canada and the United States of America, historical implications of colonization, and the current technology and Internet use and development.

Sociocultural/Symbolic Elements

Sociocultural elements are particularly important as they speak to the cultural context in which individual users are living in and from which they engage in Tumblr and

online contexts. Because of the unique ability of social media and the Internet to connect individuals from around the world together in a shared space, users can be living in vastly different environments from other users. For this section of situational elements, I chose to identify broad categories instead of specific elements as I felt it was important to acknowledge the other contexts from which individuals were engaging with Tumblr. Users may be living in certain sociocultural contexts that impact their engagement with Tumblr content and the situation of inquiry while not specifically identifying how this impacts or influences them. Sociocultural elements that I identified were language spoken, religion and spiritual beliefs, including the/a dominant religion of Christianity, cultures of origin, dominant cultural values of country of residence (for example: cis/heteronormativity as a dominant cultural value). Users posted about adhering to or breaking down cis/heteronormative values and systems and how living within these systems made them feel. Particularly, users posted about feeling as though their gender was not valid and many sought validation or recognition from others in this online context. Many blog groups posted validating content or posts that recognized the difficulty of living in a social world that does not recognize an individual's non-binary gender.

Spatial Elements

As mentioned above in *Discursive Constructions of Nonhuman Elements*, space was important element of this situation with many users posting about safe versus unsafe spaces and the differentiation between virtual (online) and offline spaces. Spatial domains in the situation of inquiry included mediated/moderated spaces in which specific blog moderators running the space and editing and approving content before it was posted, as well as self-run versus group spaces. Some of the other spatial elements in the situation

included sectored spaces that were only available or offered to individuals belonging to a certain group (for example: trans feminine only) and policed spaces which were identifiable by the way in which users present in these spaces policed others for language use and would critique others for lack of knowledge or awareness about certain topics or terminology.

Major Issues/Debates

Major issues and debates included many of the areas discussed in the discursive constructions of human elements, including debates around the existence of gender (i.e. why gender needs to exist or why gender roles exist), terminology usage, self-identifying, gender as fluid versus stable, and gender as a social construct. Major issues that were present in the data included washroom usage (i.e. trans individuals using the public washroom of their identified gender versus their assigned gender), transitioning, passing, and pronoun usage. For example, two of the interview participants discussed how washroom usage was a big topic of conversation with each of their peer groups and how they access Tumblr as a source of information about this topic.

Another hotly debated subject was centred around who is allowed to talk about what issues, for example: are only individuals that identify as trans allowed to discuss or have an opinion on trans issues, can individuals who identify as gender fluid discuss trans issues, are individuals that present as cisgendered but identify as nonbinary allowed to have an opinion on “passing¹⁵”. For example, one posting by an anonymous user, states “Honestly, can non-dysphoric people please stop trying to tell dysphoric people that they

¹⁵ Passing is defined as an individual’s ability to be regarded as a member of a certain social/gender group, in this situation for an individual to be viewed at a glance as either a cisgender male or a cisgender female regardless of assigned sex/gender at birth (Serano, 2007)

need to love themselves and that gender/gender roles need to be abolished in order to relieve dysphoria? That shit is very hurtful and it can make dysphoria worse”. This post is indicative of the ongoing debate within the situation of inquiry regarding individuals who do not identify with a particular gender or experience sharing their opinions or comments in the conversations of individuals who do identify with the gender/experience in question.

Related Discourses

Related discourses that are notable to the context include the idea of a biological sex, medical interventions for trans individuals including surgeries and youth transitioning using hormone therapy. As with Implicated Silent Actions (see above), other discourses that were not specifically present in the situation but arguably have an influence and impact on the discussions within the data include colonization, feminism, as well as privilege and power. I included these as situational elements as they are on-going discourses that involve gender and are related to the situation of inquiry. As the Tumblr users exist in contexts outside of Tumblr, it is highly plausible that some of the individuals interacting with Tumblr have encountered these discourses and their engagement with them has influenced how they discuss gender in the Tumblr context.

Thematic Map

Using a mapping technique not typically employed in Situational Analysis, I mapped the themes in the data to represent the relationships and interactions between themes. As discussed in the previous chapter, *Methodology and Methods*, Tumblr provided a unique opportunity to theme data as Tumblr users identified themes themselves through the use of hashtags in their posts and comments. Drawing from these user-

identified themes, I mapped the most common themes visually, using a technique that displayed the relationships and overlap between and amongst themes, as shown in *Figure 7*. The most prevalent themes are indicated in bold in *Figure 7* and included topics of conversation, themes within posts, as well as other ideas captured within the previous situational map, *Figure 2*. Sub-themes are noted on the thematic map and are placed in relation to the overarching themes. Overlapping circles represent the relationships and interactions of these ideas within the discourse. The theme of *Terminology* usage was very prevalent throughout the Tumblr data and is represented by the central circle on the map. This theme overlaps with two other major themes of *Similarities* and *Differences* that were included in almost every post and comment. Almost every post and comment reviewed for this project included some ideas either about how individuals were similar or how they were different from others. For example, posts would include educational information aimed at supporting or explaining terminology to others with similar experiences so that these others would know the correct terminology to use for their own gender and the gender of others with similar experiences. In contrast, other posts would include content that spoke to the theme of difference, particularly how individuals or groups who were different (most often addressed to cis/heteronormative identities) did not understand or acknowledge diverse gender experiences and how a lack of knowledge or inappropriate terminology/pronoun use led to feelings of identity erasure.

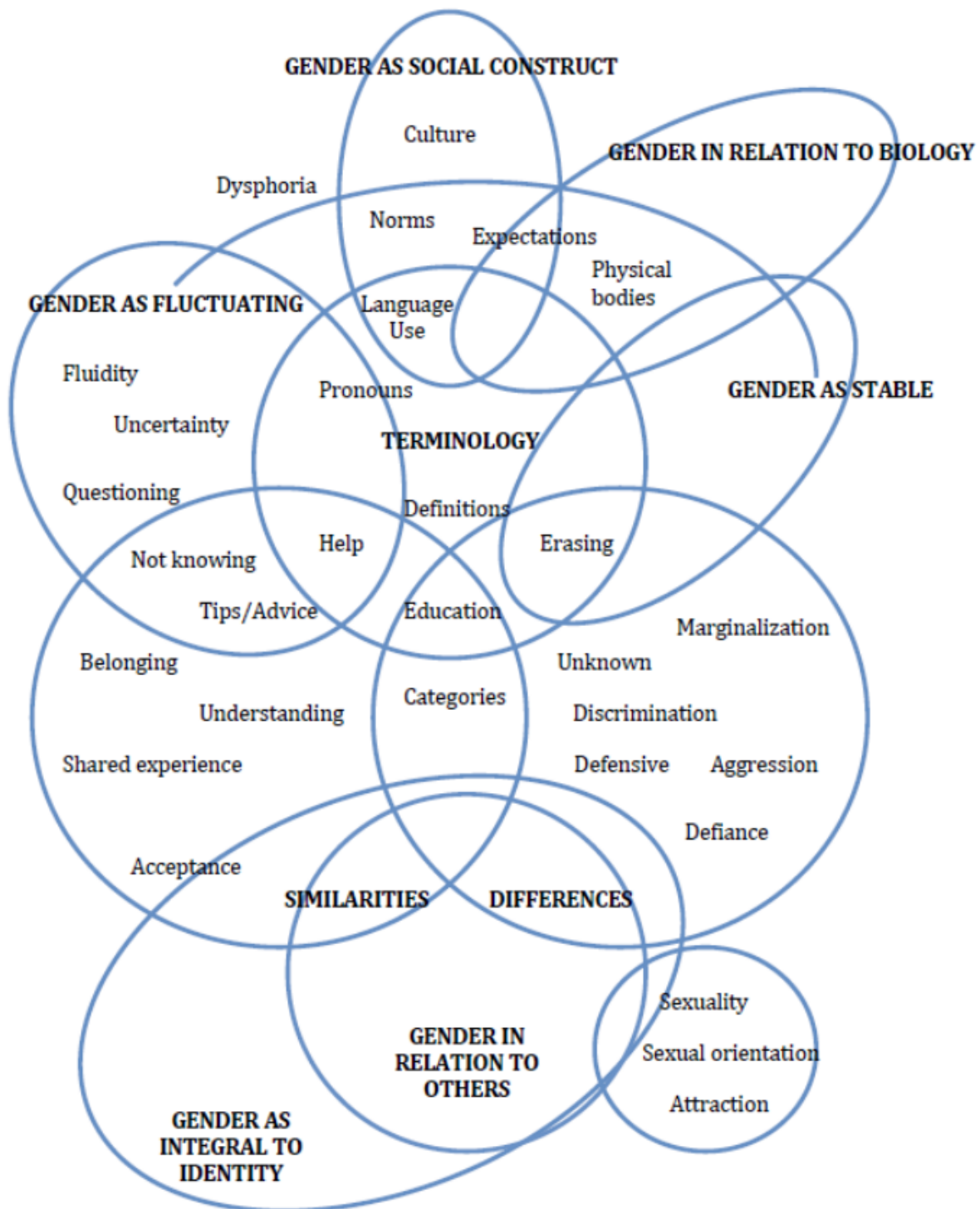


Figure 7. Thematic map. This map illustrates the relationships and overlap between the themes present in the situation of inquiry. Note: this map does not quantify the thematic information, i.e. shapes and sizes are not depicting percentage of presence in the situation of inquiry.

Social Worlds/Arenas Maps

Within the situation of inquiry, I identified 10 social worlds and 6 main arenas. As Clarke (2005) states, social worlds are considered universes of discourse and depict how people organize themselves through collective commitments and actions. Individuals and groups enter into arenas from their social worlds to engage in conversations regarding specific topics or areas of concern (Clark, 2005). As mapping social worlds and arenas layers these together, the map including all of the components is visually difficult to understand, so for this reason, I present here 8 maps, *Figure 8* is the entire social worlds/arena map and incorporates all the layers of social worlds and arenas. The other maps are presented for visual accessibility to make the information contained in *Figure 8* easier to read. *Figure 9* outlines the 10 social worlds present in the situation of inquiry, and *Figures 10-15* show individual arenas layered over the social worlds, to clearly display how the social worlds engaged in the arenas (*Figures 10-15*).

Social Worlds Map

By mapping the social worlds (*Figure 9*) in the situation of inquiry, it helps to show that, although Tumblr itself may be viewed as a world of social action, there are many social worlds (10 identified) interacting within this platform. Individuals may belong in multiple worlds as the worlds overlap with other worlds; however, it is important to note that some worlds have no overlap and are depicted as such. For example, as noted above, there was a clear divide between adult and youth worlds, and while youth may interact with other social worlds that include adults, there is a differentiation between youth experience and social worlds as compared to the adult social world. The following maps depict the social worlds and arenas present in the data. These

maps are an illustrative tool to visually represent the relationships between social worlds and arenas in the situation of inquiry. It is important to note that these maps are a qualitative analytical tool and do not quantify the presence of social worlds and/or arenas in the situation of inquiry, i.e. the size and shape of the social worlds and arenas were chosen to illustrate the relationships between social worlds and arena and not specify the percentage or quantity to which a topic (arena) or social world can be found in the situation of inquiry.

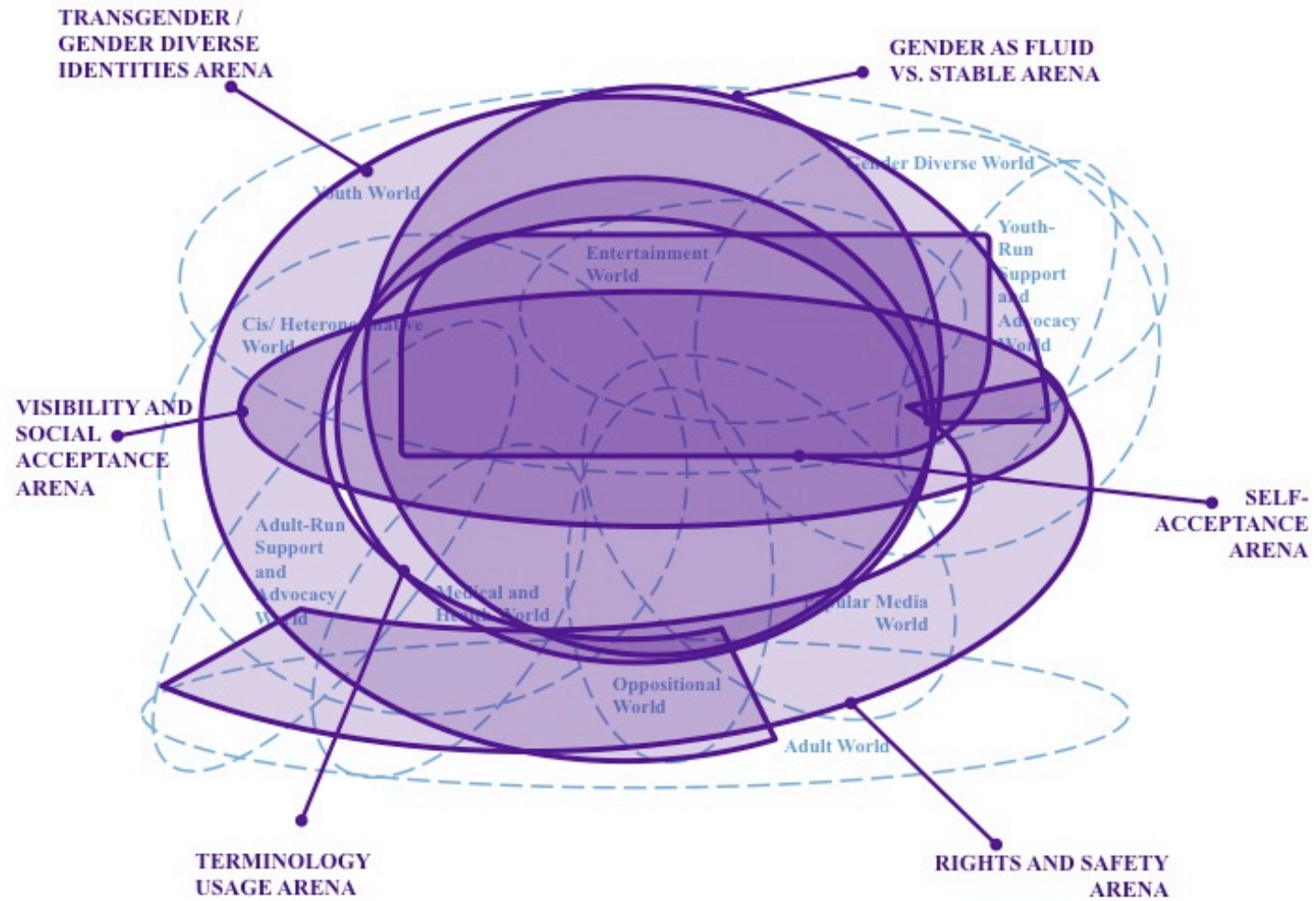


Figure 8. Social Worlds/Arenas Map. This map shows all social worlds and arena present in the situation of inquiry. Social worlds are depicted with dotted lines, arenas as purple filled shapes.

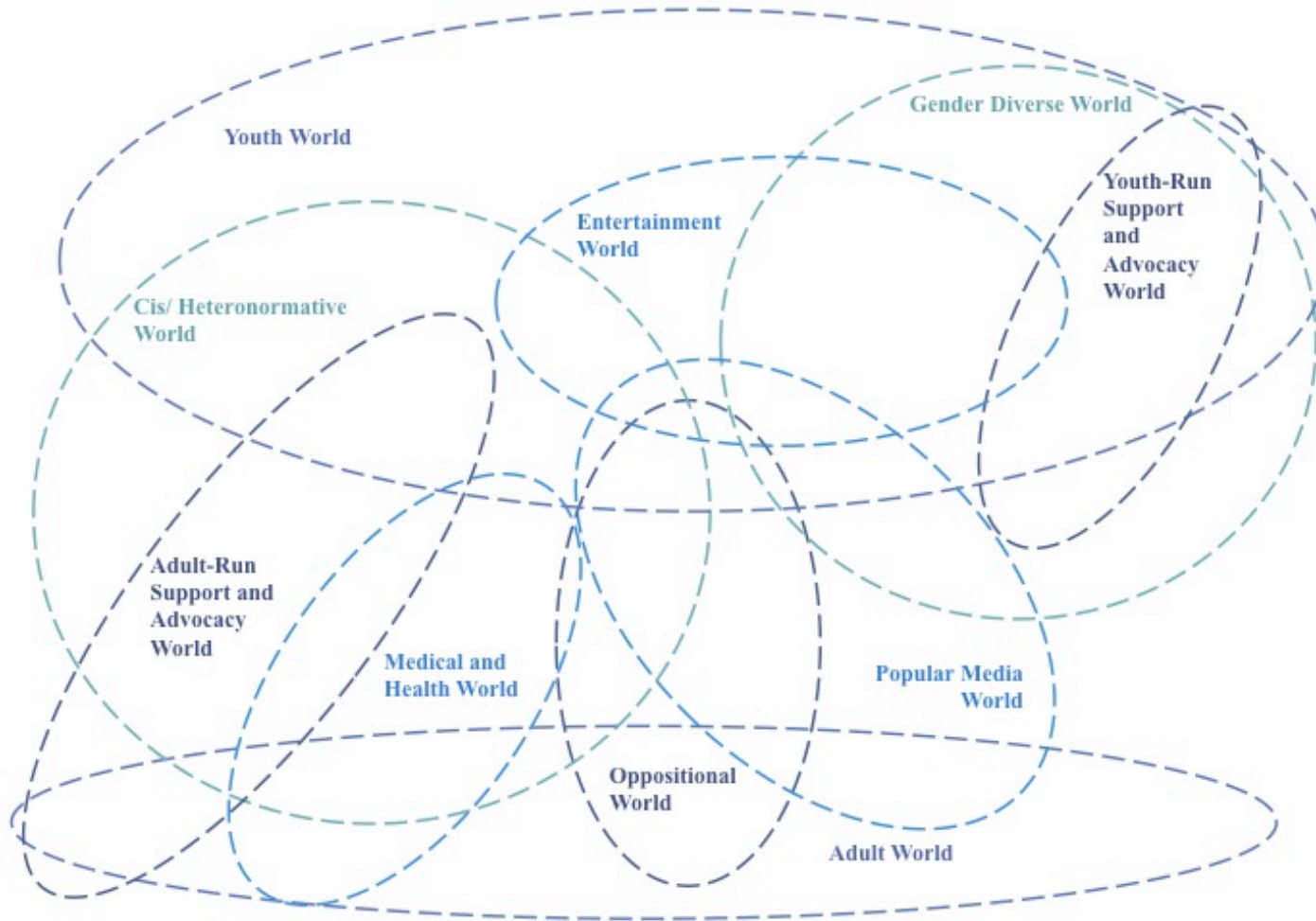


Figure 9. Social Worlds Map.

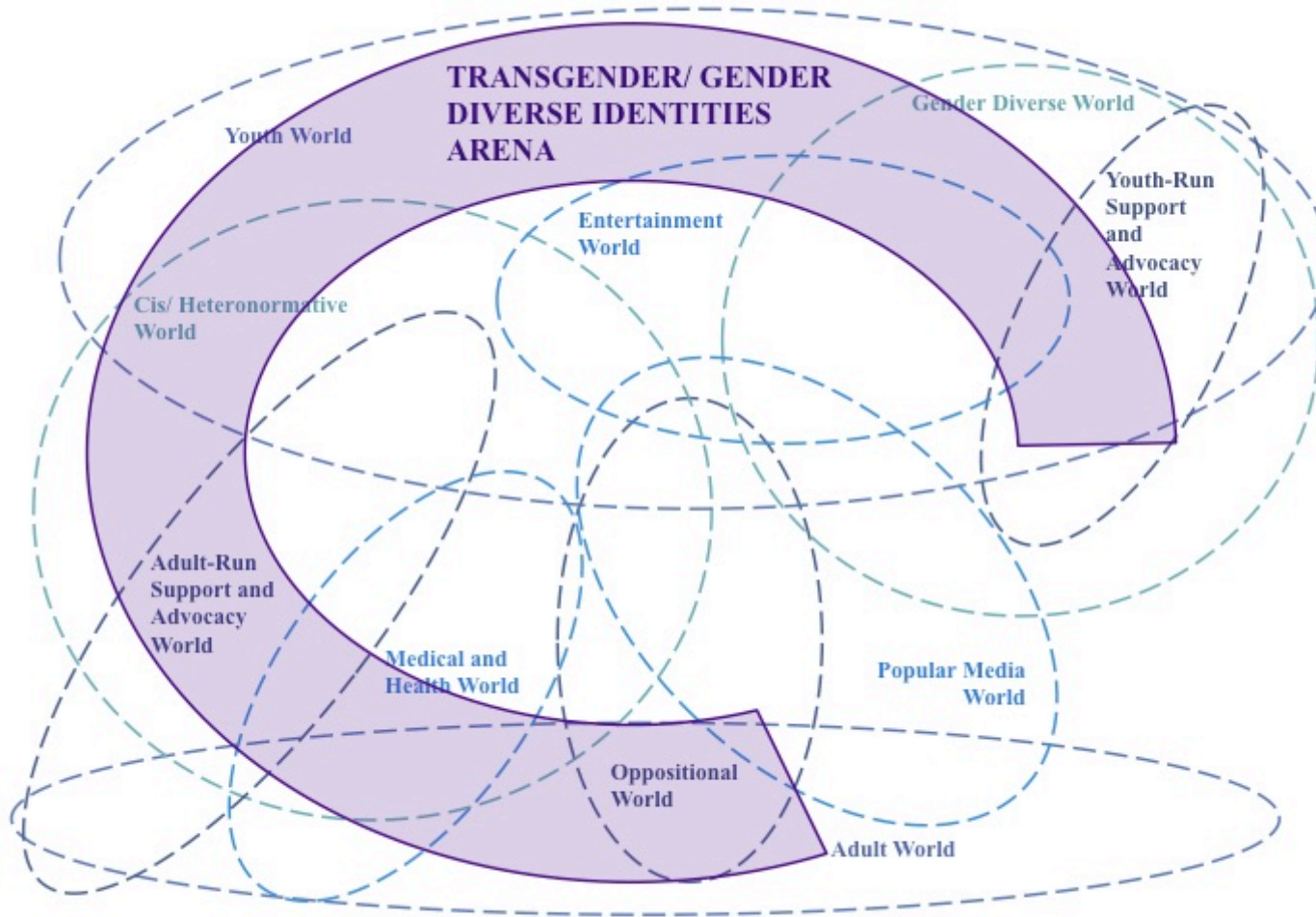


Figure 10. Social Worlds and Transgender/Gender Diverse Identities Arena.

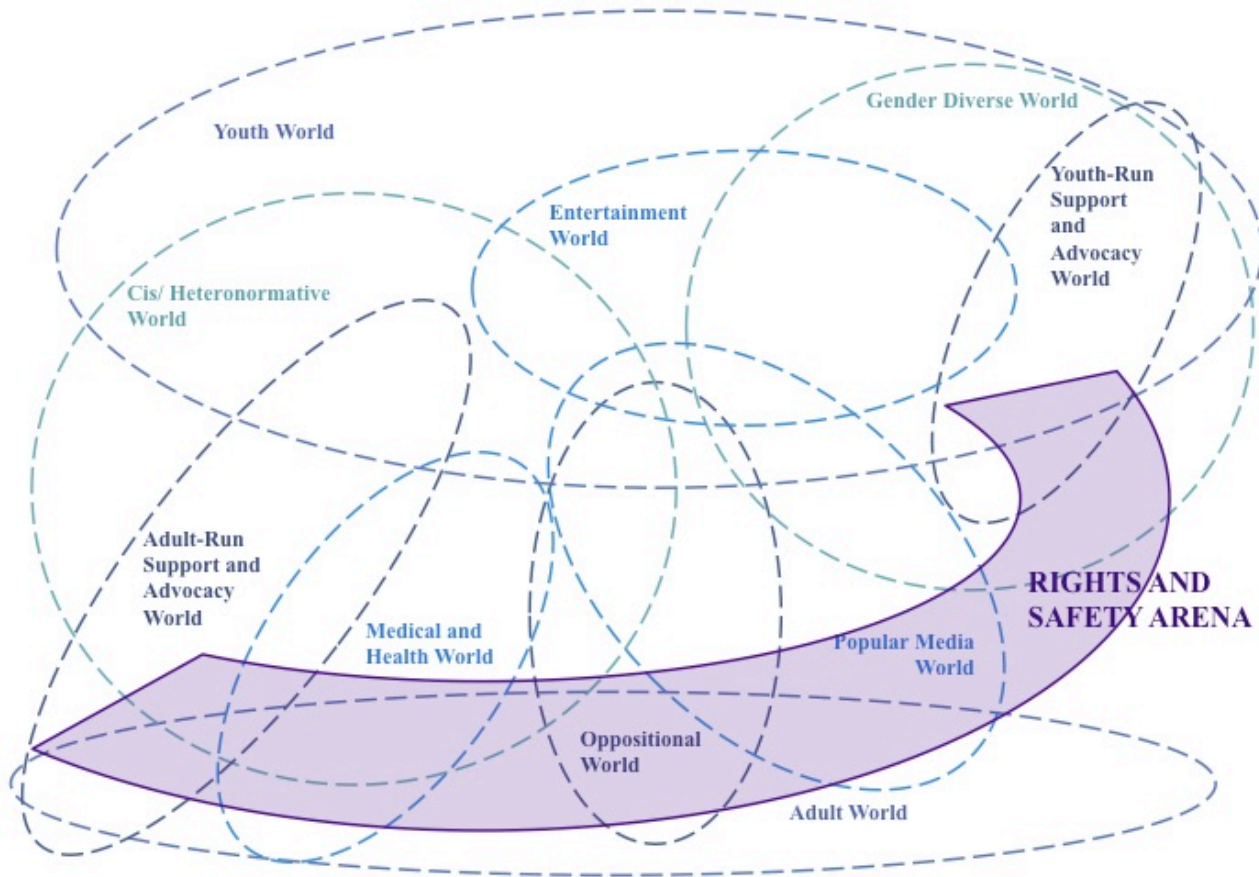


Figure 11. Social Worlds and Rights and Safety Arena.

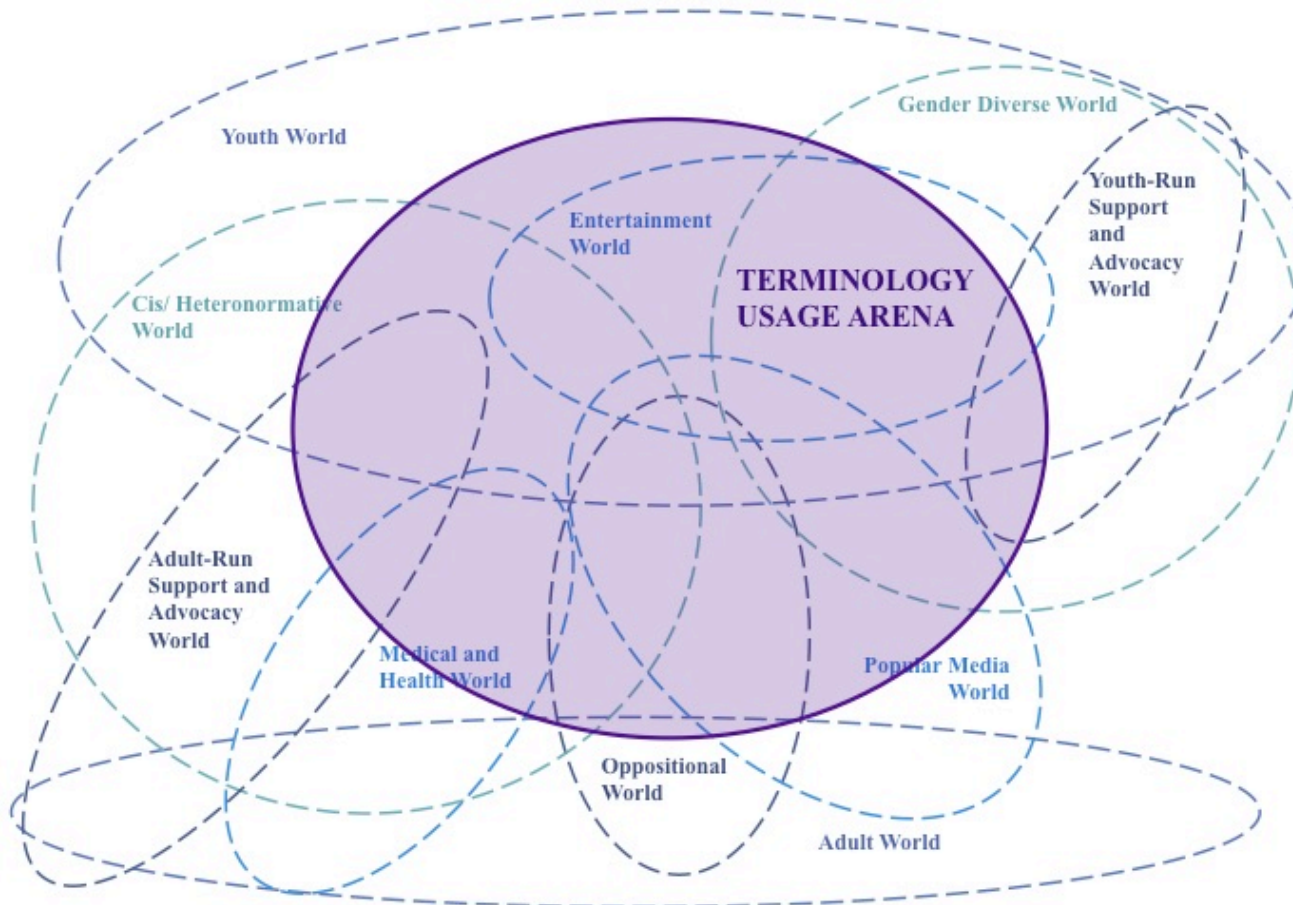


Figure 12. Social Worlds and Rights and Terminology Usage Arena.

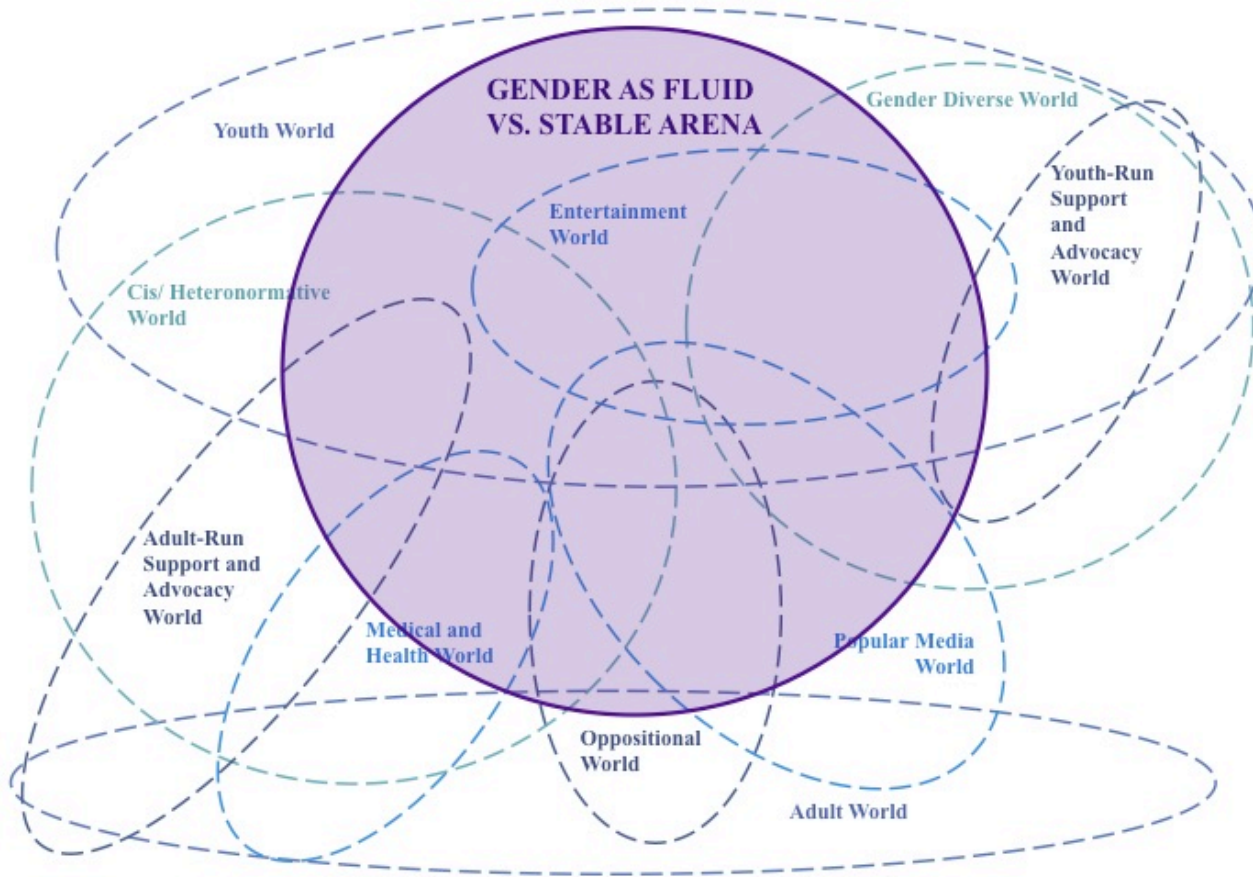


Figure 13. Social Worlds and Rights and Gender as Fluid vs. Gender as Stable Arena.

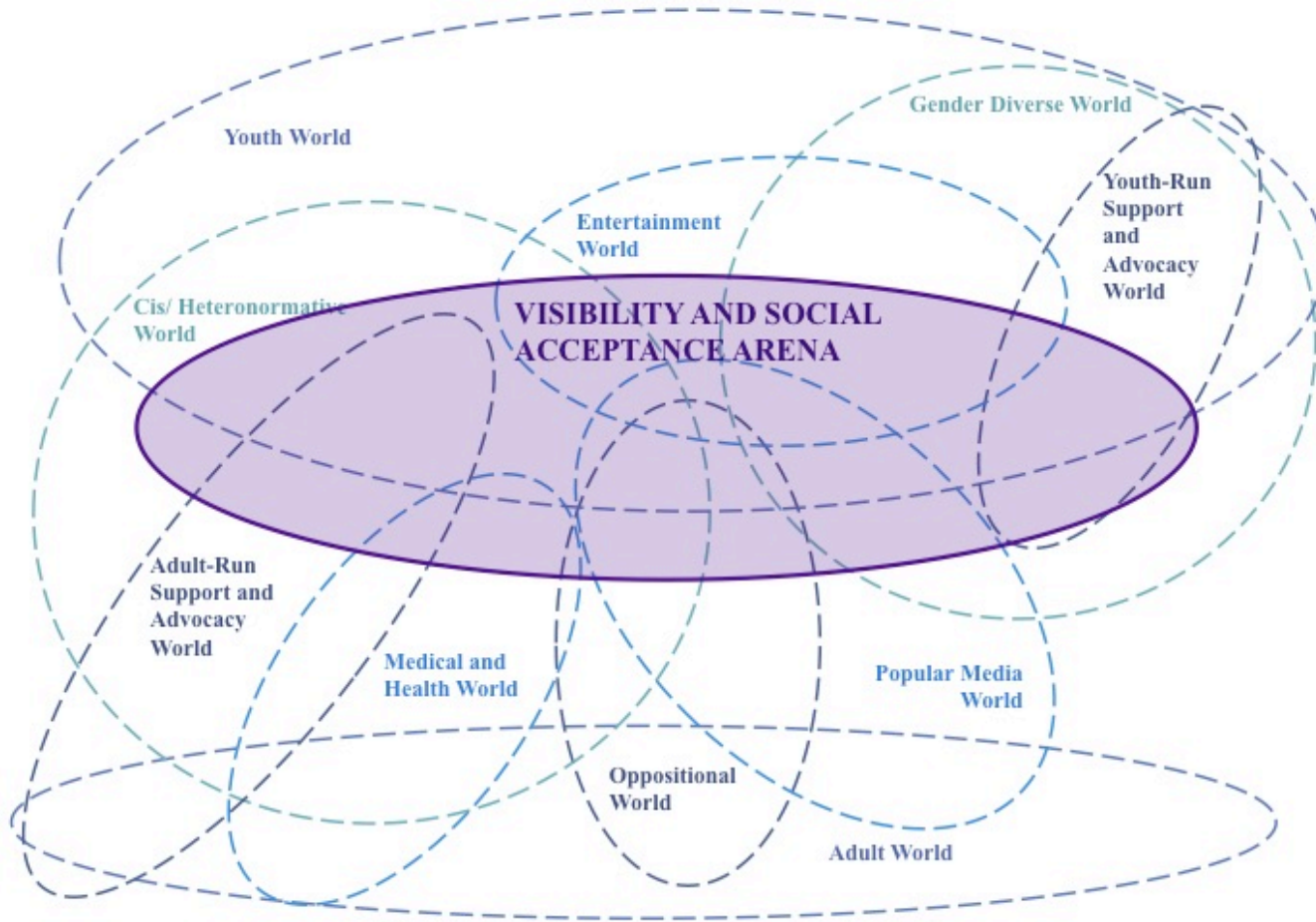


Figure 14. Social Worlds and Rights and Visibility and Social Acceptance Arena.

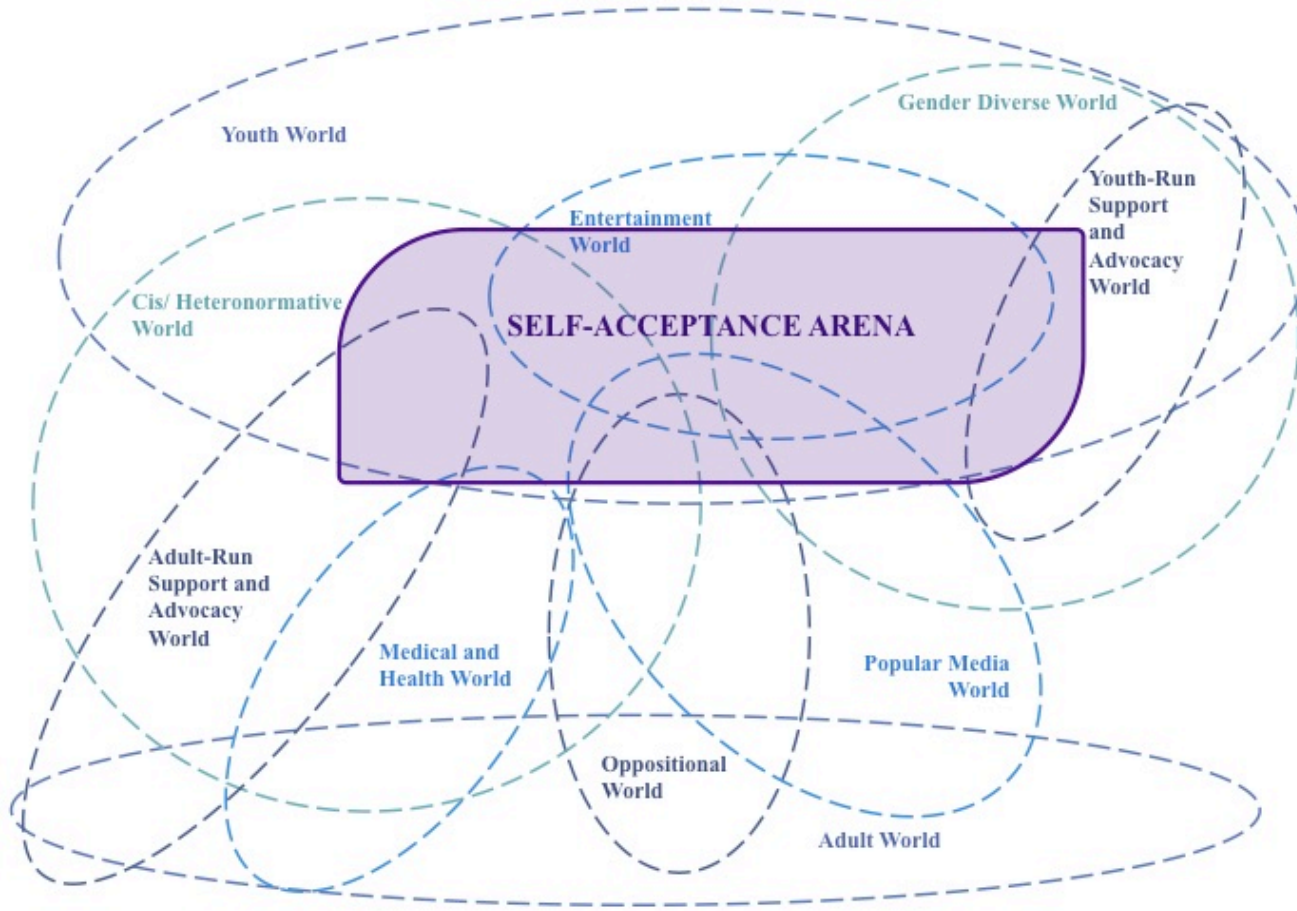


Figure 15. Social Worlds and Rights and Self-Acceptance Arena.

Arenas

Several of the arenas were areas of discourse that all of the social worlds entered at some point, including Transgender/Gender Diverse Identities Arena (*Figure 10*), Terminology Usage Arena (*Figure 12*), and Gender and Fluid versus Gender as Stable Arena (*Figure 13*). These three arenas depict some of the major issues and debates present in situation and these maps helps to illustrate how many different universes of discourse (i.e. social worlds) are entering into these conversations in this situation. For example, a comic (see *Figure 16*) regarding gender diverse identities and terminology usage (Transgender/Gender Diverse Identities Arena and Terminology Usage Arena) was posted by a group existing in the youth run-support and advocacy social world, gender diverse world, and entertainment world; however, comments and notes on the post came from other social worlds including the oppositional world, the adult-run support and advocacy world, and the youth world.



Figure 16. Example comic that illustrates Transgender/Gender Diverse Identities Arena and Terminology Usage Arena and the presence of different social worlds within these arenas, including gender diverse world, entertainment world, youth world, adult world and oppositional world.

Positional Maps

The section presents the four positional maps (*Figures 17-20*) that capture the most salient positions taken within the situation of inquiry. Positional maps were created, mapped and re-mapped in tandem with social worlds/arenas maps and include several of the same topic areas as the social arenas, as well as major issues and debates noted in the situational map (*Figure 2*). In each positional map, the positions are worded in the first person as they are either direct quotes drawn from the data or paraphrased ideas found across multiple posts.



Figure 17. Positional map depicting positions on knowing own identity compared to positions on gender as fluid vs. stable.

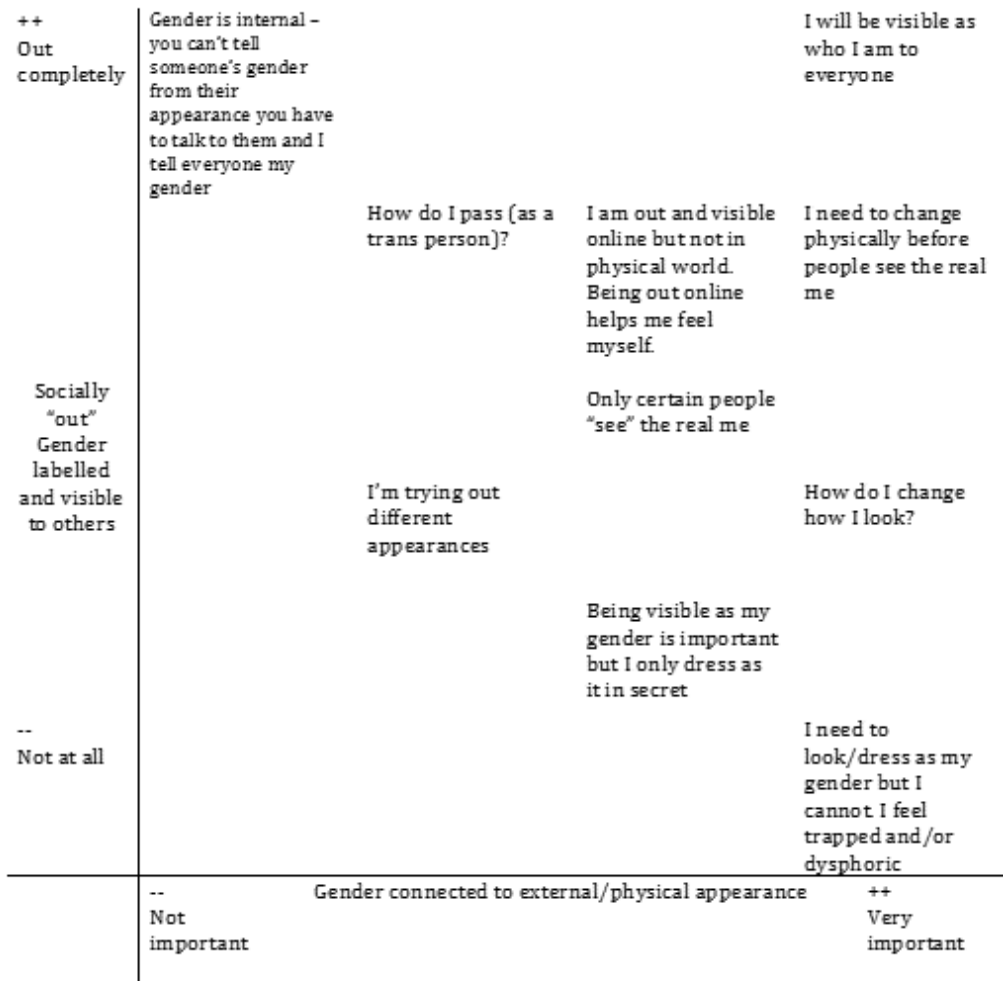


Figure 18. Positional map depicting positions on gender connected to external/physical appearance as compared to being socially "out", with gender labelled and visible to others.

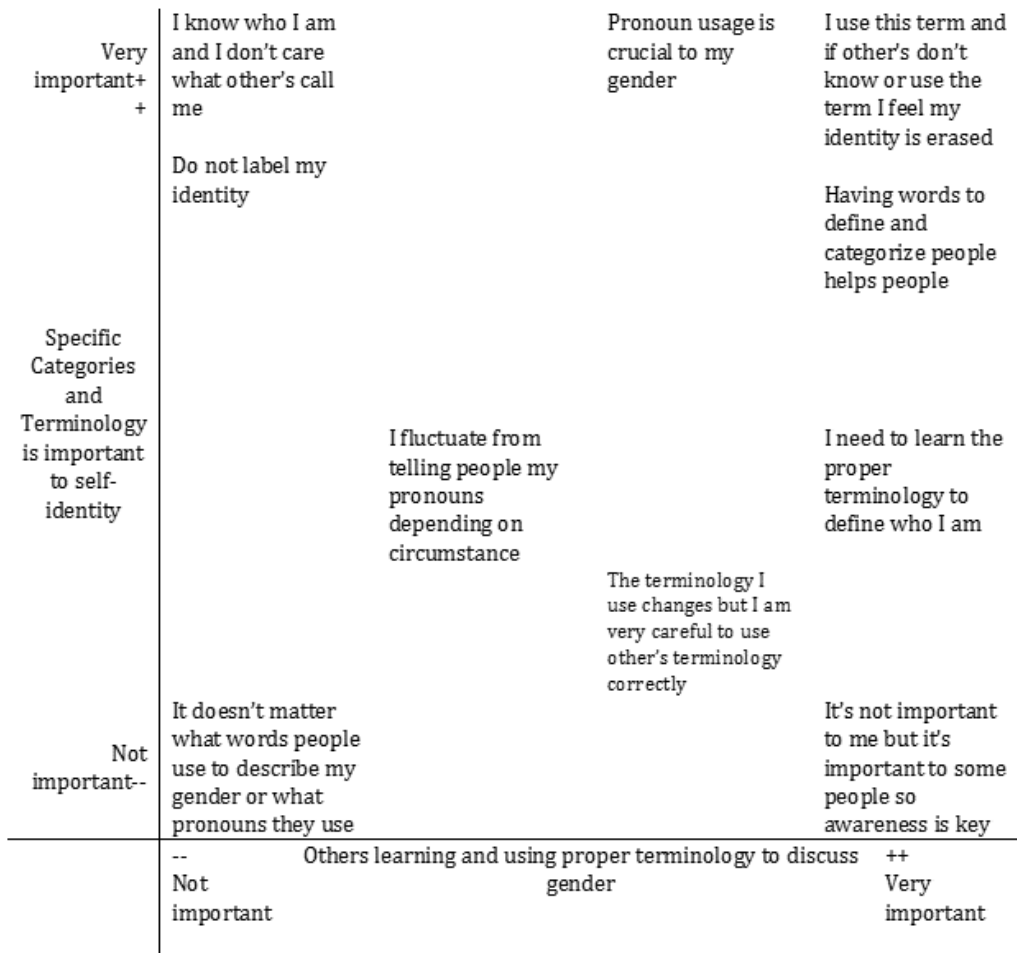


Figure 19. Positional map depicting positions on others learning and using proper terminology to discuss gender as compared to specific categories and terminology being important to self-identity.

Same or Similar Gender	I don't feel like I belong - I don't feel like I am like other with the gender I am	I need to hear stories of shared experiences to feel safe	I need help and advice to find which group I fit in	Understanding Support Shared experience We are similar and safe in that category
Gender in relation to others		Defiance - I'm not like you and I don't care		
	Feelings of marginalization	Defensive - I need to defend my gender expression and identity		Let's discuss different experiences
Different	Discrimination - it is wrong to be different. Unknown is scary.	I don't feel the same as anyone, I feel alone.		It is great to be different. Diversity is positive and important
	-- Not safe	Personal and Social Safety		++ Safe and accepted

Figure 20. Positional map depicting positions on personal and social safety as compared to gender being related to others.

Relativity Mapping

The relativity theory-inspired maps are presented in this section in order to integrate the four previous analytical maps and present a new format to capture the complexities within the data. Throughout the analytical mapping process, I noted that young people were talking about gender *in relation* to other factors in their situation. In applying the imagery and certain concepts from relativity theory to create a visual representation and description of the social phenomenon of gender and this situation of inquiry, I mapped the data by adapting and overlaying situational elements onto visual depictions of gravitational waves (see *Figures 21* and *22*) (please see Relativity and Mapping Gravitational Waves in Chapter Three: Methodology for explanation of how concepts and imagery from relativity have been used in this study) .

Typical representations of the ripples gravitational waves created throughout the universe rely on a two-central mass visualization. The influence of major positions or ideas within the situation of inquiry is illustrated by using this idea of two central masses and the influence these central masses have are depicted by the rippling gravitational waves. As this this push and pull of influence could be, and arguably is, coming from a multitude of forces at any given time, I saw a multitude of possible central positions influencing the situation. I simplified what I saw in the data, by only displaying two black holes in both maps included in this section (*Figures 21* and *22*) in order to represent this concept without making the maps incomprehensible or visually overwhelming.

Figure 21 presents a simplified map depicting two typically polarized perspectives of gender (gender as social construct or gender as related to biology/physical features) with some examples of different themes that emerge from the discourse. This map attempts to capture some of the complexities in the discourse around these two

issues, illustrating that individuals may find themselves appreciating or identifying with the polarized perspectives based on different situational elements. Individuals navigate through the waves of discourse, each individual perspective slightly different from the other depending on the point at which an individual finds themselves. Situational elements that may impact an individual's perspective include elements of culture, institutions (schools, work place), dominant discourses, social groups, and other situational noted in the first mapping technique (*Figure 2*) as well as social worlds/arenas (*Figures 8-15*) that an individual may interact with.

I suggest that the greater the importance or the weight of an idea in an individual's life, the greater its influence on how they interact with and see other positions or ideas within this situation of inquiry. For example, as depicted in *Figure 21*, if an individual strongly believes that gender is a stable part of identity that never fluctuates or changes over time, this individual will view and interact with conversations regarding non-binary and gender fluid identities much differently than an individual that strongly believes gender is fluid. However, this individual's perspective on gender fluidity can be influenced and shifted over time through the impact of other situational elements such as the discursive structures that an individual interacts with and the terminology they have available to them, as well as their culture and social experiences. An individual who only interacts with ideas and ways of talking about gender that frames gender as stable will have a much different perspective on an individual that has been exposed to ideas and language that describe gender as fluid. The proximity that an individual has to ideas that frame gender as a social construct as compared to gender as based in biology will also have an impact on the other situational elements. The way that

they talk about their gender and the gender of others is relative to the other aspects in their situation and their unique position within a context.

Figure 22 depicts the radiating waves of influence from two situational elements; again, this is a simplified map to avoid being visually overwhelming. In the situation of inquiry there are a multitude of situational elements that have an influence in the situation, each could be depicted as a black hole; however, this map takes just two of the situational elements. This image captures how elements within the situation have an influence on the positions that are taken on debated topics, as well as how individuals may conceptualize gender depending on their proximity to certain ideas and situational elements such as culture and discursive frameworks. Arenas are noted in this map with overlapping colour waves in order to show how the different ideas and positions come together in the various social arenas.

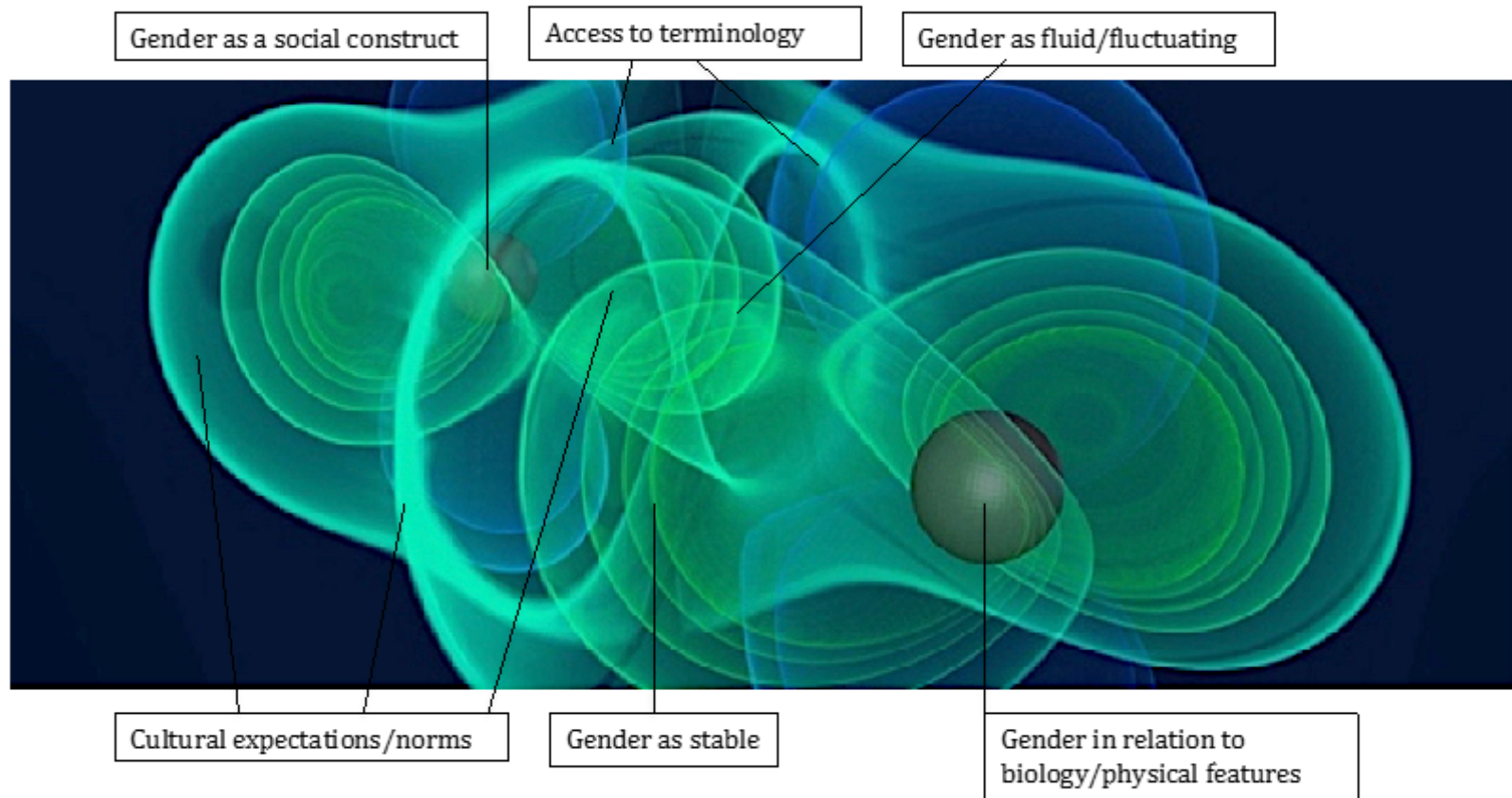


Figure 21. Relativity mapping depicting two polarized ideas, gender as a social construct in contrast with gender in relation to biological/physical features. This map visualizes these polarized ideas as the binary system of black holes, which cause waves of influence throughout universes of discourse. Individual positions on major issues can be seen in relation to these polarized ideas. An individual's position on whether gender was a social construct as compared to related to biology is influenced by their access to terminology which in turn is also influenced by and impacted by the presence of these polarized ideas. *Image adapted from image retrieved from: www.nature.com/news/einstein-s-gravitational-waves-found-at-last-1.19361*

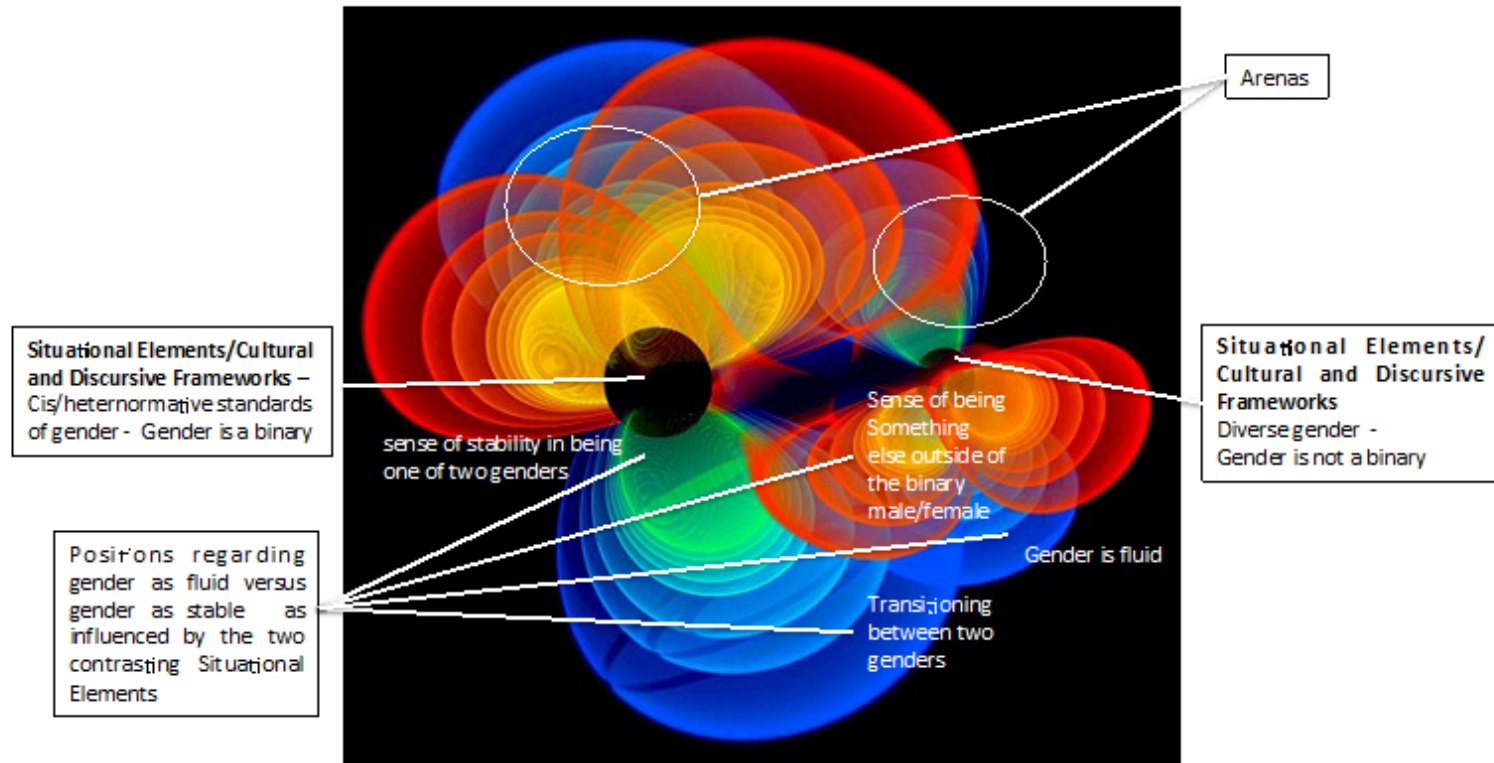


Figure 22. Relativity map depicting the influence of two situational elements - Cultural and Discursive Frameworks of gender as either Cis/heteronormative standards of gender (gender is a binary) and Diverse Gender (Gender is not a binary).

These two situational elements impact the positions that are taken as depicted by the radiating waves of influence. Different positions are either closer or further away from the situational element. Arenas are shown in this map as the overlapping waves of influence, the convergence of different ideas and conceptualization entering into arenas of discourse.

Image adapted from image retrieved from: Michael Koppitz, <http://www.businessinsider.com/gravitational-waves-detected-first-time-ligo-2016-2>

Using the imagery found in relativity allows me to capture three core ideas I saw in the data. First of all, positions on and understandings of gender are influenced by situational elements: the more weight (i.e. importance) a situational element has in an individual's life, the more influence this will have on their perspective about gender and how they talk about it.

Second, different individuals may have varied perspectives and understandings of gender, but they can be made aware of the different perspectives and positions present in their contexts or in other contexts. By being aware that situational elements have an influence on perspectives and positions, individuals can acknowledge what may be impacting a position another individual takes or recognize how the individual's perspective has shifted over time as they interact with other situational elements. Expanding this idea, it could be possible to understand different positions from one's own if the individual could become aware of what influencing forces has led to the positions being taken.

Finally, the idea that, although different individuals may be influenced and impacted by other factors within the situation, their experiences still remain valid, real, and able to be viewed, appreciated, and understood by others. For me, this was an essential realization that came out of the data and an important differentiation away from viewing gender as only socially constructed. Just as in relativity theory, while all positions must be considered in relation to other elements of the situation, they are all experienced as real. These three core ideas are expanded further in the *Chapter 4: Discussion*.

Chapter Four: Discussion

*“My gender is a triangle . . . my gender is a void . . . my
gender is I love you . . . my gender is I don’t care . . .
my gender is for me”*

(Anonymous Tumblr user)

In the previous chapter I presented the data I found with the use of the visual mapping approaches used in Situational Analysis and added a new approach that I developed by adapted imagery and key concepts of relativity theory. In this chapter describe and discuss these results in order to address the research questions identified at the onset of this project:

- How do young people, specifically youth who do not identify with cis-heteronormative standards of gender, talk about gender, their own and others?
- How do young people talk about and describe their own experience of gender?
- How do young people use language to describe their lived experience of gender?
- What influencing factors contribute to young people’s identification with certain experiences of gender, specific gender vocabulary, and identity labels? I.e. If gender is socially constructed – what factors have specifically lead to/influenced the construction of individual young people’s genders?
- How do youth find, utilize, and make sense of terminology and vocabulary that describe and identify gender in their own lives?
- What words, terminology, and vocabulary are being used by young people to describe and talk about their own experiences of gender and others?
- Do young people utilize diagnostic labels/language to describe and understand their own experiences of gender?

- How do young people create meanings for specific gender vocabulary and terminology?

Through my exploration, I found that young people are talking about gender in relation to the many situational elements and contextual influences that are present in their lives.

These are described below in the following sections.

Terminology and New Language of Gender

Much of the language about gender diversity that is used in academic and professional publications describes genders that are outside cis/heteronormative, binary standards of gender as “nonconforming” or “gender variant,” and displays an absence of terminology that allows people to describe themselves outside these binary categories (Carr, 2007; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Drescher, 2010; Drescher & Byne, 2013). Genders that fall outside the binary categories male/masculine and female/feminine are described as abnormal by the vast majority of publications, which largely utilize pathologizing language to discuss and describe these genders. While there may be a growing number of researchers and professionals who are suggesting supportive approaches to gender variance/gender nonconformity that frames and names gender without focusing on norms or binary expectations (Ehrensaft, 2012, 2013, 2014; Hill & Menvielle, 2009; Lev, 2004; Menvielle, 2012; Pyne, 2014), Spack et al., 2012), few articles specifically use language to express support of gender diversity (e.g. Ehrensaft, 2012; Pyne, 2014).

The terminology used in academic and professional publications to describe non-cis/heteronormative genders stands in stark contrast to the multitude of terms I found in the data seen within the context of Tumblr. While the literature that I reviewed at the

onset of this project had three terms available – *gender variant*, *gender nonconforming*, and *transgender*, the data from Tumblr showed these terms and a myriad of others including but not limited to *gender fluid*, *genderqueer*, *nonbinary*, *agender*, *pangender*, *omnigender*, *trans*, *trans**, *semi-cis*, *two-spirit*, *gender flux*, *demi*, *demiboi*, *demigirl*, *trigender*, *polygender*, and many more. While some terms referred to specific gender identities such as *demi*, *demigirl*, *demiboi*, *omnigender*, or *pangender*, other terms appeared to serve the dual function of being both an individual gender identity and a larger, umbrella term that is used to encompass genders that fall outside of cis/heteronormative, binary standards of gender, terms such as *nonbinary*, *trans*, and *gender fluid*. As well, while academic research suggests a need for language and terminology that describes gender outside the usual binary categories (Wiseman & Davidson, 2012) as if this were yet to be developed, such language and terminology already exists and is being used by young people, as is evident in the data, although it has not yet been taken up in professional and academic discourses.

The most prevalent terms I noted in the data to describe and categorize genders that are not cis/heteronormative and binary are terms that identify gender as being fluid rather than a stable trait, for example *gender fluid* and *trans*. While Ehrensaft (2012), one of the few researchers reviewed, offers some terminology to express gender fluidity, for example: *gender creative*, *gender prius* and *gender hybrid*, I did not find these terms in any of the Tumblr content I reviewed for this project. This could be indicative of a lack of awareness of these terms by Tumblr users in the content that I reviewed or demonstrative of how different terminology is created by different groups that are not in relation as they exist in very different situations. Further, although Ehrensaft (2011)

suggests that those working with *gender nonconforming* young people often impose their own view on young people rather than allowing the young person to tell their own story, the lack of presence of Ehrensaft's suggested terminology on Tumblr raises the question about the level of influence, weight or "pull" that can be exerted by one situation on another when these situations are experientially quite disparate.

Accessing Language

Tumblr served as a resource and space of access to terminology to many users, and many posts from organized and educational blogs contained definitions and lists of terminology as well as links to other sites and resources regarding terminology usage. Access to terminology and language to describe gender experiences was identified over and over again throughout different Tumblr posts, as being a crucial part of understanding and expressing an individual's gender. Many posts contained questions about searching for a term to describe how they felt and experienced their gender. Users posted comments about feeling that they finally had a way to describe how they felt and often noted how helpful it was to know that others who used the same term might feel and experience their gender in similar ways.

Many Tumblr users posted questions about how to use terminology and what terminology they should use based on a posted description of how they experience their gender. In this type of Tumblr content, those who posted descriptions of their genders would often mention that in certain contexts they presented one way, but may feel or want to present another way in a different context. Along with that, they also posted about feeling comfortable with being and expressing their gender differently in different spaces and with different people. For example, one individual posted about presenting as

male, dressing in typically masculine clothing, having facial hair, and using male pronouns (he/him) while at school; however, when this individual is with friends they like to wear feminine clothing, make-up, and use they/them pronouns. This individual also posted a question about what term they should use to describe their gender to their friends and for themselves and stated that they don't feel *trans*.

Answers and suggestions about how to define and categorize the original poster's gender reflected interactions and knowledge gained from other contexts, situational elements, and experiences. In response to the above user's question, one Tumblr user suggested that they are *genderfluid* or *nonbinary*, thus reflecting experience with these terms that had been gained from previous interactions with others who view and think about gender as a fluctuating part of an individual's self. They posted about having friends that identified as *genderfluid* and *nonbinary* and how their conversations with these friends had helped them to learn about and think about gender as fluid and fluctuating.

I also found that posts and responses contain references to cultural contexts and social expectations and acknowledge limitations within certain social contexts based on expectations of others. For example, again in reply to the question noted above, some Tumblr respondents acknowledged that while the individual is at school it may feel safer for them to present as male and use male pronouns because social expectations of that context are that there are only two, binary genders. Answers also, almost always, contain supportive and affirming language and an acknowledgment of the importance of self-definition with terms that best fit each person.

The presence of posts, information, and education acknowledging the importance of gender self-definition speak to how important this is to young people. As Singh, Meng, and Hansen (2014) found, the ability to self-define and use their own words and expressions to align with their gender is key to young people's resilience. Many Tumblr posts included expressions and experiences about young people feeling frustrated that others could not understand the terminology they wanted to use or did not respect how they wanted to self-define. These posts also spoke to experiences with feeling isolated or marginalized because of their gender.

Considering the above example of Tumblr conversations, it appears as though what can be seen in this context is that having terminology to describe and identify gender experiences is important to young people. When an individual has knowledge of and access to terminology, they are better able to describe their gender experiences and express this to others clearly. However, it is also evident throughout the data, that individuals may take-up these terms and understand them differently across contexts. This implies that it could be beneficial to those supporting young people to have an awareness of terminology and resources that describe and define gender terms, as well as an open and flexible position to allowing the young person to identify their own gender in their own way, which may vary across situations and contexts.

Use of Diagnostic Language

In comparison to much of the academic language describing gender difference typically falling into diagnostic categories that pathologize variance from prescribed social norms, the posts reviewed did not contain language that specifically utilized *dysphoria* as a diagnostic label that pathologized variance. In the situation of inquiry,

gender fluidity and diversity is seen as a norm. On Tumblr, when the terms *dysphoric* and *dysphoria* are present in the posts, both within conversations and as hashtags, being *dysphoric* is not used as an identity label or a pathologizing term. Instead, young people use the term *dysphoric* to describe what it feels like when how they look, how they are embodied, or how they physically appear does not align with their sense of gender. Tumblr users have utilized the term *dysphoric* as a feeling rather than a category. These users post about feeling stressed, depressed, overwhelmed, or frustrated that they did not feel safe or free to express their gender the way they feel, which in turn could lead to feelings of *dysphoria*. The data suggests that it is not the feeling of *dysphoria* that leads to these poor mental health outcomes, but the experience of living in a social context where an individual is not free or safe to express their gender the way that they feel it to be. This arguably shifts the purpose of utilizing a diagnosis of *Gender Dysphoria* to a different understanding of what is meant when this term is used, a shift that underlines the fact that these mental health issues are not directly related to experiences of dissatisfaction with one's gender, but instead refer to the impact of a constellation of experiences of victimization and marginalization based on one's gender that confirms what is suggested by Drescher (2010) and Leeper and Spack (2013). For these young people *dysphoria* is not a mal-alignment of physical body with gender identity, it is a mal-alignment of context with lived experience.

Furthermore, while the terms *gender nonconforming* and *gender variant* are in use on Tumblr, they are not commonly employed and when they are, these too are often used to describe a feeling or experience, rather than a specific gender category. For example, an individual might use the hashtag “#gendernonconforming” to describe how their

expression of their gender does not conform with typical binary gender expectations, while at the same time, their self-identified gender is *nonbinary* not *gender nonconforming*. In this way, nonconforming is used as a verb that describe the action they are taking rather than an identity label.

As seen in the data, diverse experiences of gender can be viewed as part of the normative spectrum of gender, thus shifting the goals of treatment and therapy for these young people. This speaks to the need for more practitioners and medical professionals to move towards a more affirming approach in which gender nonconforming behaviour and identification is viewed as healthy and normal human variation (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Cohen-Kettenis & Pfafflin, 2003; Cohen-Kettenis, Delemarre-van de Waal, & Gooren, 2008; Ehrensaft, 2012; MacNish & Gold, 2011; Hill et al., 2007, 2010; Lev, 2004; Malpas, 2011; Mallon, 2009; Menvielle, 2009; Rosenberg, 2002; Saeger, 2006; Vanderburgh, 2008).

Young people are seeking out social support networks online that do not pathologize their identities and help them to feel confident in their gender. They are using language to describe their experience and are not diagnosing something that they feel is wrong or disordered about themselves. They are expressing a belief that diverse arrays of gender experiences are valid and real and are reaching out to others in order to feel connected to people that experience similar feelings and genders so that they can experience a sense of belonging.

Creating Terminology

As Ehrensaft (2011b; 2012; 2014) suggests, gender nonconforming behaviour, identity, or expression, does not necessarily speak to a trans identity or a diagnosable

disorder. Through this project, I have seen that not only are young people thinking and talking about gender in complex ways (Beemyn, 2013), they are also creating new terminology to reflect the diverse ways in which they experience and make sense of gender in their lives. Tumblr users share resources about new terminology, help individuals find terminology to describe their experiences and identify their gender, and offer support for choosing or creating new terminology. For example, some individuals may combine different identity labels into a new term like *trans femme*, *gender fluid queer*, or *androgynous transwoman*, that they feel captures their gender as well as reflects other salient aspects of their identity or other important related identity factors (e.g. sexuality, sexual orientation, gender presentation).

This creation of gender terminology, as well as the information sharing and peer education, is an ongoing interactive experience on Tumblr. As individual and community experiences change and shift, so too does the terminology used to describe these experiences. Evidently, this creates challenges and complications inside and outside different communities (Simmons & White, 2014), as different situational elements in different contexts such as culture, location, and class, influence what is agreed upon with regard to the definitions and understandings of certain terminology. This is further complicated by many Tumblr users' postings about their genders shifting, feeling fluid, or fluctuating based on different situations or experiences. Terminology is used and created that both captures this fluidity as well as labels different distinct gender experiences. As Ehrensaft's (2011b) notes, professionals who support children and youth need to listen more attentively and with less rigidity about gender. Professionals who work with and research young people's experiences should acknowledge that

terminology is frequently changing and being created to best fit or describe who individuals feel that they are, as suggested by Pyne (2014) and Simmons and White (2014).

Gender as Fluid

“You don’t need to fight for who you are. You don’t have to choose sides. You don’t have to be one thing or the other”

(Anonymous Tumblr user)

As I reviewed the data, a dichotomy became clear between two ongoing discursive frameworks of gender, on the one hand young people are considering gender as a fluid or fluctuating experience that cannot be strictly categorized, while on the other hand and at the same time, they are also engaging with a plethora of distinct categories that can be labeled and defined. As Edwards-Leeper and Spack (2012) suggest, those working with transgender children must accept the fact that gender may be fluid. While fluidity is far from widely accepted in professional settings, as evidenced in the academic literature (see *Chapter Two: Gender in the Literature*), Tumblr users spoke openly and supportively about gender fluidity and gender experiences that do not fit into one gender identity label or another. Many posts offered information and resources to other users about the fluidity of gender and the validity of all experiences. While Calhoun Davis (2009) argues that this “ritualized repetitions of gender categorization further solidifies and naturalizes gender dichotomization” (p. 114), Tumblr posts offered categorizations as a way to relate to others, and feel a sense of identity. Gender categories and terminology present on Tumblr are far from limited to binary gender labels and posts that offer

definitions of certain categories almost always contain a caveat that whichever word, term, category fits best for the individual is valid, even if it changes or fluctuates. Still, although gender is largely discussed in the Situation of Inquiry as fluid, this does not mean that individuals do not acknowledge that some individuals strongly identify with a stable gender. Some individuals may experience gender as fluid, and some as stable.

Despite destabilization of gender categories, there appears to be a need when defining gender, for individuals to embody and possess a single gender at any given time (Dreger, 1998, as cited in Fausto-Sterling, 2000). While the idea that gender is fluid is the most common way in which gender is discussed in the posts reviewed, the need to possess a single gender label or identity category also appears to be prevalent across the data; however, this does not mean that the individual is identifying themselves as a member of a mono-gendered category. One-word categories or labels can identify an individual as possessing more than one gender, for example: *omnigender*, *pangender*, *polygender*, or *bigender*.

Whereas Calhoun Davis (2009) found that a focus on destabilizing gender (i.e. gender fluidity) ignores the social pressures and presentations that may hide gender diversity and may disregard individuals' subjective attachments to identity and discount their desires for a sense of gendered location, data from Tumblr users both agree and disagree with this sentiment. This speaks to different ways which the terms *trans* and *transgender* are being used by young people on Tumblr. Some individuals identify as *trans* and utilize this term as it identifies them as being assigned a sex/gender at birth and then later socially (and at times medically) transitioning to a different sex/gender, for example Assigned Female at Birth (AFAB), identifying as a *trans*. However, other

individuals that were AFAB and identified as *trans* may also add other gender identifiers, such as *transman* or female-to-male (FtM) or take a more overarching term of *transgender* or *trans*. Some individuals identified as *trans* while they were transitioning and moved through being *trans* to being *male*, while others kept *trans* as an important part of their identity after they transitioned.

In this situation of inquiry, I found that users made it very clear that conceptualizing gender as fluid is not intended to mean that one can “get up and put on a new gender today” (Salih, 2004 in Calhoun Davies, 2004, p. 102). The experience of gender is articulated repeatedly as being a real, felt sense of gender, something that is experienced. There is a strong resistance to the idea that gender is merely a social construct. This is reflected in Calhoun Davis (2009) who reminds readers that several postmodern, queer theorists have rejected framing gender as voluntarily constructed. Like Serano (2013), Tumblr users argue that the intellectualization of gender as a theory and social construct creates an inaccessible approach to understanding these concepts that leaves individuals feeling scrutinized, fictionalized, and erased. The idea that gender is fluid speaks to the need to deregulate gender ideals and categories and create space for gender complexities, acknowledging the validity of diverse experiences without pathologizing as abnormal or non-conforming.

As I see it, one of the most salient aspects of how young people are talking about gender in the online context that I worked with, was that gender is experienced and lived in relation to many other factors in their lives. That is, young people are using a multitude of terms to describe and discuss their genders and the genders of others and do this in relation with other factors in their lives. This makes clear that the ways in which young

people are discussing gender cannot be seen in isolation from their contexts, the access they have to language, the social worlds that they interact with, and the many situational elements that influence and impact their lives.

Visualizing Gender through Relativity Theory

In exploring the complex phenomenon of gender and how young people talk about gender, I have studied the ways in which young people are using language, creating new language, and accessing terminology to describe their diverse experiences with gender. Throughout this process of mapping the situation of inquiry, and analyzing the situational elements, what I have found is perhaps elegantly simple and at the same time highly complex: the way in which young people are talking about gender is in relation to the situational elements in their contexts. As Diamond and Butterworth (2008) suggest, the difficulty in making sense of individuals with multiple identities, multiple subjectivities, and multiple social locations is captured in the absence of language to describe these diverse and complex experiences. I suggest that what my inquiry has revealed is that young people are talking about gender in relation to other contextual factors and that gender, and the ways in which we discuss and describe gender, can be understood with the help of relativity theory (see previous section in *Chapter Two: Methodology and Methods – Relativity and Mapping* for full explanation). The core concept of relativity theory, that there is no *absolute* frame of reference, is applied in this study to visually capture the complexity that all situational elements and ways of talking about gender must be seen *in relation* to something else (Emspak, 2017).

Relativity, as used in this study, helped me to show that diverse gender experiences can be seen and recognized and understood as real and valid, and existing in

a material, external world. While relativity in this sense may be confused with relativism or subjective idealism, I use relativity in this study to represent that multiple and diverse experience can and do co-exist and can be understood through viewing these experiences in relation to situational elements present. Relativism and subjective idealism would arguably deny external experience stating that the subjective experience is the only way an individual can know anything (Flage, n.d., and Westacott, n.d.). Subjective idealism is premised on the principle that what we call reality is completely dependent upon the minds of the subjects that perceive it. Relativity theory on the other hand, is premised on the principle that there is no absolute frame of reference, any time something is measured or considered it must be seen in relation to something else (Emspak, 2017). This is an important distinction in that, through relativity one can view and understand that there are multiple positions and perspectives within a social world, or situation of inquiry, and although the one's perspective may be different from another's it is possible to know and understand what may be impacting the other perspective.

Relativity theory captures what I found throughout the data in that gender is a verifiable and felt experience; it is not merely constructed and therefore cannot also be deconstructed or erased, as Serano (2013) would argue. While gender is impacted by cultural and social context, viewing gender in relation to these factors as opposed to constructed by them, shifts the idea of gender as socially constructed to gender as a verifiable and real, lived experience. Some have argued that framing gender as socially constructed enables an individual to choose or change their gender based on political or personal goals. As Salih (2004 in Calhoun Davies, 2009) argues, gender is not something that you can get up and change in the morning. It is not an 'anything goes' aspect of

identity constructed and deconstructed at will; choice is only possible in relation to other contextual factors.

Multiple and diverse, real experiences of gender exist and are experienced by individuals. The ways in which they talk about and view gender can be understood in relation to other factors in their lives and reaches far beyond subjectivity. Relativity, that is, viewing gender in material relation, captures the intricacies of influence that various situational elements have on any given position, social world or arena of conversation. The idea that all positions taken (or not taken), all social worlds/arenas, and situational elements must be seen *in relation* to one another and mapping this influence helps us to capture the complexities of gender as lived.

Gender in Relation

How youth talk about gender can be visually represented in relation to other situational elements. In the data, I saw that the more important certain situational elements were in an individual's life, the more they impacted and influenced how they spoke about and viewed gender. Based on my recent exposure to relativity theory in the popular press (Cho, 2016; LIGO, 2016; Radford, 2016; Reuters, 2016), I noted that this can be likened to the idea of gravity and weight. One can consider situational elements such as culture, discursive structures, political environments, institutions, etc., as 'masses' that hold importance, or 'weight'. The more important something is in someone's life, the more 'weight' it holds and the more it influences their discourses and conceptual frameworks. This influence can be thought of like a 'gravitational pull' that exerts a force on the individual. An individual may be influenced or pulled by multiple 'masses' in their life, and the closer they are to one or more of these influencing factors,

the more it impacts how they talk about and view gender. Situational elements or influencing factors gain ‘weight’ or importance through social relationships and personal experience. The more ‘weight’ (i.e. importance) something has in an individual’s life depends on their interactions with other factors in the situation. For example, social groups may place importance on the use of certain terminology: the more that this terminology is used, the more important it may become. In turn, the importance (or ‘weight’) it holds for an individual who is part of that social group impacts how they think about and interpret gender.

Gender in relation to discursive frameworks.

Throughout the data, gender was often discussed in relation to certain discursive frameworks of gender, most notably, gender as stable as compared to gender as fluid, gender as being cis/binary as compared to a non-binary system. Thus, the more an individual interacts with, learns about, and converses with others using certain discursive frameworks (e.g. gender as fluid), the more important this idea may become in their life. The closer they are to this idea and discursive framework, the more they start to consider gender as fluid, and the further they are from viewing gender as a stable, binary system.

Nevertheless, even while embracing one idea about gender, an individual can also hold multiple, sometime highly contested perspectives and positions on a subject area; for example, depending on context, they can speak to experiencing gender as fluid or gender as stable. By looking at gender and how individuals talk about gender in relation to other situational elements, I saw that individuals’ opinions and feelings about these debated topics vary based on context and personal experience. While these positions may vary, it is not necessarily a personal choice that shifts these perspectives but rather interaction

with situational elements in the context. This is an important distinction as it speaks to the concern voiced by Serano (2013) that viewing gender as socially constructed implies that individuals may construct or choose their gender based on personal or political agenda. Understanding gender as *in relation* to situational elements as compared to socially constructed by them, importantly clarifies that gender, and how one views gender, is not voluntarily socially constructed.

Gender in relation to biology, physical bodies, and appearance.

In the academic literature, gender is presented as a learned social role and as an expression of innate biological traits; and gender is often simplified into the social role associated with dichotomously sexed bodies (Braun & Wilkinson, 2005, p. 509). While many researchers, such as Fausto-Sterling (2000), cite the wide variation in physical bodies and culturally specific gendered behaviours in order to dismantle the continuous conflation of sex and gender, and others contend for the acceptance of gender as separate from sex (e.g., Butler, 1990; Fausto-Sterling, 2000, 2012), some, such as Paetcher (2003), claim that although theorists may want to separate bodies from behaviours, people remain connected with their physical bodies. The physical body must be considered a medium in which gender is performed.

In the Tumblr data, gender is often discussed in relation to biology, biological sex, and physical bodies, which mirrors what several studies (e.g., Braun & Wilkinson, 2005; Carr, 2007; Collier, Bos, & Sandfort, 2013; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008) suggest, that namely that biological, physical features may be a determining factor in how individuals consider their gender. Tumblr users posted about their physical bodies and representations of their gender, and the ways in which they talked about gender were

linked to how they looked, how they embodied their gender, their physical bodies, their clothing, accessories, make-up, hair, and other physical representations of their gender.

As Bem (1993) suggests, biological sex can act as a “looking glass” through which individuals make decisions about how to conceptualize and categorize themselves and others. Individuals in my Situation of Inquiry often discussed and categorized their genders in relation to their biological bodies and their physical appearance. For example, some individuals identified themselves as *AFAB* (assigned-female-at-birth) *nonbinary*, presented themselves in a typically feminine appearance, and utilized they/them pronouns. In this example, the physical biological female body (their feminine appearance) is an important part of their identity and the embodiment of their gender. As noted by some researchers (e.g. Elliot & Roen, 1998; Kaufman, 2010), embodiment is a central issue to gender identity. This was also true for some Tumblr users, especially for those with a focus on an embodied experience of difference. For example, some Tumblr users posted about embodying difference and not subscribing to gendered roles, appearances, or categories, how they presented their gender was a direct attempt to challenge norms and gender expectations.

Physical appearance was highly connected to the ways in which young people were talking about gender, particularly in the online context, with many posts containing “selfies” or other pictures of the youth to display the young person’s identity and gender. Viewing gender in relation to biological sex, physical bodies, and appearance directly challenges some understandings of gender as strictly a social role, having little or nothing to do with the body as discussed in Cardon (2010), Erickson-Scroth, (2014), and Hines (2010).

Social constructionist notions of gender cannot however be simply dismissed as not adequate. As Ehrensaft (2011) notes, culture often dictates what aspects of the body are considered to be gendered. Tumblr users spoke to cultural signifiers of masculinity and femininity being important to their embodiment of gender differences. The importance of cultural signifiers and physical appearance impact how an individual may embody their gender and how they choose to present. These situational elements of culture and social expectations impact and influence gender and the weight or importance of these ideas in the individual's life shift and change the perspective of the individual and the ways in which they experience and converse about gender. Situational elements can however be readily accommodated in relativity and as a result are not mere constructions but can be seen as actual manifestations.

Gender in relation to others.

Throughout the data, young people are talking about gender in relation to others. Many of the posts and comments discuss gender in terms of being either the same as others or different from others. That is to say, individuals seek out ways of talking about their gender that help them identify with others that are similar or the same as them or as a way of differentiating themselves from others. For example, an individual identifying as *nonbinary* can locate others that also identify with this term while at the same time specifying that they are distinctly different from those that are *binary* or *cis*. Individuals are talking about gender in relation to other identities, through specific terminology such as being “non” ___ or “demi” ___; for example, an individual may categorize their gender as *nonbinary* (in relation to binary genders) or *demigirl* (in relation to girl, gender as partly girl).

Individuals in the situation of inquiry also talk about gender in relation to culture, expectations, and social norms and how they fit or do not fit with these expectations. The connections between gender, culture and social norms was visible in posts about feminine and masculine genders or expressions of gender. For example, one Tumblr user posted about liking make-up and high heels (which are often viewed as feminine and were identified as such by this Tumblr user) but also having facial hair (described by the Tumblr user as masculine). This poster stated that they wanted to embody a nonbinary gender by physically presented as both genders using cultural expectations of what is masculine and feminine to challenge social norms.

Individuals also related gender to sexual orientation. This was not as present as some other situational elements; however, some genders were linked with sexual orientation and some individuals utilized terminology that described their gender and sexual orientation together. For example, an individual that described his gender as *transmasculine* and *trans*, shifted the terminology he used to described his sexual orientation as his gender identity terminology also shifted: First he identified as a *transmasculine*, then he identified as a *butch lesbian*, then as *masculine of center lesbian*. As his identity shifted to *transmasculine*, he shifted his sexual orientation terminology to *queer* as he no longer identified as *lesbian* but also did not identify as *heterosexual* because of his gender. Another example of this was individuals that identified their sexual orientation as *pansexual* as compared to individuals who identified as *bisexual*. Thus, an individual describing their sexual orientation as pansexual may describe being attracted to an individual of any gender, whereas a bisexual individual may describe their sexual orientation as being attracted to both masculine and feminine genders.

Throughout the data, gender is discussed as a personal experience that should not impact others, but is also highly connected to relationships with others and how an individual experiences a social world. Tumblr users posted about their gender in relation to personal experiences and feelings as well as in relation to past, present, and future expectations of themselves and of others. Many Tumblr users expressed feelings of frustration related to gender expectations and constraints within social contexts. They discussed looking for terminology and ways of talking about gender that both acknowledged their lived experiences of gender while at the same time erasing the need to have gender at all. Tumblr users posted about how integral gender is to their identity and their self, and how it is a real lived experience that they talk about in relation to their situation and social contexts but also on occasion wished to be free of having to deal with gender. For some gender is a paradox. For all, gender is clearly not merely a category.

Future Directions for Research

This exploratory study broadly answered the research questions by looking at Tumblr as the situation of inquiry. Further research could expand our understanding of gender through relativity theory through exploring other situations and other contexts in order to gain more knowledge about how young people are talking about gender. Such studies could help to expand knowledge and understanding of how young people are talking about and thinking about gender, particularly non-cis/heteronormative genders, so that adults working with young people may be better prepared to help young people with this complex issue.

As Singh, Meng, and Hansen (2014) suggest, for young people, the ability to self-define and utilize their own words to express their gender identity is a key element of

fostering resilience when working with young people. What is clear, as a result of this analysis, is that there is no universally agreed upon gender terminology. As Menvielle (2013) notes, it is becoming more common for practitioners to encounter young people and their caregivers who accept that gender identities that vary from cis/heteronormative standards are not pathological. As my study shows, given that young people are talking about gender as fluid, not only should we immediately move away from viewing gender identities that vary from cis/heteronormative standards as pathological, we should also rethink the notion that a fluid, diverse understanding of gender is *nonconforming*; expanding our understanding of gender to include and accept gender diversity in all its forms.

Conclusion

Framed around the central research question: *How do young people, specifically youth who do not identify with cis/heteronormative standards of gender, talk about gender, their own and others?’,* this project explores *how* young people are talking about gender in order to learn more about the ways in which young people negotiate social relationships, construct identities and manufacture knowledge and language through discourses about gender. Providing insight into the complexities of how language is being utilized by young people to shape and construct diverse understandings of what gender means in individuals’ lives by analysing data gathered through the social media platform, Tumblr, through Situational Analysis. Through the steps of this project, data from Tumblr and 3 in-person interviews was analysed, mapped, and re-mapped, using Situational Maps, Social Worlds/Arenas Maps, and Positional Maps. After mapping themes found throughout the data and analysing all of the visual representations of the data together, a key component of how young people are talking about gender was clear; young people are talking about gender *in relation* to their contexts, the situational elements in these contexts, their social worlds, and many other factors

In order to represent the complexity in the data and capture the relational nature of how gender was being talked about, I employed a visual mapping technique into which I incorporated Relativity Theory as an allegory, to explore how youth access and use language to define and articulate diverse experiences of gender, as well as create unique terminology to discuss and define gender categories and identities. By using this mapping technique and presenting data in this fashion, I was able to capture the notion that I found within the situation of inquiry that although individuals may hold different

positions on topics, have different experiences, or have widely differing opinions on certain topics, all positions within this universe, or context, can be seen as real. While different individuals may be influenced and impacted by other factors within the situation, their experiences remain valid, real, and able to be viewed, appreciated, and understood by others.

By providing new information about how youth use language and terminology to describe gender in their own lives, this research project addresses gaps within the current literature on how gender and gender experiences are talked about, conceptualized, and categorized. This research project creates space for a new understanding of how youth and the practitioners that support them think about and talk gender. It is my hope that this research project will create a possibility for Child and Youth Care practitioners, as well as other human service professionals, to reconsider how to work with individuals around the highly complex issue of gender.

As more and more young people seek support for dealing with the challenges of living with diverse gender identities and experiences, the dangers of pathologizing these identities and the clear benefits of a supportive, non-pathologizing approach are becoming increasingly recognized (Price Minter, 2012). Beemyn (2013) suggests that the “nature of gender is undergoing fundamental changes” (p. 159), which is what I also found as in this project. The majority of conversations that I reviewed focused on gender as a fluid and fluctuating experience and aspect of identity, and with that, made it clear that young people are challenging the rigidity of gender categories and binary gender roles.

Diamond and Butterworth (2008) suggest that the challenges in recognizing

individuals with multiple identities, multiple subjectivities, and multiple social locations are displayed in the lack of language to describe such experiences. However, throughout this project I found that while academic and professional literature may have a lack of language to describe diverse gender experiences, the terminology is being used, created, and defined throughout online contexts by young people. While some scholars argue that creating new language and terminology to describe a variety of gender expressions may lead to further categorization and labelling of individuals (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Mallon & Decrescenzo, 2006), I believe that the results of my research display that new language and terminology is continually evolving and being used in different ways.

I hope that the findings of my research will serve to expand the understanding of what gender is and how young people interact and engage with this concept in their lives. As Calhoun Davis (2009) notes, the availability of linguistic options impacts individuals' ability to communicate the complexity of their gendered experiences. With researchers noting that an ability to self-define and theorize one's own gender is a key component of fostering resilience amongst young people with diverse genders (Singh, Meng, & Hansen, 2014), understanding how young are talking about gender is essential to supporting young people.

By being aware of how young people talk about gender, use language and create terminology to describe and discuss their gender experiences, practitioners will be better prepared to support young people in these issues without labelling or limiting their experiences. The ways in which young people are talking about gender illustrate that gender is constituted out of a complex and fluid interaction between numerous situational elements, and social experiences. While different individuals are impacted by different

factors within their situations and contexts, their genders are experienced as real, valid, and able to be understood and appreciated by others, however diverse they may be.

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Appendix A
Recruitment Materials
Recruitment Poster

EXCITING RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY

**Interested in Talking
about GENDER?**



**You are invited to participate in a
research project to explore how young
people talk about gender.**

**In order to participate in this study you
must be:**

Between the ages of 18-21

A current UVIC student

A fluent English speaker

**Identify or have experience identifying with a
non-heteronormative gender***

**Participation in this project requires participation in a one-hour
interview, as well as, optional participation in a one-hour follow-up
discussion with other participants.**

INTERESTED??? Email Mattie Walker at
[REDACTED] to learn more about this
exciting research opportunity!

**This research is being conducted in order to fulfill the requirements of the MA
program in Child and Youth Care, Mattie, the researcher, is a current MA student
within the School of Child and Youth Care at UVIC.**

***FOR THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY THE TERM "NON-HETERONORMATIVE" IS USED TO
EXPRESS THE EXPERIENCE OF POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS WHO FEEL LIKE, OR HAVE
FELT IN THEIR PAST, THAT THEY DO NOT IDENTIFY WITH DOMINANT GENDER
CATEGORIES OF MALE/MASCULINE AND FEMALE/FEMININE. THIS TERM IS USED WITH
THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF ITS LIMITATIONS AND NON-SPECIFICITY. THE RESEARCHER
ENCOURAGES INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE ISSUE WITH THIS TERM TO CONTACT THE
RESEARCHER FOR POTENTIAL PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY.**

Recruitment Emails

Email to Undergraduate Students

Dear First and Second Year Undergraduate Students,

My name is Mattie Walker and I am currently an MA student in the School of Child and Youth Care. I am conducting research for my final thesis in order to fulfil the requirements of my graduate program. The title of my research project is: Gender and Language – Exploring How Non-Heteronormative Youth Talk about Gender.

I am currently recruiting first and second year undergraduate students to participate in a one-hour interview answering questions about how they talked about gender while they were high school students and how they continue to talk about gender in their lives today. I am interested in interviewing individuals who have talked about and thought about their gender. This study explores the words individuals use to talk about and explain their gender and it is hoped that participants will be able to share a variety of language, words, and terminology that they have used or been exposed to in their lives as they explore their gender.

Participants will have the option to participate in an optional one-hour follow-up group discussion with other participants in the study following their interview.

I am recruiting participants who are first or second year students, between the ages of 18-21, and who identify or have experience identifying with non-heteronormative standards of gender, and who are fluent in English. Potential participants that are interested in this research project are individuals who feel like, or have felt in their past, that they do not identify with dominant gender categories of male/masculine and female/feminine and who have talked about this experience in their lives.

Interested participants can contact me, the researcher, at (contact email) for more information. Potential participants should be aware that I am a current MA student and TA in the School of Child and Youth Care. Students are in no way obligated to participate in this study; participation should be entirely voluntary. Participation in this study should in no way be associated with potential advantages in any other capacity in which the researcher and participants may be interacting (i.e. TA and student relationship).

Could you please forward this email along with the attached recruitment poster, to the undergraduate students in the School of Child and Youth Care?

Thank you. Sincerely,
Mattie Walker

Email to Professors for In-class Recruitment Request

Dear Professor,

My name is Mattie Walker and I am currently an MA student in the School of Child and Youth Care. I am conducting research for my final thesis in order to fulfil the requirements of my graduate program. The title of my research project is: Gender and Language – Exploring How Non-Heteronormative Youth Talk about Gender. I am currently recruiting first and second year undergraduate students to participate in a one-hour interview answering questions about how they talked about gender while they were high school students and how they continue to talk about gender in their lives today I am interested in interviewing individuals who have talked about and thought about their gender. This study explores the words individuals use to talk about and explain their gender and it is hoped that participants will be able to share a variety of language, words, and terminology that they have used or been exposed to in their lives as they explore their gender.

Participants will have the option to participate in an optional one-hour follow-up group discussion with other participants in the study following their interview.

I am recruiting participants who are first or second year students, between the ages of 18-21, and who identify or have experience identifying with non-heteronormative standards of gender, and who are fluent in English. Potential participants that are interested in this research project are individuals who feel like, or have felt in their past, that they do not identify with dominant gender categories of male/masculine and female/feminine and who have talked about this experience in their lives.

I am asking for permission to speak briefly in your class about my research in order to inform your students of the opportunity to participate. I will ensure that students are aware that participation is in no way required for your class. Students will the opportunity to ask questions if they are interested.

I will bring a copy of my recruitment poster for students to look at, along with my contact information for potential participants.

Please let me know if you are able to accommodate this and if yes, the most convenient date and time for me to speak in your class.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Mattie Walker

Note: This study and recruitment processes have been approved by the Human Research Ethics Board

Appendix B

Consent Forms



Participant Consent Form – INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

Gender and Language: Exploring How Non-Heteronormative Youth Talk about Gender

You are invited to participate in a study entitled Gender and Language: Exploring How Non-Heteronormative Youth Talk about Gender that is being conducted by Mattie Walker.

I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts program in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria and you may contact me if you have further questions by emailing (contact email).

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Child and Youth Care. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Sibylle Artz. You may contact my supervisor at (contact number).

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to explore how youth who identify with non-heteronormative genders, talk about gender, create language to describe and discuss their own gender and others, and utilize available terminology to describe and discuss ideas and issues of gender.

Importance of this Research

By exploring with youth who identify with non-heteronormative genders how language and terminology is used to describe and understand gender in their own lives, this project will explore how the language used to talk about experiences of gender influences and impacts our own understanding of what gender is and practice standards of how best to support youth who identify in gender “non-conforming” ways.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are interested in talking about gender and have volunteered to participate. You identify, or have experience identifying, with non-heteronormative genders and have thought about gender in your own life. You are currently a first or second year student at the University of Victoria and are between the ages of 18 and 21. You are fluent in English.

What is Involved

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include a one-hour interview with the researcher, in which you will be asked questions about how you talk about gender, the words you use to talk about your gender, and how you utilize language and terminology to understand and express your gender. This interview will be audio recorded and a transcription will be made. The interview will be held in a University of Victoria classroom. If you wish to disclose your own gender at the time of the interview, this gender will be utilized to describe you in the final research report; however, no other identifying information will be released.

Following the interview you will be asked if you wish to be contacted about participating in an additional follow-up focus group with other participants in this study. If you wish to be contacted about participating in this opportunity, the research will email you after the interview process with further details. For your information, the other participants in the group will have participated in the interview and will have been asked the same questions that you answered in your interview.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time commitment required of the project. The interview is one-hour duration and the optional group discussion is an additional hour.

Risks

It is possible that participants may, at times, feel emotional or psychological discomfort as talking about personal experiences with gender may bring up negative experiences or emotions from the participants past or unresolved issues/concerns surrounding the participants gender-related experiences. Participants may feel discomfort if a question is too personal or sensitive.

All efforts will be made to minimize and prevent the possibility of risk during the individual interviews by clearly outlining the possible sensitivity of the subject matter and the possibility of the discussions bringing up past or current unresolved issues for the participants. The researcher will make all possible efforts to create a safe and respectful environment for participants to share their personal experiences. Participants will be informed prior to the beginning the individual interview that their participation is voluntary, that they may withdraw their consent to participate at any time, and that they reserve the right to decline answering a question that they do not feel comfortable answering.

If a participant does experience emotional or psychological discomfort the researcher will provide the participant with an opportunity to debrief their experience with the researcher privately and the researcher will provide information to on-campus and community support resources such as UVIC Counselling Services, Positive Space Network, UVIC Pride, and UVIC women's centre.

Benefits

Participants have the opportunity to expand their knowledge about gender diversity and gender experiences. Through this research, participants may learn about themselves and their own experience of gender.

This research will benefit society as it will help educate Child and Youth Care and other allied professionals/practitioners how to best support individuals who do not identify within dominate,

heteronormative gender categories. This research may help provide practitioners with insight into how to navigate this complex area of practice.

This research will benefit the state of knowledge by providing information to practitioners and professionals within the human services fields that expand our conception of how language is utilized to describe a variety of gender experiences. This research will lay the groundwork for further research to be done in this area and will help scholars to understand how language influences and shapes our understanding of gender.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your interview data will be used with your permission. If you choose to withdraw from the research project after participating in the group discussion, your data will be used in summarized format, as it is impossible to remove a single participant's data from a group discussion.

Dual Relationship

The researcher is currently a graduate student in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. The research has multiple roles within the school as a graduate student, a teaching assistant, and a research for this project. It is possible, that as a participant you have a prior relationship with the researcher. By consenting to participation in this research project, you are acknowledging that your previous relationship to the researcher has not influenced your decision to participate, you acknowledge that you are volunteering to participate and that your voluntary participation in this project in no way impacts or influences other aspects of the relationship you may hold with the researcher, including grading in classes that you may be enrolled in.

On-going Consent

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, consent will be confirmed prior to the beginning of the interview process. At the end of the interview, participants will be asked if they wish to be contacted about potential participation in a follow-up focus group discussion, you can indicate your interest in this possibility on this form below. Consent to participate in the focus group will be obtained after the interview process and again prior to the focus group.

Anonymity

In terms of protecting your anonymity, no identifying information will be published in the final research report outside of the agreed upon self-disclosure of your own gender.

The data will be stored in a locked file cabinet and on a password protected computer and will only be available to the researcher, the supervisor, and the committee of the this project.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by the data being kept safely and securely in a locked file cabinet and on a password-protected computer. Prior to the group discussion, if you so choose to participate, the participants will be reminded of the confidential nature of the discussion and will indicate their consent to keep the information shared during the discussion confidential.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: the final research report will be presented in the form of a Master of Arts thesis and will be presented during an oral defence of the thesis as a requirement for graduation. The research report may be published in an academic journal and will be available online through the University of Victoria archives of Master's theses and the online access of the academic journal it may be published with.

Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be disposed of by deleting the files permanently from the computer and shredding all paper copies of data.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include:

Researcher: Mattie Walker – (contact email)

Supervisor: Sibylle Artz – (contact email)

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

I consent to Participant in an individual interview:

Name of Participant *Signature* *Date*

I consent to be contacted about the opportunity to participate in the *optional* additional, follow-up focus group discussion:

Name of Participant *Signature* *Date*

I consent to have my self-identified gender utilized in the final research report:

Name of Participant *Signature* *Date*

SIGN ONLY IF YOU ARE WITHDRAWING FROM THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

I withdraw my consent to participate:

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

I consent to have my data included in the analysis despite my withdrawal of my participation:

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and the researcher will take a copy.

Appendix C

Interviews

Interview Questions

- 1) What is your current understanding of what the term gender means?
- 2) I am going to show you a series of pictures and ask you some questions about these pictures. These pictures have been retrieved from a publically accessible photo project available online, named “the identity project” by sarah deragon.
 - a) What gender do you think this person is?
 - b) How can you tell? (is gender something that is a visible characteristic? If yes or no, please elaborate)
 - c) How have you learned the words you are using to describe this person’s gender?
 - d) This is the person’s self-identified gender (the photos from “the identity project include the individual’s self-identified identity). Have you heard these terms used before?
 - e) If yes to above, where did you learn these terms?
 - f) If yes to question d. how do you use and understand these terms?
 - g) If no to question d. what do you think these words mean?
 - h) What have been some influencing factors on your understanding of what gender means?
- 3) How many genders do you believe there to be?
- 4) If you believe there to be more than two (masculine/feminine) genders are the other genders distinct categories?
- 5) Can you list all the genders that you know of?
- 6) I am going to ask you some questions about your high school years now:
 - a) When you were in high school did people talk about gender?
 - b) When you were in high school, how did people learn about gender?
 - c) What kind of words did you use in high school to describe and talk about gender?
 - d) What was your gender when you were in high school? Is it the same now?
 - e) Did you talk about your gender with your friends, teachers, and family when you were in high school?
 - f) How did you learn the words you knew about gender?
- 8) I am going to ask you some questions about your current gender-related language:
 - a) Do you talk about gender now?
 - b) How do you learn about gender now?
 - c) What words do you use now to describe and talk about gender?
 - d) What is your gender now?
 - e) Do you talk about your gender with your friends, family, or professors?
 - f) How have you learned the words you know now about gender?

Photos Used In the Individual Interview Process:

Photos used in the individual interview process were retrieved from publically accessible online photos from “The Identity Project” by Sarah Deragon (2014).

“The Identity Project” creator Sarah Deragon encourages others to be inspired by her project and share their ideas and projects on her webpage. I emailed Deragon and received her permission to use the photos in this research project.

Photos were used to spark conversation in the individual interviews.

Photo 1:



Photo 2:



Photo 3:



Photo 4:



Photo 5:



Photo 6:



Photo 7:

