

TOWARDS NONBINARY RHETORIC: NAVIGATING DISCOMFORT
& SHARING GENDER STORIES IN A
BINARY SOCIETY

by

Kathryn Anne Kane, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a Major in Rhetoric and Composition
May 2023

Committee Members:

Eric Leake, Chair

Rebecca Jackson

Nancy Wilson

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the trans and nonbinary community, including all of the members who are finding themselves as we are repeatedly targeted by anti-trans and anti-queer legislature that has been proposed and passed in Texas and the rest of the United States. There is a greater community looking out for you and that already loves you for who you are. We are here and we will continue to be here. Don't give up.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my parents for pushing for my education my entire life and helping me build towards my future. There is no way I would have been able to achieve what I have without you.

I would like to thank my thesis committee members, Drs. Eric Leake, Rebecca Jackson, and Nancy Wilson, for their support and encouragement to be brave enough to put my identity out into the world in the ways this thesis allowed me to do and teaching me the skills to do so. I would like to thank my friends and coworkers for listening to me when this project was all I talked about and for reminding me to take time to try to be a well-rounded human. I like to think I gave it my best go throughout this process.

Lastly, I would like to thank anyone who takes the time to read this document all the way through; I poured my brain, heart, and soul into it and hope it will be informative and enlightening.

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ABSTRACT

The nonbinary identity and its related rhetoric, while still new in academia, is a pressing matter. This project serves to introduce, define, and explain the relevancy of what it means to be nonbinary and how nonbinary rhetoric can serve humanity as a whole, as highlighted through scholarship including rhetorical analysis of texts and autoethnography. In the first chapter, a literature review is included that focuses on the influences for this project such as queer rhetoric, the rhetorical situation, and the topic of (dis)comfort as an experience of minority groups such as nonbinary people. Next, the term “nonbinary” is defined, then is explored through different texts. The second chapter dives into texts that are written by nonbinary people explaining their experiences as part of this minority group, including an article, a TED Talk, and excerpts from a book of memoirs. The third chapter moves on to guides that are written to help nonbinary people as they navigate through uncomfortable situations and hurdles they may face in daily life, primarily obstacles that center around passing, coming out, and transitioning. Then, chapter four is comprised of an autoethnography in which I depict my own gender story and how it has been part of my journey. Finally, the conclusion addresses nonbinary rhetoric and how it relates to the current trajectory of legislation in the United States, before stressing a call to action to uphold nonbinary rhetoric. The overall aim of this project is to uplift nonbinary people and educate those who may be unfamiliar with nonbinary rhetoric with the hopes of knitting society closer together with the common interest of human understanding

I. INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Nonbinary Definition

As a graduate student who identifies as nonbinary, upon starting this project, I was intrigued to see what academia had to say about this **gender identity (see the Appendix Section for a glossary of definitions of important bolded terms)**. Despite the long history of individuals who did not conform to the gender binary, **nonbinarism** seems to still be emerging in scholarly work. Society is learning to grapple with us and the normalization of the change we represent. With growing numbers of people identifying as **enbies**, I can imagine our acceptance will hopefully become more prominent in society. Nonbinary rhetoric is part of our history, which is made daily, and should be explored not only as part of queer rhetoric, but as its own field.

In this thesis, I construct nonbinary rhetoric by looking at materials informing and discussing nonbinary experiences, my own included, regarding the discomfort, including enbyphobia, nonbinary people encounter simply by existing. I discuss how nonbinary people navigate this discomfort through **passing**, **coming out** and **transitioning**, as rhetorically informed strategies.

First, I put together a definition of what I, as a nonbinary person, consider “nonbinary” to mean and consider its contrast to the common gender binary in our society. Then, I share sources both by and for nonbinary people that depict to their audiences a method or experience of action that reflects what I consider to be relevant to the definition of nonbinary and pick up on the methods of handling discomfort. I evaluate the sources based on a set of topical criteria. Criteria includes a clearly communicated interpretation of being nonbinary, thoughts on passing, coming out, transitioning, and/or enbyphobia, as well as the involvement of discomfort felt either by the nonbinary person or the people around them in a given context.

Sources include texts written by nonbinary people, including an article, a TED Talk, and excerpts from a book of memoirs. By referencing these, I aim to convey a more general image of what it is like to be nonbinary, not just my own lived experiences. Other sources I analyze were written for enbies to aid them in the discomfort they interact with in life. This includes a pamphlet on coming out, an interactive workbook on resilience in **queer** people, and a book. By using these sources, I hope to build a basis of nonbinary rhetoric.

. I then reflect on my own experiences and create an autoethnography that I believe accurately depicts my experience as a nonbinary person in a society that is still binary-centric. Based upon a rhetorical analysis, I will include thoughts on the actions of passing, coming out, transitioning and enbyphobia, including when I feel the different methods are appropriate in different settings in my life.

Literature Review

While the definitions and applications of the nonbinary identity are currently thriving in our society, the concept can still be considered a “new” or “emerging” topic when it comes to scholarly research. While there has been an increase in the interest of **transgender** studies and/or their medical-related content, this thesis is focused specifically on the nonbinary identities, the issues nonbinary people face socially, and the discourses surrounding these issues. This perspective allows me to build upon queer rhetoric, discomfort and normality, and the concept of the rhetorical situation to contribute in a scholarly direction that has not yet been explored with adequate depth.

Queer Rhetoric

Queer rhetoric drives much of my analysis. As acceptance of queer culture is being normalized, both the LGBTQ+-related and academia-related views on queer theory are being

explored regarding being nonbinary. In his article “Queering the Writing Center,” Harry Denny writes that queer people “integrate with larger society, making strategic decisions about when to invoke our identities and experiences and when to proselytize about who we are” (107). Denny also says that queer activists and scholars practice queer theory intending to “to demystify and de-naturalize structuring dynamics” (107). This highlights that the integration of what is being queered is constantly in relation to the outside majority. In the case of this thesis, that subject is nonbinary people and the materials produced regarding their identity. There are three main terms associated with managing one’s nonbinary identity: passing, coming out, and transitioning. They are closely intertwined as discussed by Denny, who gives pros and cons of coming out and passing (112) and Planned Parenthood, in their guide “What Do I Need to Know About Transitioning?” which gives information about transitioning both medically and socially. The three terms are key elements to understanding the nonbinary identity.

One hurdle that many nonbinary individuals face is the issue of coming out; this can look very different as there are unique situations for each person. Denny writes that there is strategy involved in the process of coming out and that some enbies are in safer positions in others. He compares this to the physical identifiers that other minorities, such as people of color and women, must navigate (107). The individual’s outward presentation is directly related to passing; the better someone passes, the less likely they may feel they need to come out or take steps to transition. Passing can be both a luxury and a survival tactic, depending on the context and rhetorical situation. Additionally, while coming out is ideally on the enby’s own terms, there are times where they are forced into the situation. Furthermore, transitioning aids trans people, including enbies, in the process of becoming comfortable in specific environments and spaces.

In “Comparing the Health of Non-Binary and Binary Transgender Adults in a Statewide

Non-Probability Sample,” Sari L. Reisner and Jaclyn M. W. Hughto specify some differences between (binary) transgender and nonbinary populations. This includes the idea that nonbinary individuals “may have an identity and/or expression that is either feminine or masculine, both feminine and masculine, or neither” while trans individuals often identify within the gender binary. The distinctions and overlap between the two helps define the discomfort felt by others, including in the form of transphobia. In some cases, transphobia is studied as inclusive of binary and nonbinary transgender people such as in Salem State University’s “Anti-Oppression: Anti-Transphobia,” which specifies that transphobia is “systemized discrimination or antagonism directed against transgender/nonbinary/**genderqueer**/agender persons” due to “a desire to maintain the gender binary.” This informs the definition of transphobia that leads to my delivery of a working definition of enbyphobia which is more specific to nonbinary people.

Queer rhetoric is increasingly becoming a subject of focus in rhetorical studies. GPat Patterson writes in the introduction of the 2020 trans edition of *Peitho*, which is called “Because Trans People Are Speaking: Notes on Our Field’s First Special Issue on Transgender Rhetorics,” that trans (including nonbinary) people are simply speaking, which on the most basic level makes their presence and work in society rhetorical. Patterson says that “trans people are crafting arguments that, quite frankly, need listened to, because cis culture’s profound lack of imagination about the ways gender is weaponized and racialized doesn’t just result in terrible arguments—it results in danger, precarity, and soul murder for gender-expansive people” (Patterson). The relevance of the way nonbinary people oppose the gender binary is important as it creates discomfort that can prompt serious results.

In “Queer Rhetoric in Situ” Jean Bessette defines the concept of heteronormativity and its prominence in social life (150) and discusses how queer is seen not necessarily positively. It can

be seen as being so far from normal that it is sometimes seen negatively as “antinormative” (151). Similarly, the term “nonbinary” is sometimes defined as being anti-gender or a third gender. The definitions of these two terms focus on what each given identity is not, rather than what it is. Due to this lack of acknowledgement, enbies sometimes feel “not trans enough” or “not nonbinary enough” to claim the label. However, Bessette writes, “a single act can be *both queer and normative*” (italics in original, 156), just as how a person can be nonbinary and normative. The concept of normality regarding being nonbinary is dependent on what the individual feels is “normal.” There is no one true way to be “normal,” and acceptance can be achieved in a variety of actions to support nonbinary individuals. Reaching an ideal environment that uplifts enbies with equity is dependent on what is considered acceptable by the dominant culture.

In “Queer Feelings,” a chapter of *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed defines what queer ideality looks like for queer theorists:

For queer theorists, it is hence important that queer lives do not follow the scripts of heteronormative culture: that they do not become, in Halberstam’s term, “homonormative” lives. Such lives would not desire access to comfort; they would not have families, get married, settle down into unthinking coupledness, give birth to and raise children, join neighborhood watch, or pray for the nation in times of war. Each of these acts would “support” the ideals that script such lives as queer, failed, and unlivable in the first place. (149)

Indeed, the way in which queer lives are accepted brings up controversy and, for some, discomfort. If the acceptance a group wants is coming from a party they are trying not to emulate, do they truly want that acceptance from those people? This is especially pertinent when

the party is oppressive or others the group seeking acceptance. The pressures and restraints on what is socially acceptable are a burden nonbinary people face daily. Success would be the freedom to live their most authentic selves, but realistically, that often comes with judgement, exclusion, and violence. Would the binary members of society accept the enbies because they have expanded tolerance to what binary people consider monumental differences? Or would the acceptance come only after they find enough similarities to feel comfortable? Are they willing to do either of these? Will enbies ever be able to be their true, authentic self at all times?

This group of sources contributes to the understanding of what it means to be queer, transgender, and more specifically, what it means to be nonbinary. It begins the discussion on the ways in which nonbinary people act upon the discomfort they may face and actions they take to maneuver through those feelings.

Nonbinary (Dis)Comfort and the Rhetorical Situation

Rhetorical analysis can illuminate standards made by society and the comfort or discomfort nonbinary people face when deciding if they are going to follow those standards. The scholarship reviewed here also discusses the important concepts of nonbinary people feeling uncomfortable in certain spaces, as well as society feeling uncomfortable with the nonbinary gender. It highlights the concept of binaries and contrast in spaces and how this is something enbies have to work through. Joshua Chambers-Letson notes in his chapter of *Keywords for Gender and Sexuality Studies*, called “Identity,” that when identity becomes a sense of selfsameness with like people, the separation between self and other increases and becomes problematic; this may lead to inequality in key aspects of life including money, power, knowledge, resources, etc. (117). This lack of balance places one identity group as one with greater acceptance and importance, while demoting and suppressing the other. In this context, it

is binary and nonbinary people, respectively. This imbalance seeps into many parts of society and firmly supports the idea that being nonbinary is not “normal,” which feeds into negative mindsets that lead to some spaces to being uncomfortable.

Ahmed discusses her discomfort in heteronormative spaces to explain rhetoric’s role in the experience of being in spaces that do or do not welcome queer people. This includes restrictions in social spaces in which queer people are asked not to make straight people uncomfortable with their public affection (148). This othering of anything that is not heteronormative applies discomfort to nonbinary people; they often feel this social pressure in everyday spaces as compared to their comfort levels in accepting spaces. This feeds into the internal debate about passing versus coming out in these spaces.

To help understand how nonbinary discourses may be situational, I turn to the concept of the rhetorical situation. The rhetorical situation is a fundamental part of writing and communicating effectively. Jeffrey and Zickel write about the five parts: author, audience, setting, purpose, and text. Their chapter, “What is the Rhetorical Situation?” focuses on the importance of these aspects while putting the information into informal language, which I found to be a helpful review as well as a solid foundation. Another valuable resource was Lloyd Bitzer’s “The Rhetorical Situation.” This source broke down key details of rhetorical situations regarding subjects such as rhetorical discourse and exigence. Exigence can be seen as a catalyst that prompts authors to create their texts. This term can be defined in more detail as an urgent occasion for writing, which can lead to change as carried out by the audience; this is shown on the poster of the rhetorical situation by College Composition and Communication. This source provided, in my opinion, the most palatable definition, which aided in my understanding. Applying a theory of the rhetorical situation to nonbinary discourse can demonstrate its

occasions, possibilities, and constraints.

In Jenny Edbauer's piece, "Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies," she explores the variety of interpretations of the phrase "Keep Austin Weird" and follows the correlating connotations. This theory of ecologies informs a wider analysis of the rhetorical situation informs and supports my analysis of nonbinary rhetoric and discomfort by prompting me to look beyond the immediate rhetorical situation and into other associations.

Together, these resources provide ample explanation of key terms that build rhetorical situations and their relevance in the larger picture of communication and articulation. In doing this, they incorporate context that allows for other associations and a deeper understanding as related to outside connotations. An understanding of rhetorical situations is important as I analyze nonbinary rhetorical strategies in context, as well as the creation and experience of uncomfortable nonbinary situations.

Research Questions

While observing discomfort experienced both by and regarding nonbinary people, I collected many ideas which came from my own experiences and those of others who identify as nonbinary. While looking at these texts and relating them to different types of rhetoric, I found that while there is much to be said about queer rhetoric, the same depth of exploration is not evident in nonbinary rhetoric. This led me to the following questions:

Primary Question:

- Given interest in queer rhetoric and the lack of nonbinary rhetoric, what might a theory of nonbinary rhetoric look like?

Secondary Questions:

- How do nonbinary writers describe their navigation of uncomfortable situations? How are these situations rhetorically created for nonbinary people?
- How do online guides aid people, particularly nonbinary people, to face discomfort in society? How does this correspond with contemporary rhetorical theory, especially around identity and rhetorical action?
- How might one understand nonbinary rhetoric in reflecting on one's own life and experience in situations that highlight nonbinary identity and discomfort?

Methodology

To address these questions, I first conducted analysis of texts written by others. When looking for texts written by nonbinary people, I identified the references to passing, coming out, and transitioning. I also searched for actions that indicate discomfort, either on the side of the enby or society, as well as enbyphobia. I looked for messages and depictions of what I believe are relatable and relevant based on my own life experiences and those of other enbies I know. While reading these texts, I highlighted and made notes about the parts I identified as describing uncomfortable situations and the writers' experiences in those situations. Then, I analyzed the references to provide insight into nonbinary experiences and their construction and communication. Using this material, I constructed a rhetorical understanding about how feelings and actions are discussed within the selected texts.

While reading documents written to guide nonbinary people, I analyzed the material for a few key ideas. First, I looked for how these guides recognize rhetorical qualities of nonbinary identity. Elements may be related to what to say, whom to talk to, outward appearance, and the fact that gender is socially coded in our society. I highlighted and made note of these important

moments in the texts. Additionally, I looked for how these sources arm enbies to prepare for the discomfort they may face in society and potentially, internally, using this rhetorical information. I considered how this empowerment impacts the advice these documents give. Specifically, I searched for the advice given regarding passing, coming out, and transitioning, and considered how this advice is rhetorical in nature.

I also created an autoethnography composed of my own experiences. Since my research is based on the experiences of nonbinary people and I identify as a nonbinary person, I believe autoethnography is the best research method to use as it allows the writer to discuss their experiences as related to a group they are a part of. I choose to use my own life so that I could find and expand on details that are directly related to the material in my analysis. Doing so also allowed me more flexibility and ease of access to materials. Additionally, situating myself in the research is beneficial because it encourages the audience to learn from a direct source, giving them authentic answers and increasing my credibility as a writer.

To do this, I revisited an autoethnography that was originally intended to be the final production for a class called Autoethnography. The piece was to represent the knowledge I had collected throughout the course about effective autoethnographies as well as fit the definition of autoethnography built by the class. I adapted it to more closely align with the themes discussed in my thesis. Part of this process includes restructuring current material and adding new material. All ideas linked back to nonbinary rhetoric and the core ideas of passing, coming out, transitioning, discomfort, and enbyphobia.

Limitations

Since gender identity is personal and unique to every individual, there is no way to encompass the experiences, ideas, and feelings of every single nonbinary person. Gender is

complex and nearly any study on it would yield the same limitation. My hope is that this thesis allows the audience to understand experiences that are not their own, but those of nonbinary people, and to inform others on the discomforts and challenges that are common to nonbinary people daily. I aim to present and highlight these instances of discomfort and modes of navigating through them to bring attention to those who may not be aware of what this population endures. I acknowledge that not every enby has these problems and that these problems can be faced by other trans folks, including those who identify with labels that are sometimes under and sometimes outside of the umbrella of nonbinary identity. This is not meant to speak for all individuals nor is it to create rigid structures that might lead to gatekeeping of gender identity labels.

Organization of Thesis

This thesis will present upcoming information in the following order: Chapter 2 will rhetorically analyze texts written by nonbinary people. The texts analyzed are the article “They, Then and Now” by Brock Colyar; “A Nonbinary Transition,” the TED Talk by Sage Skyler; and excerpts from *Nonbinary Memoirs of Gender and Identity* edited by Micah Rajunov and Scott Duane. The purpose of the chapter is to normalize the nonbinary identity and the ways in which it is rhetorically significant. Chapter 3 will rhetorically analyze texts written for nonbinary people to benefit them in their journey to embodying themselves. The texts featured are: the guide, *Coming Out: Living Authentically as Transgender or Non-Binary* by the Human Rights Campaign, the book, *How to Understand Your Gender: A Practical Guide for Exploring Who You Are* by Alex Iantaffi and Meg-John Barker, and the interactive workbook, *The Queer & Transgender Resilience Workbook: Skills for Navigating Sexual Orientation & Gender Expression* by Anneliese Singh. This chapter discusses gender stories and the ways in which

guides advise nonbinary people on how to build, adjust to, and tell the stories. Chapter 4 will consist of my autoethnography on my gender identity, which serves as an example to show the significance of sharing gender stories. Lastly, there is a conclusion chapter to discuss the importance of nonbinary rhetoric and relate it to recent American legislation and the larger relevancy of a nonbinary-inclusive society.

II. EXPERIENCES OF THEYDIES AND GENTLETHEM

Introduction

This chapter focuses on personal texts written by nonbinary people. This first section serves to highlight the ways in which coming out can be crucially different depending on the elements of the rhetorical situation at each instance. I illustrate these points, as well as put into practice questions enbies often think about regarding coming out with a theoretical case study and analysis. Next, I bring attention to the rhetorical act of transitioning and the discomfort that surfaces when nonbinary people present themselves. Finally, I discuss quotes from memoirs written by people who are nonbinary as they relate to common hurdles such as a lack of support from other LGBTQ+ individuals, functioning in the workplace, and rebellion against society's gender binary. Together, these parts explore some of the experiences that come with being nonbinary and interacting with other people and some of their driving rhetorical factors. They include elements of the rhetorical situation that are applicable to when a nonbinary person passes, comes out, or transitions; the discomfort that occurs when enbies break the gender binary; how that discomfort can lead to conflict and negative reactions; reflection on gender as prompted by queer theory; the impacts of minority stress theory, association, and theory of ecologies; and gender norms and social role theory.

I first focus on a selection from *The Cut* entitled "They, Then and Now" by Brock Colyar, who identifies as nonbinary. This article discusses Colyar's experiences regarding coming out. They focus on how pronouns are relevant to their life as an enby, as well as their relation to the rhetorical situation of coming out, discomfort that coming out may cause, and the fake wokeness of some binary people. I then consider a theoretical case study of a nonbinary teenager determining how and when to come out to their family. The next text I focus on is a TED Talk by Sage Skyler. I analyze the video with attention to the process of transitioning and

the rhetorical situation. I conclude with an analysis of selections from an edited collection of nonbinary memoirs. Throughout this chapter, I aim to normalize the nonbinary identity.

“They, Then and Now” by Brock Colyar

In their article, Colyar takes the time to note who their rhetorical audience is by primarily bringing their attention to and targeting the frequent existence of some people who feel that they are woke as they take the time to ask for Colyar (and perhaps others’) pronouns. Lloyd F. Bitzer says that the rhetorical audience can be influenced by discourse and they can be mediators of change (8). Despite the woke and progressive image they express, Colyar notes that these people are really doing so to boost their self-esteem during the pronoun exchange; Colyar says this population is trying to elevate themselves “with [their] deft ally-ness.” These people are not truly allies, as they are self-motivated. Colyar writes that if someone were to ask them for their pronouns, they, themselves, would in turn, ask that party for their pronouns; Colyar addresses the audience saying, “By the end of the ten-word exchange, I’d be a little exhausted and you’d be a little on edge. And if I had to guess, you’d still probably fuck up my pronouns the next time you use them. You almost certainly would when I’m not standing right in front of you.”

The lack of attention that Colyar anticipates from these people displays for the audience the ineffectiveness of the interaction, which contradicts the ally-ness they are seemingly trying to achieve. After being informed of the problems with that perspective, the audience is encouraged to reflect on their own actions. Before reading Colyar’s work, they may assume that making an effort is enough to support nonbinary people, when in reality, it is not contributing to a more progressive society if one is not following through and using the enby’s pronouns every time. This is also relevant when a nonbinary person chooses to use gendered pronouns such as she/her or he/him. One’s pronouns often, but not always, correspond with gender. Gender-neutral

pronouns like they/them and ze/hir deserve the same amount of respect as the gendered pronouns English-speakers are accustomed to.

The act of not using an enby's pronouns correctly seems to stem from discomfort, either personal or learned from society. For many people, saying pronouns that do not correlate with the gender they assume a nonbinary person to be is uncomfortable. Colyar's idea that the fake-woke audience member, or any audience member, would feel "a little on edge" after an interaction about pronouns clearly shows that while society is becoming more inclusive of gender diversity, having to consider an individual's pronouns and/or gender may not come easily nor naturally to many. Additionally, an enby may feel uncomfortable facing a population of people who do not put in much effort to respecting their pronouns. Being forced to blaze one's own trail in order to truly be themselves can be anxiety-inducing. This discomfort, on one or both sides, can be a constraint in the rhetorical situation, impacting the flow of the exchange.

Alternatively, while someone's position outside the man and woman gender binary can often unsettle binary and **cisgender** people, it can be something an enby is comfortable with. Many enbies like Colyar find confidence in their identity. Colyar writes, "There's power in sloughing off both [he and she pronouns], and some fun, especially when I see how befuddled the whole thing can make people. There is a certain satisfaction in making this confusion you seem to be having — *What box to put Brock in?* — your problem, not mine. I've thought enough about it." They are saying that identifying as nonbinary is "[their] way of saying to everyone else, 'I'm not playing your game.'" I think this confidence in owning an aspect of oneself in a society that does not traditionally accept it is one reason why some people react so negatively to the nonbinary identity. Strong reactions can produce fear and/or hatred, resulting in **transphobia** and **transmisia**—with transphobia being a fear of trans people and transmisia being hatred

towards them— and more specifically, **enbyphobia** and **enbymisia**, with the correlating feelings towards enbies.

Enbyphobia and enbymisia have a direct impact on the way that all people, both binary and nonbinary, see nonbinary people. It explicitly targets enbies and puts forth hatred towards them through attitudes, beliefs, and policies that can range in intensity. Planned Parenthood defines transphobia and transmisia as “when people have deeply rooted negative beliefs about what it means to be transgender, nonbinary, and **gender nonconforming**. Their beliefs affect the way they, the government, organizations, the media, and society generally treat people whose identities don’t fit into typical gender roles” (“What’s Transphobia”). Transphobia and transmisia can lead to harmful effects such as “discrimination, harassment, and sometimes violence,” while also impacting their rights and levels of safety; this can occur in the following ways: “stigmatizes or harms [enbies]; denies the validity of their identities; sees them as less human; and/or treats them as less worthy of care and respect” (“What’s Transphobia”). To be more specific to nonbinary people, enbyphobia and enbymisia can be considered to align with these same detriments, with a focus on hatred due to existing outside the gender binary.

To separate enbyphobia and enbymisia from transphobia and transmisia, a comparison of submission to gender norms and binary **gender expression** can be made. Enbies must be prepared to face a different kind of backlash that occurs by their existence outside of the binary. For binary transgender individuals, passing becomes a main concern in order to avoid the results of not looking appropriately feminine or appropriately masculine. Nonbinary individuals may often, and perhaps sometimes more likely, not desire to pass in order to express themselves. They may feel that they feel most like themselves when they experiment with femininity, masculinity, androgyny, or some combination of the three. In other words, binary trans people

have an expected and preset desired outcome that society approves of. Many trans men adjust to traditional masculine aesthetics and many trans women adjust to traditional feminine aesthetics. Many nonbinary people's expression leaves them outside of those constructed expectations and that makes society uncomfortable, though enbies can face their own feelings of discomfort.

Michael L. Hendricks and Ryan J. Testa apply Meyer's theory of minority stress (including that of the LGB community) to trans communities. They note the three processes in which minorities experience stress: environmental and external stressors, anticipation and expected stress (in combination with the vigilance needed for the stressors), and the negative and prejudiced beliefs internalized in society (Hendricks and Testa 462) which involves transphobia and transmisia. Nonbinary people, as people who are inherently trans, experience these processes, often on a daily basis when preparing for any activity outside of their home. When enbyphobia and enbymisia are considered, the density by which these concepts have integrated into society allows them to fuel all three of the processes. The prominent existence of binary-driven options such as gendered bathrooms and medical documentation are constant reminders to nonbinary people that they do not fit in in public spaces. The ways in which people sometimes act towards enbies when they subscribe to enbyphobia and enbymisia can be dangerous. Hendricks and Testa's article gives evidence from multiple studies on violence experienced by individuals of trans populations, including nonbinary individuals; they report that "physical violence [was experienced] ranging from 43% to 60% [of those surveyed] and reported rates of sexual violence ranging from 43% to 46%" (Hendricks and Testa 462). Entering a public space in a binary society with the fear of violence that could target them for their simple existence would prompt the second process of minority stress, negative anticipation. This could lead to an anxious existence with many possible triggers due to unpleasant experiences. Minority stress

theory feeds into nonbinary rhetoric as it supports the concern and need for nonbinary rhetoric; enbies are a population of people who endure gender in a way that most of society does not which has led to a variety of feelings about encounters with others.

Colyar quotes an unnamed friend saying that being out publicly as nonbinary is like saying the statement, “I’m not asking you to consider my gender as much as I am asking you to spend a little time considering yours.” Society seems to be bothered by people expressing satisfaction in something it does not fully (or sometimes even partially) understand. Taking a moment to reevaluate and reflect on oneself can be something humans do not like to do, so many opt to avoid doing that and reject those who do and encourage the practice. As a result, binary and cisgender people often continue to put enbies in boxes. Colyar recalls a time in which they disclosed their gender-neutral pronouns at their workplace but following this was assigned to write about male feminism. They learned that “new pronouns wouldn’t do much to change the way [they were] perceived by others.” This struggle leads Colyar to ponder the relevance of they/them pronouns and the impact they have. They wonder if their use of they/them pronouns were worth it or not or not if the individual does not match the gender neutrality society expects from people who use those pronouns. This sometimes makes enbies question the validity of their gender identity. There is often the worry that an enby feels too masculine or feminine to be nonbinary, and that is reinforced by the actions of others, such as ignoring the enby’s pronouns or associating them with the gender they were assigned at birth. Sometimes, people feel uncomfortable with the contrast between someone’s gender expression and how their physical features may look due to their gender assigned at birth. In this context, perhaps feeling that the gender binary is being threatened, asking for the enby’s pronouns can unsettle the enby as well. For example, Colyar quotes someone called Christopher who says that at times they find being

asked for their pronouns sometimes more uncomfortable than being misgendered. They say:

I go to work. I'm wearing a miniskirt. Everyone asks me for my pronouns. To me, what that means is 'I see that you're a man. And I see that you're dressed in a woman's costume. And I would like to know whether or not you want me to participate in the fantasy you're having.' I don't think my answer should fundamentally change anything about how we're interacting right now. And the fact that you're so desperate to know is weird.

The desire of binary, and typically cisgender, people to know what gender a nonbinary person was assigned at birth is, in my opinion, the most irritating part of interacting with people who are on the binary. I agree with Christopher that it feels like the overly inquisitive and judgmental population thinks you are indulging in a fantasy and that these people's desperation to get a satisfying answer is definitely weird. Does that make it difficult to determine those who want to put the nonbinary person in a box from those who genuinely want to know their pronouns? Yes—but the former is so common, that many nonbinary people feel that they have to be prepared for maximum discomfort. The preparation, part of minority stress theory, can be described as anxiety-inducing upkeep. The rhetorical situation of being asked for one's pronouns can only go as smoothly as the rhetorical situation in which the question is asked, and at times, the enby does not have much control over that. If an enby were asked what their pronouns were by a new coworker that they would be working closely with, that would be much more tolerable and expected than if they were asked by a stranger standing next to them waiting for the crosswalk light to change that they will likely never see again.

Additionally a nonbinary person's discomfort can stem from people who become obsessed with saying one's pronouns correctly at all times. Colyar quotes a nonbinary person

identified as Sam saying that “Although the people I work with are very nice, they’re also 45-year-old women who are gonna fuck up and make it super-awkward when they fuck up. “Oh my God. I didn’t mean that.” “Oh my God. I’m so sorry.” “Oh my God. Are you offended?” I don’t want to deal with that.”” These types of overreactions can feel alienating, depicting accommodating pronouns as walking on eggshells, as not to upset the enby.

Colyar also writes about feeling as if they are consumed by pronouns, and it is important to recognize that enbies are not and should not be limited to their pronouns. Their subject Sam continues to say, ““If you know my pronouns, you know very little about me. It was never about the pronoun. We’re doing it for other people. In an ideal universe, I don’t need to have a pronoun”” (Colyar). Needing words to define who we are is a necessity in our society in order to have a common understanding.

Bitzer writes that language “is a mode of action and not an instrument of reflection” (4), reinforcing the idea that words are not a perfect representation of concepts like gender, but they are the best solution we have. We apply this thought to everyone’s pronouns, and as we do, we understand that the person we are speaking about exists past that word. They have a personality, beliefs, thoughts, and other qualities that make up their identity. I consider this need to expand to be part of nonbinary rhetoric. As a subset of queer rhetoric, nonbinary rhetoric asks people to take a look at their own roles and identities in academia and beyond, including who they are professionally, personally, and privately. Nonbinary rhetoric specifically extends past the binary and into the unknown— given that the unknown is, in fact, unknown, and will be inherently limited by the requirement of having to explain it with words in which we, as people, do know.

Thankfully, words are constantly in the making and society today is frequently faced with new pronouns. However, English speakers still do not have one perfect, neutral, binary-and-

nonbinary-encompassing pronoun. Dennis Baron says that as people begin to realize that gender is both political and grammatical, there is a search for what some people call “the missing word,” a term that refers to people of all genders while also concealing gender (5). This “missing word” could be a solution to misgendering and could alleviate some discomfort in those who dislike learning multiple new pronouns, sometimes called neopronouns.

Enbies’ (and others’) pronouns do not always correspond with gender identity in terms of masculinity, femininity, and androgyny. Someone may present masculine but still consider themselves nonbinary and want to be referred to with fae/faer pronouns. Someone else might present androgynously on some days and feminine on others but want to consider themselves nonbinary and want to be referred to with he/him pronouns. A third person who prefers they/them pronouns in their personal life decides that going with she/her at work will make them more comfortable, they might do so. This may allow them to pass and avoid questions about their gender. All of these options are valid and break society’s gender norms.

Nonbinary people have some of their own gender norms already, there is this false assumption that nonbinary is the “the third gender” and all enbies must appear gender neutral. However, since nonbinary is inherently outside of the gender binary, it is defined by what it is not using the words that we have. It is not man. It is not woman. Is it both? Neither? A combination? Every enby has a different experience and a unique answer. When combined, the individuality of each enby’s life works to build past society’s ideas of what it means to have a gender and into a place where there are endless combinations of proclaiming self-expression and ways to smash gender norms. I consider the ideal universe Sam mentioned earlier, where pronouns are not needed, to be a sort of response to the idea that allows each individual’s experience with gender to exist without limitations and without discomfort. Expanding the

definition of nonbinary to encompass everything that is not on the binary requires a great amount of exploration, as well as acceptance from both enbies and the people who interact with them.

It must be acknowledged that people can and will misgender other people, and they deserve grace regarding that. There is no switch to flip to automatically correct someone's choice of words; changing minds is a process. Colyar quotes Jack Halberstam who commented on a receptionist who misgendered him, "I can't say to that woman in the office, 'How dare you?' This is her job. I need to be generous about what she's doing all day as well, not demanding on every level that I am comfortable." People are constantly works in progress, as their knowledge goes through its own transition, and should have the room to adjust to changes that are important to enbies' lives.

However, the enby should not have to manage the upkeep nor hold others' hands on their way to understanding. Colyar says, "I've often also told myself it was my privileged duty — as someone, for whatever reason, not terribly easily triggered — to be other people's workshop. I was, effectively, a safe space for them. And maybe they would do better the next time they met a nonbinary or trans person." An enby can often fill that role of an educator, one who needs to create that safe space for others to adjust to the change in someone's pronouns, name, or other forms of gender expression. They should not have to be.

Nonbinary rhetoric highlights this extra mental strain placed on enbies; they should not have to explain or defend their existence. There is much more to a nonbinary person's identity than their pronouns. There is much more than the gender binary. This rhetorical situation changes based upon who is there and what is being exchanged. What does the audience already know? What do they not know? What should they know? What should be left out? These are all questions nonbinary people must consider.

Theoretical Case Study

For example, imagine a sixteen-year-old nonbinary individual named Alex. Alex was **assigned female at birth (AFAB)** and chooses to dress androgynously in an effort to affirm their gender identity. They are not out to their family. Alex is spending time with their twelve-year-old sister, Shay, humoring her by watching a fashion show with her. Shay makes commentary about whether or not she would wear the clothes presented. Then, a new designer's clothes are shown, the outfits being worn by both masculine and feminine models; the clothes are fairly conservative and feature neutral colors with minimal patterns. Shay announces she thinks Alex would look good in such clothes; "They're very *you*," she says. "I know you don't like to show off your body and don't really like to be girly. And that's okay." Alex beams. In this moment, they feel confidence towards their relationship with their sister.

Considering the questions above, Alex debates whether or not to come out to Shay. They think about what Shay already knows about their relationship with gender. She already knows Alex distances themselves from femininity in their physical appearance. Alex also prefers to do yard work with the siblings' father rather than clean the house with Shay and the siblings' mother. Alex plays on a girls' soccer team and Shay notices their face drops each time the coach tells her "Good job, girl!" Additionally, they read nonfiction books about psychology and Alex knows that Shay saw them drop one they were reading when she entered their bedroom last week. The title had the word "gender" in it.

Shay does not know about the internal struggles Alex has trying to understand why they do not feel the ways they are "supposed to" towards their appearance and why their interests deviate so much from what everyone thinks they should like. Alex's little attraction to makeup and the idea that they are debating chopping their long hair because it does not feel true to them illustrates the distance they want to put between themselves and femininity. Shay does not know

that Alex is up late at night pondering these thoughts, not because they are doing homework like they tell their family. She also does not know the euphoria and sense of belonging Alex felt when they discovered the term “nonbinary” online. It was as if the brokenness they were feeling about themselves was remedied by a glue of understanding. They now had a place to start understanding themselves better as a nonbinary individual and not a malfunctioning girl.

Alex does not know how well-versed Shay is in LGBTQ+ vocabulary, much less if she would be able to fully understand nonbinary-related struggles. Perhaps Alex is not interested in fashion for reasons such as those mentioned in “‘Soft Armor’ For Ugly Bodies” by Erin J. Rand, which mentions that queer people are among many groups “whose bodies are subject to surveillance, physical and verbal violence, institutional confinement or intervention, and unsolicited scrutiny and public commentary” (370). Alex knows that cis straight girls like Shay do not carry this stress in the same way, much less would Shay comprehend the heaviness of those reasons at twelve years old. Shay does not know what it is like to feel out of place in the locker room after soccer practice or to only want baggy clothes because her body does not feel like it represents her gender.

The siblings have a gay cousin, so she has had some exposure, but Alex does not know if Shay even knows what “nonbinary” means. They, themselves, only discovered the term a few months ago. They are also unsure of how Shay would take the news. The two were raised in a Christian household and their parents were firm in their beliefs. Alex likes to hope that Shay would be more accepting than Alex expects their parents to be but does not know how much Shay still subscribes to their church’s negative opinion of the queer community. Shay still attends youth group weekly, but Alex does not know if that is fully by Shay’s choice or if she feels pressured by their parents. Alex does recognize other sources of influence, such as Shay’s

friends, teachers, and schoolmates; they like to believe that as society becomes more accepting and as more enbies come out, that the people in Shay's life will react with positivity, or at least tolerance. On the other side, Alex also knows that children can be mean, and teachers are sometimes set in their ways. They hope for the best but cannot help but add the ways others have influenced Shay to their list of worries.

Alex wants Shay to know that their identity is important to them and that it is not fleeting. They have felt this way their entire life; they just did not have a word for it until a few months ago. Alex wants Shay to know that their relationship will not change fundamentally; all that Alex plans to ask for is that Shay use they/them pronouns for them and say that they are Shay's sibling, not sister. Alex knows that Shay is intelligent for her age and has picked up on the ways that they do and do not express themselves. She understands that Alex dresses like Alex, and that their choices make them who they are. She conveyed this mindset in her commentary about fashion. Alex has been a role model for Shay since birth and Shay has normalized Alex's behavior.

Alex is willing to answer any questions Shay might have but is cognizant that they do need to hold back parts of their journey thus far. Shay does not need to know about all of the negative and self-deprecating thoughts that have stormed through Alex's head before they could label their identity or the various ways it has undermined their self-esteem. She does not need to hear about all of the other labels Alex rummaged through, trying to find the right one, and how frustrating that process was. Shay is twelve and does not need to be overwhelmed; a simple definition and request for pronoun changes should suffice.

Now consider another scenario. Alex's mother is helping them pack clothes before the family goes on a long vacation. She complains that Alex does not dress like how she believes a

young woman should. Alex wears a lot of neutral colors and avoids skirts and dresses at all costs. Alex defends themselves by saying that the clothes they have selected to bring are the clothes they feel comfortable in. Alex's mom continues to make note of the neutrality and androgyny of the clothes in the suitcase as she moves each garment. Eventually, Alex's mom begins looking for alternative options and reaches the back of the closet, where Alex has disregarded their dresses. Alex's mom gets increasingly frustrated, "Are you ever going to wear these? You never wear what I buy you. It's like you hate all of it and dress like a man. Do you wish you were a boy? Or are you a lesbian or something?" Alex freezes under the immense pressure to come out.

Alex's mother notes Alex's rejection of many feminine concepts: makeup, feminine clothing, housework, among other things. Alex has never been to a school dance, and rarely dresses up. Additionally, Alex does not seem to enjoy family time. When they do spend time with the family, she has noticed Alex prefers spending time with their father, especially outside, but spends even more time alone in their room. Other times, she will let Shay in her room if she knocks. She understands that Alex does not feel comfortable often, especially regarding girly matters, but she does not understand why.

This upfront prompt delivered by Alex's mother almost certainly triggers thoughts related to the minority stress theory. Alex is likely pondering *How will she react? Will she get loud? Offensive? Violent? Can she handle this? Can I handle this? Will this change everything?* Alex's mom does not know how much fear is in Alex's heart regarding coming out to her. Her dedication to her beliefs is strong and Alex understands the grip religion has on the way in which she lives her life. Alex knows it is why their mother has subscribed to enbyphobia and why they feel she may be a case of enbymisia. Alex's mom does not know that the comments she makes towards Alex about normalized ideals she believes are appropriate for women is harmful to

Alex's wellbeing. Alex takes each comment about their distancing from girly matters to heart and feels like a disappointment. They cannot present as a girl, but even more so, they cannot present as themselves. Alex's mom does not, and as a cisgender woman, cannot, truly understand the discomfort Alex is facing each time they interact with people who expect them to be a traditional young woman and how forcing them to appear as one takes a toll on them.

If Alex decides to come out, Alex's mom needs to understand that they are still the same person they were before they claimed the nonbinary label, if not a more improved version. Now that Alex recognizes they are an enby, they have a vocabulary word to better communicate who they are to other people. Alex's mom needs to recognize that any choices Alex makes to express their gender as they please is crucial to their confidence and comfort. These choices may, but will not certainly, take them in a masculine direction to compensate for the femininity that has been pushed on them their entire life. Regardless, acknowledging Alex's freedom to make gender affirming changes and supporting those decisions will be a crucial part of their relationship.

Coming out can be an immensely important moment in an enby's life; you can only deliver the message as new information to a person once, so the way in which it occurs often leaves a lasting impression. Understanding their mom's background and beliefs will likely influence Alex to make some decisions about what they want to disclose. Alex may consider leaving out any information that explicitly contrasts with their mother's religious beliefs and their gender identity that they feel could cause further turbulence. They may also leave out phrasing that suggests blame or aggression towards actions others have taken. Coming out under pressure instead of on their own terms may make the situation more reactive; the minority stress will weigh them down. If Alex is not prepared and does not feel in control, they may not present

themselves the way that they hope to. Additionally, Alex's mom's reaction may likely reflect the same level of energy and potential panic that Alex may respond to her questions with, especially considering she probably did not expect this from, nor does she desire it for Alex.

In both scenarios, Alex must make an important rhetorical choice that has the potential to change the course of their relationships with their sister and mother. They have the power to go through with coming out, but the amount of stress placed on them resides at two very different levels; this creates two drastically different rhetorical situations.

The rhetorical situation with Shay has a pre-established environment of respect and acknowledgment. Some of this is likely built on their relationship as siblings who feel comfortable enough to share this moment without being prompted by anyone or anything. Shay delivers a compliment along with a message of acceptance for Alex's gender expression before Alex has even mentioned anything about their gender identity. Perhaps Shay has noticed that Alex's lack of femininity is an issue to other people, such as their parents, or perhaps Shay finds something about it to be unique, admirable, or otherwise interesting. These potential preconceived notions and Shay's vocalized statement play to Alex's advantage and may help minimize the discomfort Alex feels when thinking about Shay's potentially conflicting religious beliefs.

The rhetorical situation with Alex's mom proves to hold a lot more at risk. The direct and targeted questioning Alex's mother poses appears to have caught Alex off-guard, taking the control they should ideally have had over the topic. Alex is aware of the heavy constraints in the situation, including their mother's religious beliefs and therefore opposition to their true gender identity, as well as their position as a child under the authority of their mom. Alex is currently holding all of the discomfort, an application of the minority stress theory, and their choice to or

not to come out may shift some of that discomfort and emotional weight to their mother. This shift is not necessarily bad, but it does make the exigence of Alex's coming out a negative cue, which is not likely to leave a favorable impression on Alex.

Given the chance to bring up their gender identity organically and on their own terms, Alex may have felt more comfortable speaking up for themselves. They may have been able to reassure themselves in a way like Shay did, saying something like, "I dress for myself and I can wear whatever makes me comfortable." This response shows ownership of their identity and gender expression while politely countering their mother's commentary. Alex could have also started a discussion about gender, asking probing questions to help uncover how their mom reached her viewpoint; an honest discussion may be able to sway her mind and break down any enbyphobia or enbymisia she may carry. Alternatively, if they felt so inclined, Alex could have used the line from Colyar's article: "I'm not asking you to consider my gender as much as I am asking you to spend a little time considering yours." While a bold move, introducing this reflective element of queer theory may have prompted Alex's mom to confront her own beliefs about gender.

It is noteworthy to say that Alex is the only person who truly understands what is at risk each time they come out. They are the one who will have to endure any personal discomfort after the conversation, as well as aftermath that may come from their audience and any strains on the relationship with that person. The act of coming out can be tricky, especially when the audience is made of people who are important to the enby, as the enby has hopes of changing any preconceived negative or biased mindsets these people may have towards their gender identity.

The preexisting relationship with the enby is one of the strongest pieces of rhetoric the enby uses, whether they explicitly say it or not, to sway the minds of their audience. This relates

to Jenny Edbauer’s theory of ecologies regarding association discussed in her piece, “Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies.” Edbauer allowed others to think about the phrase “Keep Austin Weird” and wrote about how the connotations and connections attached to it through association influenced the reception of the phrase. In these scenarios, it can be assumed that the audience has a positive relationship with Alex, as family members; since Alex is nonbinary, nonbinarism can be associated with them. If this is part of who Alex is, and the audience, either their sister or mother, likes them as a person, being nonbinary likely should not be a drastically unfavorable quality, right? At least, this is the optimistic hope many enbies embody when preparing to come out.

“A Nonbinary Transition” by Sage Skyler

As part of a TED conference with Connecticut College, Sage Skyler delivered a presentation on what it means to transition, specifically as related to nonbinary individuals. In this section, I investigate Skyler’s definition and adaptation to the word “transition,” Skyler’s own presentation and how it may look to present as nonbinary, and existing as an enby regarding interactions with the gender binary. I do this to demonstrate an understanding of why transitioning can be so important for enbies. This will help develop a rhetorical theory of nonbinary rhetoric by investigating the relationship between an enby and society with regards to the process of transitioning and acceptance.

At the start of the video, Skyler introduces themselves to the audience; they acknowledge that their name is shown on the screen, but they reiterate that because “if [they were] going to do a talk, say, four years ago, a very different name would be broadcasted up there” and at that time they were “a very different person” (0:00-0:23). This opening statement builds Skyler’s credibility, hinting that they likely went through their own transition to fully become the person

standing before the audience. Skyler proves their understanding of their self-expression and presentation for this performance. They stand tall, with upright posture and minimal hand gestures. They display emotion through the intonation of their voice and the occasional appropriate joke. The talk builds Skyler's credibility, not only as an enby with personal experience to share, but as a speaker who understands their audience and can make the content relatable. They display knowledge through their use of many examples, which were palatable and easily digestible by the audience, which likely included many binary people.

Like Edbauer, Skyler plays on word and idea association, opening up the word "transition" to having many examples for many opportunities to relate to their audience. Skyler reminds their audience that everyone is in a constant state of transition. They explain that there are transitions of all sizes and types, such as getting married, getting a new job, adopting a cat, or discovering that tomatoes aren't so bad after all (Skyler 0:39-0:47) and most people undergo these changes to feel happy (Skyler 1:47). They also mention controlling one's transition by offering examples of ways that people control the transition of their bodies such as plastic surgery (Skyler 1:25) and taking vitamins (Skyler 1:33). Skyler does this to associate transitioning with normalcy in our society. This allows them to encourage multiple, and hopefully positive, definitions towards transitions and make the topic more relatable to their audience. For example, taking vitamins is good for one's health, which can associate transitioning with change, change with improvement, improvement with good health, leading the audience to make a link, even if it is a few steps away, between transitioning and good health. This justification is a rhetorical strategy as it appeals to their rhetorical audience, or the actual targeted audience, who are selected as to expand their potentially limited views on nonbinarism and nonbinary transition through Skyler's message. Ideally, their talk will even appeal to

audience members who may have transphobia, transmisia, enbyphobia, and/or enbymisia.

Through positive association, they then approach nonbinary transition as simply another form of transitioning that helps enbies, just like everyone else, want to feel “comfortable and confident” (2:06) saying, “So, why is changing one’s body when the surface level reason is gender often viewed as inherently different than any other way to change someone’s body?” (Skyler 2:08-2:16). By posing this question, Skyler asks the audience to evaluate what it means to identify as a gender, reflecting on the subject and queering the situation. Rhetorically, Skyler asks the audience to consider what constitutes one’s gender based on what they look like.

When Skyler flips the script on the social norms, they provide counter examples such as or female athletes who appear muscular (7:05-7:11) or men with long hair to express their cultural pride (7:27-7:32). By normalizing both masculine and feminine traits in both men and women, Skyler breaks down gender roles through gender expression, moving the audience to a greater understanding of the range of expression that enbies may use to present themselves. Not every nonbinary person looks androgynous, nor should they have to, as hair, clothes, makeup, etc. are available for all and can be utilized outside of the “cultural constructions” (Skyler 7:58) they are presented as.

Enbies who choose to express their gender identity in ways that go against their gender assigned at birth are doing so intentionally, be it through their name, pronouns and/or gender expression. They know they may appear out of place. They know they could receive attention, wanted or unwanted. Despite this confidence, as demonstrated by Colyar, not every nonbinary person feels this way. They, too, may often face discomfort while trying to exist in a society that frequently outcasts them based on who they are. This can impact the strength at which the message of gender expression may be conveyed; some may feel comfortable with small changes

while others may change their entire appearance to the outside world. Some may not feel comfortable enough at all to express themselves accurately; they may appear as their gender assigned at birth at the discretion of their own discomfort.

However, fighting these label binaries does not come without a cost; enbies often talk of suffering of dysphoria, most commonly gender dysphoria and/or body dysphoria. Skyler informs the audience that “Gender dysphoria is feeling a disconnect between the gender assigned to one at birth and the gender one actually identifies with. Therefore, anyone who is not cisgender, experiences gender dysphoria” (Skyler 4:04-4:15). Gender dysphoria is something one experiences as they battle the binary of gendered expectations set by society and when they do not feel they can be themselves due to those expectations.

Presenting oneself as nonbinary can be achieved in an infinite number of ways, but in any state of wanting to pass, come out, or transition, an enby can be faced with dysphoria. This makes those three actions inherently rhetorical such that any instance of existence in a society that tells you to present and behave differently requires strategic thinking.

Nonbinary people and their personal gender expressions do not exist in a vacuum, as all rhetorical choices have to do with the context and rhetorical situation at play. This is observed by both enbies and binary people and can cause immense discomfort; this may result in awkward silence, staring, commentary, and other forms of expressing that the enby does not belong in that space; or at least, while appearing as their true selves. This frequently causes pressure on nonbinary people who express themselves in opposition to the gender they were assigned at birth to comply with said gender. Both occurrences cause discomfort due to the clashing of the unconventional gender expression by the enby. Either the enby feels uncomfortable with where they are located and/or a binary individual feels uncomfortable with the enby being there. This

can be a daily struggle. Alternatively, enbies can choose to find accepting safe spaces or express themselves in a different or lesser way, avoiding transitioning as well as coming out.

Each time a nonbinary person socially transitions or comes out in any fashion, such as disclosing their pronouns, they are in a new rhetorical situation. A rhetorical situation is built of a speaker, a message, a rhetorical audience, a setting, a text, constraints, and exigence. The enby is the speaker delivering their message of their pronouns, and sometimes, correspondingly, their gender identity, to their audience. The text is frequently via word of mouth; however, other methods may include writing or visuals, depending on what is available and appropriate at the setting. Constraints in the situation are often an important factor in how uncomfortable the enby and/or their audience may feel as the enby comes out. Bitzer describes constraints as “hav[ing] the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence... includ[ing] beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives and the like” (8). Constraints may include restrictions or limits on the enby’s delivery of their pronouns or preconceived notions their audience may have-- for example, the enby’s confidence levels or the religious beliefs of the audience, like with the theoretical case study on Alex. The exigence should hopefully be prompted by the enby’s choice to come out to their audience, though that is not always the case. Exigence can be defined as an “occasion for writing” that “carries with it both a sense of urgency and a promise that through writing, a composer can make a change to that situation” (*College Composition and Communication*). Ideally, in this instance, perhaps there was a strong moment of bonding between the enby and their audience that made them feel they could share this vulnerable information, as Alex may have felt during their scenario with Shay. A moment of unfortunate exigence may be the audience confronting the enby about their gender identity, asking them before they are ready to come out, as Alex’s mother did. Each situation of

coming out prompts a different rhetorical situation based on the differences in each part of the rhetorical situation. This is critical to do as the speaker constructs their message in order to keep their focus (*College Composition and Communication*) and address the situation appropriately.

Every nonbinary individual comes from their own direction, entering the mass conversation of gender armed with their own experiences of fitting or challenging gender norms and the way they choose or choose not to show that outwardly. Furthermore, each enby has their own pattern of presence, such that they select the places in which they reside and interact in, who they interact with, and how they exist in that place; every time, it is a new rhetorical situation and enbies need to take action on the parts they can control in order to maximize their comfort and ease their way into the given setting.

While preparing for entering different settings, the rhetorical situation can sometimes be altered, almost as if on a sliding scale. The method in which one expresses their gender outwardly can be amplified or dialed down depending on their audience and level of control and confidence. Each time an enby enters a new rhetorical situation, those facets are impacted; the speaker is consistently the enby, who is delivering to their selected audience their message of coming out through gender expression. The exigence is different for each setting and each audience but is often accredited to (and is not limited to), someone asking or confronting the enby about the changes they are making, or simply from the enby existing in a space that is generally catered to a society of binary people.

Sara Ahmed discusses Gill Valentine's concept of public spaces being heterosexualized. He says this is done through the mass spreading of heterosexual content on billboards, in music, and through people's actions, which to heterosexual people, is not particularly noticeable (Ahmed 148). The more these practices are reflected, the more that queer people may feel

pressure to pass and possibly refrain from coming out, as their own habits are not normalized. For nonbinary people, this contrast from binary folks can be mirrored in society primarily through gender roles and gender expression. This may include mannequins with traditionally female body shapes wearing dresses and skirts while ones with traditionally male body shapes wear clothes such as suits and swim trunks. Additionally, make-up advertisements most commonly do not feature models who are masculine or clearly gender nonconforming. The disconnect suggests that makeup and certain articles of clothing are intended only for women, sometimes even only cis women, which can isolate nonbinary people. The discomfort may arise in binary people who are used to frequent normalization of given gender identities and the way they express themselves in their physical appearance; they may see enbies as doing something “wrong” because it is not designated by society as acceptable.

Discomfort can also occur within enbies. Ahmed describes discomfort as “involve[ing] an acute awareness of the surface of one’s body, which appears *as* surface, when one cannot inhabit the social skin, which is shaped by some bodies, and not others” (148). Speaking from personal experience, being isolated by others in public makes an enby overly aware of their body. There can be isolation not just making one feel apart from society, but also away from their own body, as the surface Ahmed speaks of. An enby may become hyperaware of the way they are presenting and how that may or may not comply with their gender assigned at birth. They may also anticipate ways they may be judged or feel anxiety about comments that could be made. *Did I bind my chest enough? Are my clothes masculine enough to compensate for my feminine features? Am I going to be misgendered? Is this enough to blend in for now?*

Much of this thinking leads to the first category of transitioning, social transition; this is the way family, friends, and other people learn and recognize that their loved one is nonbinary.

Skyler lists many changes that may occur including one's name, pronouns, haircut and/or fashion (6:25-6:34), all contributing to their performance of their gender. Social transitioning is a rhetorical act that can start individually and internally and changes the way an enby sees themselves, sometimes away from gender dysphoria and towards gender euphoria, if they experience those feelings ("Transgender and Nonbinary Identities").

Some enbies choose to take part in medical transitioning, the second category of transitioning, as part of their journey. Medical transition is a rhetorical act because it is a more permanent method through which an enby chooses to deliver their gender identity to society. The individual may choose to undergo hormone replacement therapy and/or surgery. This may help them pass more effectively. Alternatively, some enbies may choose not to undergo medical transition to intentionally contribute to their presentation muddying the binary with the goal of not passing. According to a study by Sari L. Reisner and Jaclyn M. W. Hughto, "more than one-fourth (27.0%) of non-binary participants had medically affirmed their gender, with 21.6% planning to pursue medical gender affirmation and 30.8% not planning to pursue it. More than 1 in 10 (13.0%) non-binary respondents were not sure whether or not they planned to access medical gender affirmation in the future" (9). Rhetorically, medical transition is a strong force; the better an enby passes, the less risk they face in settings where they could potentially be in danger. Knowing this, one might assume that all transgender people, including enbies, would want to transition medically. However, the statistics above indicate that, at least in Reisner and Hughto's study, there is not currently an overwhelming push by nonbinary people to transition medically. While this may be influenced by factors other than desire, such as socioeconomic status (Reisner and Hughto 13), it does suggest that enbies are able to express their gender with more than only their bodies, as described in social transitioning.

This means that presenting one's gender can also be more flexible, if desired. Perhaps an enby may want to pass as one binary gender when they are at school and only feel comfortable enough to dress with a combination of masculine and feminine traits when they are at home or surrounded by friends. Doing so by changing less-permanent characteristics such as the way they dress and style their hair is much easier and quicker to adjust or modify than deciding to pursue surgery. Some enbies feel the need to transition medically, possibly as a larger shift towards binary norms. For example, an enby who identifies themselves as transfeminine but whose gender was assigned male at birth may opt for hormone replacement therapy to alter their levels of various hormones. Achieving more feminine qualities in a longer lasting and more drastic manner may allow them to be more comfortable in their body and alleviate dysphoria. It is important for nonbinary individuals to make the correct transitioning decisions for themselves as well as feel confident in and take care of themselves in order to project a positive image that supports nonbinary rhetoric, as their existence when they earnestly express their gender inherently contributes to it in any rhetorical situation.

What is common among nearly all rhetorical situations is the system of binaries that our society operates in. The types of binaries that Henry Denny mentions in "Queering the Writing Center" can be applied to nearly any setting and the limitations of each audience; he writes of expert/novice, professional/peer, women/men, white/people of color, straight/gay (97), among others, that all dictate the way people in our society are accustomed to think about relationships between identities. Society's upholding of those boxed-in ideals is appropriately identified as the limitations in the rhetorical situation because it explicitly does that— it limits the acceptable options. Transmen must conform to masculine norms in order to be accepted as masculine and transwomen must conform to feminine norms in order to be accepted as feminine. Nonbinary

people are often more likely to embrace the freedom of not committing to one set of gender norms. Nonbinary people exist as alternatives to the rigid binary mindset and “demystify and denaturalize structuring dynamics” (Denny 107). By breaking these societal ideals, enbies contribute to nonbinary rhetoric through their individual displays of gender expression in ways that shatter the binary. Any combination of masculine, feminine and/or androgynous characteristics, both bodily and in self-expression, is valid in conveying one’s identity, though society does not always deem it so.

Due to the normalization of the gender binary, the concept of passing becomes crucial to the lives of enbies. It is a coping mechanism that can be used with the intention of blending in, often for safety and security, or ignored to stand out and fully embody oneself. Skyler narrates what a possible dilemma may look like when preparing to go out in public: “Do I dress as far from my assigned gender at birth as possible in order to confuse people and avoid getting misgendered or do I wear an outfit that makes me feel great about my body, but I know I’ll lose all confidence as soon as someone calls me by the wrong pronouns?” (8:15-8:28). The two options Skyler describes handle the rhetorical situation of nonverbally coming out to others in public with two opposite grips on comfort. Dressing to meet others’ pronoun expectations is limiting the enby’s outward projection of the gender they feel comfortable identifying as by forcing them to make changes that do not suit them. This may confuse people by the contrast between the physical appearance of the enby’s gender assigned at birth and the way they are dressing, which Skyler seems to imply as being the binary opposite. This option makes it seem like the nonbinary person is giving up part of themselves to make others comfortable, which might result in confusion, a more moderate response to the enby. If the enby decides to dress in a way that makes them feel confident but results in a strong negative response from others through

misgendering, the enby ultimately gets hurt, taking on the discomfort rather than letting the other people feel that way.

Both options intrinsically produce discomfort, but the weight is shifted depending on how the nonbinary person chooses to present. Transitioning can help enbies choose that second option without enduring the repercussions of losing their confidence after being misgendered either by preventing them from being misgendered or providing themselves with enough physical evidence for their brain to remember that their outward appearance as themselves is valid and so is their pronoun usage. This relationship between a person and their transition is applicable to all trans people, but I feel the struggle to match one's pronouns to their appearance is a particularly heavy problem for enbies. Enbies are typically more likely to use gender neutral pronouns than binary trans people and because the concept of gender neutral is not normalized for the most part, other people rarely assume that someone's pronouns are gender neutral. This issue is part of nonbinary rhetoric and extending gender past the binary and towards feelings and identities we may not have specific words for.

Regardless of labels that fit into or are adjacent to nonbinarism, a crucial purpose for nonbinary rhetoric under the self-reflection of queer rhetoric is to support all forms of gender identity, named or not. Since we need words to describe what we feel, it is evidence that for now, using words related to the binary is the best we have to offer as society popularizes new words. In doing this, "the most important thing is what makes someone feel good and confident and at home in their body right now, at this point in their life" (Skyler 10:43-10:53). The rhetorical choice to express one's gender, or even come out, can be a brave one, and forming an accepting audience is a valuable and stress-reducing part of that process.

***Nonbinary Memoirs of Gender and Identity* Edited by Micah Rajunov and Scott Duane**

The last text in this chapter is a collection of memoirs from thirty nonbinary- and genderqueer-identifying writers; it is called *Nonbinary Memoirs of Gender and Identity* and is edited by Micah Rajunov and Scott Duane. I have selected quotes from six memoirs and the introduction of the collection to inform about nonbinary experiences with a lack of acceptance from other LGBTQ+ people, nonbinarism in the workplace, and nonbinarism as a form of societal rebellion. I will analyze the works using concepts such as social role theory, as well as briefly acknowledging the relevance of the rebellion of nonbinary existence.

While the LGBTQ+ community is, in fact, a community, that unfortunately does not mean that everyone is accepted with open arms. Some of the writers featured in this book of memoirs discuss hard feelings by trans allies (Chang 31) and even older trans individuals they saw often (Beemyn 46). Since nonbinary people are outside of the gender binary, this can raise negative feelings by people who reside within the binary, trans or cis.

This could be accredited to what Joshua Chambers-Letson's concept of "selfsameness" that people bond over regarding gender as part of the identity (117). The grouping of identities on a binary creates a sense of division, acknowledging one's own group as the norm and othering the opposite group. In this case, it is not a man/woman binary, or a cis/trans binary, but a binary/nonbinary binary. Cisgender people have such a majority that being trans is sometimes seen as a problem, or to some, even an illness. The American Psychiatric Association only removed being transgender from its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 2012 (National Institute of Corrections). Furthermore, nonbinarism takes the concept of not only evaluating what it means to be a man or woman, but also rejecting both roles, creating a more specific and even less common identity. The existence of the nonbinary identity in low numbers leads to a sense of greater acceptance and importance of binary identities, as that is what is seen

as “normal.” It also demotes and suppresses nonbinary people in the form of strong inequalities in aspects such as political power, resources, knowledge, violence, life, and death (Chambers-Letson 117). These imbalances reinforce the negative mindsets some binary people have about enbies, adding to the general discomfort around the subject.

I doubt anyone could be fully resistant to the enbyphobia our society promotes; moreover, some do not work to counteract it. Sand C. Chang writes that there are some trans allies who are not comfortable with the fluidity of gender and will only treat trans people as strictly men or women (31). While this is perfectly acceptable for binary trans individuals, it is disrespectful to enbies. They continue, “Gender fluidity confuses [these allies], makes them visibly uncomfortable, and this often incites rage (‘just pick one!’). They don’t want to do the work to truly challenge their conceptions of gender” (31). This lack of work is what contributes to the popularity of the gender binary, which nonbinary people dispute.

Society operates under social role theory which according to Alice H. Eagly and Wendy Wood, says that gender roles not only exist, but are normal protocol, due to sex differences normalized through socialization to reinforce the performance of those roles (459). Social role theory indicates these rigid roles that are challenged when met with fluidity and flexibility. Ultimately, this excludes nonbinary identities from the same attention and consideration binary identities are given.

Frequently, when there is a mismatch between a binary person and their gender’s gender roles, someone tries to “correct” the individual, correlating with social role theory. For example, if a young boy is found playing with dolls, his uncle might tell him that doing so is wrong. Alternatively, if a teenage girl cuts her hair into a short pixie cut, her parents might think she is gay. This “correction” of behavior, especially in children, is frequent and contributes to their

understanding of the world around them. A study by Reisner and Hughto notes that “gender non-conformity is more socially acceptable for individuals assigned a female sex at birth than those with a recorded male birth sex” (12). This is reflected in the acceptance of the habits of girls labeled “tomboys” during adolescence. This approval does not last long, though, because when girls become young women, they are typically expected to adhere to feminine norms, simply accepting their designated gender roles. This does not mean trans men or transmasculine enbies are necessarily accepted easily just because they have the potential of having more leeway. CK Combs writes about acquaintances at their local gay bar harshly disapproving of one lesbian individual going through gender transition. Combs writes sarcastically about the gossip that was going around: “Clearly that means she was rejecting women and femaleness and choosing to be a man as an easy way out rather than staying in the feminist, queer trenches with the rest of us.” (93). While it appears that the individual Combs talks about was implied as identifying as a transman, transmasculine enbies may face similar commentary. Transmasculine enbies may endure the extra pressure of needing to meet their own standards for masculinity but also not wanting to overcompensate for their feminine features. This extra step towards being confident in their image requires considering the rhetoric of passing and evaluating one’s gender based on gender norms.

Each enby faces the reflection on gender from queer theory at their own pace, with some investigating it thoroughly before picking up the label “nonbinary.” They likely go through the rhetorical questions posed previously in the section of my analysis related to Sage Skyler’s talk. Prior to those questions, they likely ask themselves (and maybe others) what it means to be a man or a woman, or why society has gender roles. These questions challenge linguistic structuralism regarding gender. Mary Holmes explains Ferdinand de Saussure’s ideas that

language has established a binary of what something is by understanding what it is not. This idea, when applied to gender in our male-dominated society, sees men as highly valued and women as fulfilling supporting roles. This binary makes it more difficult for women to break stereotypes and sexualization (Holmes 68). When applied to the binary/nonbinary binary, nonbinary is correctly addressed as “not binary,” but in the same way that women are more than just “not men,” enbies have their own identities. Just like how women are neither overly dramatic nor less capable than men when it comes to negotiation, enbies are neither confused about their gender nor faking it for attention. Nonbinary rhetoric supports this freedom of expression outside of gender norms and the limits placed on enbies by what is considered acceptable and normal in society.

Genny Beemyn, a self-proclaimed older enby and author of the chapter “Being Genderqueer Before It Was a Thing,” recalls their experiences being misgendered by the older trans women they came up around, who only believed in being transsexual or cross-dressers. These women did not experience the same feelings Beemyn had about gender and would refer to them with masculine pronouns (46). Beemyn writes: “I found myself in a surreal situation where my gender identity was more often disrespected by other trans people than by some cis colleagues who had much less understanding of trans issues but wanted to be supportive of me” (46). The situation likely felt surreal because one would expect other trans people to be supportive of another trans identity, or at least more adjusted to it than cis people. This is not meant to devalue the support of Beemyn’s cis colleagues, but highlights the lack of support within the LGBTQ+ community that many people expect. Additionally, mutual respect between colleagues is a vital attribute that contributes to an enby’s comfort level in a given environment, such as one’s workplace.

Féi Hernandez was able to come out as an enby on their own terms as a teacher to their class (19-20) but has trouble coming out to their coworkers (21). “Some [questions] are learning experiences, appropriate. Some are not. Then there’s a lot of silence at times. In said silence, I hear religious, homophobic, sexist jargon sprinkled around the hallways by students, staff, teachers alike” (21). Hernandez’s experience captures the array of sources of discomfort enbies may face in the workplace. This discomfort can be spread around easily, even more so depending on the age and impressionability of the students. If students were to hear a teacher or staff member talking negatively about a nonbinary teacher, they may also begin to take that viewpoint, as part of the ethos of employees at a school is that they are meant to be trustworthy role models for students. In some districts, there are direct measures taken to prevent nonbinary employees from living fully as themselves. For example, a middle school classroom in which a nonbinary teacher is not allowed to teach their class their pronouns, or even singular they/them pronouns in general. Rhetorically, this sends a message to the teacher that they are not truly welcome nor accepted at the school as they are not allowed to be themselves without restriction. This also creates limits on the relationships they build with their students; a teacher who is constantly misgendered by their own class is likely to put more emotional space between themselves and the students, due to that constant and tiresome lack of reassurance of their gender. This is strenuous on the aspect of pathos, as they may feel they cannot offer their fullest self to their self, which could lead to them not being as invested as they could, or even may want to be, in their teaching.

Chang also discusses their gender identity as related to their profession; they work as a gender therapist. They note that the business casual dress code is “highly gendered” and they “have to decide which ‘drag’ to wear to work” on a regular basis (Chang 51). Chang usually opts

for a more masculine look, primarily to be taken seriously as a nonbinary person, contributing to their ethos. They say this about wearing their femme clothes: “I won’t be seen as ‘trans enough’— my clothes will give people permission to treat me like a woman or feel entitled to use the wrong pronouns. Even people who claim to be accepting of nonbinary gender still expect that our expression must deviate from the norms associated with our sex assigned at birth.”

(Chang 51). This topic echoes the experiences of Colyar’s source, Christopher, who finds themselves wearing a miniskirt to go to work and facing judgement due to the highly gendered contrast between their gender expression and their sex assigned at birth.

Employers across fields of work need to be cautious of the way that they treat both employees and interviewees. The way in which interviewers phrase questions and what diction they use can rhetorically impact their credibility. Chang recalls an interview in which the following occurred:

At the end of the interview, [the interviewer] asked, “How do you react when people make mistakes about your gender?” I spouted off some line about being used to people misgendering me and not having energy to educate everyone about my gender (which is true). But since the interview, I’ve been kicking myself, wishing I had asked, “What are you and this organization going to do to support me when that happens?” So here I am the next day, still mulling over whether to give the manager feedback about her question. It just didn’t feel appropriate. It’s like saying to someone, “How do you react when you are being sexually harassed?” or “We know our system is racist. What are you going to do when well-meaning people tell a racist joke?” The question really felt like, “How big of a problem are you going to be for us? How uncomfortable are you going to make us feel?” (52-53)

The lack of sensitivity by the interviewer not only indicates a lack of support, but a lack of awareness of her enbyphobia. This does not illustrate to Chang that the company would support them if (or more likely, *when*) they were to be misgendered.

Chang continues to say that they were offered the job, but rejected it, choosing “true respect” for themselves (53). The interviewer did not represent her employer as an inherently respectful or accommodating workplace for nonbinary people. Had Chang chosen to drop the name of the company in their memoir, this could have created a butterfly effect that damaged the company’s image, possibly even tanking it. As a result, in any following rhetorical situations and interactions, the company would have lost credibility.

Speaking generally, Chang notes that “Workplaces tend to be reactive when it comes to accommodating trans and nonbinary folks. They wait until a trans or nonbinary person gets hired, then they scramble to figure out how to make the environment safe and accessible” (53). Chang notes that at their workplace, a gender-neutral restroom was installed just for them when they asked for one, but it was sixteen floors down (53). A restroom is a basic need and enbies should not have to settle for the fact that *at least the employer provided one*. Similarly, changes and accommodations provided for enbies such as name changing processes or other documentation should be sorted and readily available before an enby walks into the workplace. Placing the responsibility of change is not a burden that binary people experience, much less each time they enter a new workplace. Nonbinary people deserve that same standard of respect and comfort.

With the lack of representation of nonbinarism and its constant contrast to the gender binary, some people think that nonbinary people are part of a movement. I choose the word “rebellion” to describe the movement because of its nature. *Dictionary.com* defines rebellion as

“resistance to or defiance of any authority, control, or tradition.” The normalcy of the gender binary has such a strong grip on society as it has given control to those who follow its tradition. Ideas that extend into the depths of history and reinforce discriminatory beliefs about gender can be traced all the way back to Aristotle. In “Aristotelian and Judeo-Christian Models of Sex Difference,” Shannon Dea notes that not only did he only recognize gender as being inherently related to sex, but he believed men to be of the superior gender, their physical characteristics were more desirable for their children, and that female offspring only exist due to a male’s genes’ “failure to prevail” (37) during conception. This belief is incorrect on multiple levels as gender is not inherently tied to sex, nor is it only limited to the two genders assigned at birth. Sex does not equal gender and the innate existence of nonbinary people is proof. Alex Stitt writes in their memoir that “I desired to be a woman with the same curious passion I desired to be a man. Why? Because in the end I was neither. To identify as one was to disavow the other” (8). The expectations that govern the way people live are rigid; it still enables a feeling of gender hierarchy and wants to place every individual in a box, as Colyar mentioned. However, “the existence of nonbinary people shows us that gender is messy” (Rajunov and Duane xxix). It is messy; it can be turbulent; it feels individualized; it is valid. The history of the nonbinary identity is not new. Attempting an in-depth history of the identity is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is important to note that the nonbinary identity has existed across many time periods in human history and people who identify as nonbinary have battled similar expectations. Though the rhetorical scenarios may differ, many enbies are trying to communicate the message that social roles can be an ingenuine guide. The enbies of the past, too, have faced minority stress theory, in some cases, in harsher or riskier conditions than others. Nonbinary people of the past also faced grave consequences when being themselves as opposed to portraying another gender to pass and

get by. The rebellion of existence by enbies has extended throughout human history and certainly is not over yet.

Additionally, rebellion makes a new future possible by acting on the present. In their memoir, Jeffery Marsh writes, “I’m a metaphor for being free, for a grander ideal. I am a walking, breathing representation of the fruits of self-acceptance” (76). Marsh’s application of queer theory in their questioning of gender roles, which opposes social role theory, shows the audience how they have maneuvered through discomfort and turned it into confidence, aiding in paving the way for future enbies. The power held within an enby who is sure of themselves is impactful, not just in their lives, but others as well. Rajunov and Duane write that just by sharing their identity, enbies “contribute to rebuilding our shared mental model of gender” (xxi). The more society makes room for nonbinary people, the less pressure will press on not just enbies, but all individuals in society.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I analyzed texts written by nonbinary people for the ways in which they contribute to nonbinary rhetoric. First, I looked at Colyar’s article, which I paired with a theoretical case study of my own design to highlight coming out and the rhetorical situation; then, I focused on transitions and situations in Skyler’s talk; finally, I looked at memoirs of nonbinary experience. The intention of this chapter is to normalize nonbinary identity through helping the readers understand the experience, its rhetorical significance and considerations, and recognize the identity as legitimate.

As much as nonbinary rhetoric is a cohesive concept, it is made of countless experiences and sources of input. Any person who is nonbinary contributes to nonbinary rhetoric daily, just by existing and making a space for themselves. Being nonbinary is not something one is

prepared for in our society. “When it is impossible for your external appearance to accurately reflect your inner gender—when the general public is missing the mental model that represents your gender—you will never be truly seen” (Rajunov and Duane xx). Blazing one’s own trail is a large part of why we need nonbinary rhetoric and more importantly, why we need the individuals behind it. Enbies face daily obstacles; the next chapter will discuss texts created to help enbies through passing, coming out, and transitioning, as well as other experiences that are important to what makes enbies who we are.

III. ABIDE BY GUIDES

Introduction

The third chapter focuses on texts that are written to guide nonbinary people as they come to understand, confirm, and live as the gender they are. The first part of this chapter highlights the Human Rights Campaign's guide to coming out, entitled *Coming Out: Living Authentically as Transgender or Non-Binary*. This source promotes a basic understanding of what it means to be trans or nonbinary, gives realistic and affirming advice, and provides answers to questions enbies and other trans people may have about the process of coming out. They prepare trans and nonbinary people to feel comfortable and secure enough in their gender stories to begin to share them with their desired audience. Next, *How to Understand Your Gender: A Practical Guide for Exploring Who You Are* by Alex Iantaffi and Meg-John Barker aims to support people, including enbies, who are venturing out into the possibilities of gender by providing information on many facets of gender. This includes the definition, viewpoints, experiences, vocabulary, relationships, and trailblazers regarding gender. Lastly, I focus on The final text explored in this chapter, *The Queer and Transgender Resilience Workbook: Skills for Navigating Sexual Orientation & Gender Expression* by Anneliese Singh, which helps queer and transgender individuals, including nonbinary people, prepare for the challenges and negativity they may face in society. In this chapter I aim to highlight the rhetorical importance of an enby feeling secure in one's gender story and sharing it with others.

***Coming Out: Living Authentically as Transgender or Non-Binary* by the Human Rights Campaign**

As *Coming Out: Living Authentically as Transgender or Non-Binary* advises and guides nonbinary and other trans people through their coming out experiences, The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) recognizes that coming out can be stressful and tricky. There are many

variables to consider that correlate with this vulnerable and sometimes life-changing rhetorical event. Attentively, the HRC speaks to the audience with carefully chosen language in *Coming Out*. The text conveys supportive messages and realistic advice about owning and sharing one's identity by using affirmative and inclusive language such as in this example: "What's important is that you know your truth, and that you don't let other peoples' uninformed opinions direct your own narrative. You know who you are and that's enough. It will be hard, but many more people will accept you than you may expect. Focus your energy on them because they are the ones who are worth it" (HRC 20). These words empower the reader while also mentioning the unfavorable concept of uninformed people who will try to impede their gender journey. The ratio of uplifting language to unfortunate reality is high, keeping the focus optimistic and helping the enby create a positive mindset. This rhetorical tactic by such a credible organization makes delivering sensitive information and details, such as considering the audience's perspective or taking care of one's mental health, relay smoother. When these ideas are related to nonbinary rhetoric, opportunities are created for individuals to own and share their experiences in a community where being oneself is enough.

Owning one's own identity is typically the first step enbies take as they begin to openly live their lives as their true gender identity. It is also one of the largest places of control in the process. Some enbies struggle with the lives they are told they should be living instead of magnifying the ones that are honest with themselves; on the other hand, some are educated or educate themselves on gender quickly, immediately picking up on cues that lead them to start their transition (HRC 10). Regardless of the speed or fashion of the identity finding process, an enby is the biggest expert on their own life and deserves to have control over their process of learning about trans identities, recognizing their own, and moving towards living a life that is

true to how they embody that identity. Rhetorically, the experience adds to the enby's credibility as they learn to maneuver through coming out and the related actions and reactions that will depend on the audience, setting and exigence each time they share the information.

Enbies typically desire to have as much control as they can over whom they reveal their identity to. Making this decision allows enbies to build their own rhetorical situations and can aid them in relishing in confidence. There are many elements to consider when selecting a target audience, and no single rule that determines whether the enby should come out or not (HRC 13). There are some elements to be expected when coming out. The results of a study conducted by Stacey M. Brumbaugh-Johnson and Kathleen E. Hull concluded with three major themes amongst trans people during the coming out process: 1) navigating others' gender expectations; 2) navigating others' reactions; and 3) navigating the threat of violence" (1158).

The way that others react, and the potential of violence build off gender expectations. Nonbinary people, specifically, may experience these in a different way than binary trans people, as they are often more likely to break gender norms and/or mix and match them, rather than conform to one end of the binary or the other. Knowing that the presence of these elements are part of the rhetorical situations enbies face almost any time they are with other people in public, whether they are choosing to come out or just exist, can help them adapt how they wish to, including the acts of passing, coming out, and/or transitioning. Furthermore, *Coming Out* invites the enby to consider a different point in the rhetorical situation: their audience's reaction and response. They directly suggest that "it might help to try to put yourself in their shoes and anticipate their likely reactions, potential questions and next steps" (HRC 22). By looking at the rhetorical situation from the audience's perspective, the enby can have a better understanding of how they may be thinking or feeling. Giving attention to the audience is a valuable concept as

the audience is a crucial part of the rhetorical situation and is even more prominent in the speaker/text/audience rhetorical triangle.

The guide offers a handful of sections of information headed by questions that are essential for one to contemplate and prepare for, which can also help curb anxieties. These questions are as follows: “Do I know what I want to say? Who should I tell first? What kinds of signals am I getting? Am I well-informed and willing to answer questions? Is this a good time? Can I be patient? Is it safe to disclose? Is it safe to disclose at work? What do I do if someone reacts badly? What if someone outs me before I’m ready?” (HRC 16-21) Each question is followed by sincere and practical advice. By tackling difficult questions, the HRC prepares enbies and trans people to maneuver through situations in which the disclosure of their identity ventures off of the ideal path they want the conversation to follow.

Variety can also be prominent in the range of emotions felt by the enby. The HRC mentions that throughout the coming out process, “it’s common to feel: scared, unsafe, confused, guilty, empowered, exhilarated, proud, uncertain, brave, affirmed, relieved” and that it is utterly important “to check in with yourself and the emotions you are having along every step of the way” (HRC 13). The normalization of feelings beyond the happy/sad or proud/ashamed binaries is crucial to the mental health of anyone who goes through coming out. Mental health is particularly a concern among trans and nonbinary people; the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey reported a 40% lifetime prevalence of suicide attempts among nonbinary and trans people, which is roughly nine times the rate of the general population, 4.6 percent (James 3). The stigma and discrimination faced by nonbinary and trans people is highly prominent and affects people daily. Having the courage to exist as one’s true self as a nonbinary person in a binary world is a brave act that extends pride beyond discomfort and even beyond danger.

The HRC comforts enbies and other trans people by normalizing the aspect of variety in multiple elements of the coming out process. There are many genders, many ways to embody gender, many ways to feel about one's gender and many ways other people might react to an enby coming out. For example, on page nine, a note is written signifying that the definitions they provided for some gender identities "do not encapsulate all of the possible genders that exist across the world... We encourage you to research other genders that exist in cultures and nations around the world" (HRC 9). The organization's acknowledgement of identities and terms that are outside of what they provide gives credibility to the HRC because it highlights that they are not trying to come across as if they are the ultimate source on the topic. This makes them appear more trustworthy and down-to-earth than a source that claims to know it all. Rhetorically, this can be comforting for enbies and other readers, particularly those at the early stages of their gender journey. It can be reassuring to know that not everyone, in fact, likely no one, knows everything there is to know about gender since there are infinite ways to embody an identity as well as so many identities. This comfort in knowing there is room to explore in between and beyond the gender binary is an extension of grace that nonbinary rhetoric welcomes.

Additionally, the HRC provides comfort and security through unity. One example is their use of inclusive versions of the word "we" to show their support for those preparing to come out. They write, "Few of us are told that *we* might have a gender identity that differs from the body into which we were born..." (HRC 10, my emphasis) but they also write about embracing one's gender, saying that "When you're ready, no matter when that is, *we* will be here for you" (HRC 10, my emphasis).

There are two different assumptions that can be applied to the use of "we" in those statements. To combine these into one identity, that of the organization, the "we" they speak of

has also experienced having a body that does not inherently feel like it matches their gender identity, AND they are fully supportive of the reader on their gender journey. For the readers, knowing that the people who wrote this source not only want to help them, but understand where they are coming from can be comforting and can reassure them that there are practical solutions to their problems. This “we” that they mention hints that there is a larger community that ensures the enby is supported by a community of people, even if they do not yet know who they are.

The source also mentions that finding unity in a like community in one’s life can be important to create connections such as “feel[ing] less alone on your new path” and “answer[ing] questions you might have about next steps” (HRC 11). The more an enby embodies and accepts their identity, the more they can accurately communicate the support they need and perspective they have. This contributes to our diversity and cohesiveness as a society; it also makes the enby more credible and stronger in their information-presenting role as the speaker.

The HRC makes it clear that ownership of gender stories, and the way they are told, matter. As a LGBTQ+ supportive organization, they use resources such as this one to help queer and trans people come out and share their own stories. They do so by providing the language, concepts, and definitions for the enby to consider when building their own methods of coming out. More specifically, they give advice as to how to come out, possible reactions to expect, and a range of emotions one may feel. By specifying vocabulary, the HRC is participating in emotional granularity, which Katharine E. Smidt and Michael K Suvak define as “the ability to make fine-grained, nuanced distinctions between similar emotions” (48). Here, enbies are given terms to identify with as they pick out the specific words that are applicable to how they feel and what they think. The HRC also notably does not specify some things, such as who to come out to, when to do it, or why they should. Leaving those crucial moments of the rhetorical situation

permeable for the queer and trans folks gives them the control that the HRC stresses is so important. They do everything they can to prepare enbies (and other queer and trans people) for emerging as their true selves in society and give them the foundation to find or build the community that they need.

***How to Understand Your Gender: A Practical Guide for Exploring Who You Are* by Alex Iantaffi and Meg-John Barker**

In *How to Understand Your Gender*, Alex Iantaffi and Meg-John Barker inform their audience about gender and the way that it impacts people. They discuss information regarding topics such as binaries, bodies, and community. All of these concepts can be related to nonbinary rhetoric such that it is accepting of people regardless of where they fall on not just the gender binary, but other binaries as well. Furthermore, communities that employ nonbinary rhetoric exist to see and accept people, including enbies, for both the body and individual that combine to create the person.

Part of growing into one's true outward expression of gender, especially when it is different than what they currently display, is constructed by making one's body match (to the best of their ability) who they are in their mind. In "Transgender Rhetorics: (Re)Composing Narratives of the Gendered Body," Jonathan Alexander mentions that gender is "both in the psyche and on the body" (56), which is something many trans people already know, as they may face such contrast between the two. Regardless of what one's transition looks like, one must become at peace with the way they appear as they begin to share it with others in their lives. Whether the transition is medical or purely social, there are ups and downs related to the way one feels in their own skin.

Two of the main feelings about one's body and gender are euphoria and dysphoria. The book defines gender euphoria as feelings "of pure joy, when you feel good about your body, how you feel in it, what you're wearing, and how you're perceived by others" (Iantaffi and Barker 114). These feelings help people feel confident about who they are and accurately express how they want others to see them. On the other end of this gender-related feelings binary, there is gender dysphoria. It can be described as "a complete lack of fit between your body and yourself, almost as if you and your body, or parts of it, are complete strangers to each other" (Iantaffi and Barker 114). Moments of gender dysphoria can be discouraging and frustrating as one battles with how they want to be seen and how they feel as they feel these things contradict the image they see in the mirror. Both of these feelings are tied to one's physical body. This brings attention not just to how one looks and how one feels they look, but also how one feels while they look the way they look. Since this is something one has power over, they need to feel control over their thoughts and sometimes be able to calm down their physical body. Importantly, they may feel both euphoria and dysphoria—it is not a binary.

There are a few activities dispersed throughout the book that connect the enby to their body in its physical form. On page 118, there is a body mapping activity. It instructs the reader to draw a map of the outline of their body and to label areas that cause them to feel euphoria or dysphoria. The authors encourage readers to use colors, shapes, and words to articulate their feelings and even suggest creating multiple maps for multiple situations. This activity requires the enby to make a direct connection between their thoughts about themselves and their physical figures, grounding the thoughts in the body that they have. Oftentimes, the body an enby has does not match the body that society has deemed as the "default" or "assumed" body. This is true for anyone who is trans, queer, plus-sized, and/or a person of color. In "The Body: An Abstract

and Actual Rhetorical Concept,” Karma R. Chávez notes that until the 1970s, rhetorical writing revolved almost entirely around the bodies of white, cisgender, able-bodied, heterosexual men (244), which illuminates the need for diversity within rhetorical studies and therefore, a need for nonbinary rhetoric. Chávez continues that in rhetoric, the abstract body and actual physical bodies are about power (245). When there is the abstract body of a dominant culture, there is consequently a minority culture that is valued with lesser power. This continues to further the othering that occurs between the two bodies and divides them based on lack of real values such as visibility and representation. Enbies can feel more comfortable in physical spaces if they feel welcome and represented, without feeling like their bodies are being policed or misrepresented. Furthermore, the strength provided by greater numbers of enbies and those who outwardly express their transness, as well as more people who support and affirm their presence, can help to normalize their existence and comfort in society.

Exploring and understanding one’s gender can be a difficult task. There are many thoughts and emotions that can arise that may leave a reader overwhelmed. As part of bodily care, *How to Understand Your Gender* guides the reader through possibly stressful or distressing moments and checks in on their emotional wellbeing throughout the book. For example, page 168 reads, “Breathe in, breathe out. Here you are. And you’re not alone. Others have lived in this vast gender landscape before you, and others will live in the same yet different landscape. You’re not the first and you won’t be the last.” This gives a sense of safety and community as readers work through their thoughts and emotions. The emphasis on reflection and self-care throughout the book can be crucial to some readers.

Part of nonbinary rhetoric is making space for enbies (and others) to understand and feel confident in their gender story. To gain this confidence, they often need to feel comfortable in their body and their community. This community of supporters is frequently made up of members such as their family, friends, and at times, other enbies. Finding familiarity and normalization in people who share a similar gender experience can be helpful but can also dictate its own binary. While congregating, groups are subject to using their identities to create what Iantaffi and Barker call an our people/other people binary (160) that opposes people who are not considered part of their group. This is not to say that all groups, or enbies in particular, subscribe to this binary, but it does acknowledge that amongst like people, othering can occur; othering rhetorically creates a divide based around discomfort.

This divide can become a binary of “our” familiar group as opposed to their “other” group. “When looking for ‘our people’, we’re making a dualistic distinction from ‘other people’ (i.e. those who are not our people). When it comes to gender, our ideas about who we view as being ‘our people’ or not might be based on our understanding of biology, on psychological traits, or on social experiences” (Iantaffi and Barker 164). This brings the question of what determines one’s gender identity. Without considering the variety that enbies experience these aspects of gender in, we are ignoring ways to bond and form community that supports nonbinary people. While a large portion of the division is by people who are cis othering those who are trans, there are also binary trans people who other nonbinary people. Similar to experiences noted by multiple enbies in *Nonbinary Memoirs of Gender and Identity* in my previous chapter, queer people are not always inherently accepting of all other queer identities, including nonbinarism. This othering does not build towards the community enbies need. By denying them this support, nonbinary people can find it much harder to find people who encourage them and

reinforce their thoughts and ideas. Furthermore, this can lead to nonbinary erasure which makes it more difficult for enbies to find their identity and do so in a positive manner.

Returning to Ahmed's "Queer Feelings," enbies may find themselves uncomfortable in heterosexualized spaces based on the ways the dominant straight and cis community others them. She writes that "queer subjects may also be 'asked' not to make heterosexuals feel uncomfortable by avoiding the display of signs of queer intimacy" (Ahmed 149). While this is related to sexuality more than gender, it should be noted that enbies and people who inherently look queer or trans often face similar judgement. One example of this is when a person's gender expression does not match what others assume their gender assigned at birth was, such as Christopher's experience wearing a mini skirt in Brock Colyar's piece. Ahmed continues "which is itself an uncomfortable feeling, a restriction on what one can do with one's body, and another's body, in social space" (149). The rhetoric that comes with a dominant culture can apply pressure to the minority group and make them feel uncomfortable. This is something prominent in society through compulsory heterosexuality, which unlike nonbinarism, as Ahmed notes, "shapes bodies by the assumption that a body 'must' orient itself towards some objects and not others, objects that are secured as ideal through the fantasy of difference" (146). The idea that one must interact by certain gender norms and rules is binary. It creates that acceptable/unacceptable binary that brings in the aspect of shame to attempt to punish those who do not abide by these norms and assumptions.

Iantaffi and Barker note that for some trans people, "there may be a sense of peace in navigating spaces where they're seen as just another person, rather than as a 'trans' person. For others, this may not be possible, or desired, and there may be quite a lot of discomfort when navigating spaces where people don't know them and might make incorrect assumptions" (81-

82). Even in queer spaces, many queer and trans individuals have experiences in which they have felt judged regarding whether they are seen as or feel that they are “trans enough” or “queer enough.”

People sometimes face judgement and insecurity based on divisive decisions. However, Iantaffi and Barker note that “for many of us who have felt threatened and lost friends and lovers to hatred and violence, making those divisions, however, might seem essential to maintaining the integrity and safety of our communities” (165). In nonbinarism, the community needs to be protected, and it must do so concerning both people who are and are not seen as “nonbinary enough.” All enbies need to be tolerated, if not accepted, by everyone, as everyone has their own experience. This is something groups can struggle with due to “individual and collective historical, social, and cultural trauma” (165) surrounding gender, resulting in reactive responses and difficulty “build[ing] trust and relationship through authentic vulnerability” (165). I think a successful image of nonbinary community can find a balance between excluding people who are not enbies while also welcoming those whom some members may think “barely qualify.” This, in itself, is another binary. Why subscribe to one or the other when there are so many versions of identity?

I believe nonbinary rhetoric also calls for less gatekeeping of the label. I do agree with Iantaffi and Barker that for a community to exist, there needs to be some exclusion, in order to protect and give extra needed validation to nonbinary people. I am optimistic that it may occur with less judgement as society progresses. We create community when we choose to break binaries and accept everything in between and outside of them.

Later in the book, there is an activity called Circles of Intimacy. This activity helps the enby visualize their personal community and the relationships it is comprised of. A drawing of a

target is shown, and the instructions ask the reader to write themselves in the middle, followed by their most intimate relationships in the next circle, other close relationships in the following circle, and lastly, relationships that are not as close in the outermost circle. A set of questions follows, asking the enby to consider criteria they may have used to categorize the people in their lives. With whom do they spend the most time on a daily basis? Who could they call at 3 am if they were having a crisis? Who have they known the longest? (Iantaffi and Barker 141). By evaluating their community, enbies can ensure they are surrounding themselves with relationships that work for them-- platonic, romantic, familial, professional, etc.—regardless of what societal norms dictate. The image that society has upheld as an ideal script is heteronormative, which “makes much stronger claims. It is assumed that all arrangements will follow from the arrangement of the couple: man/woman” (Ahmed 148). Breaking the script and making one’s own statements about who they are can be seen as vital to living a life as an enby or other LGBTQ+ person because it signifies the difference between what is “normal” and what is true to the individual. Ahmed says “queer lives shape what gets reproduced: in the very failure to reproduce the norms through how they inhabit them, queer lives produce different effects... The gap between the script and the body, including the bodily form of ‘the family’, may involve discomfort and hence may ‘rework’ the script” (153).

Ahmed writes about the tiredness that queer people, enbies included, feel from the man/woman binary that fuels this script for life. The script, in this case, is the cis- and heteronormative expectations from society such as those involving a breadwinning man and a domestic-centered woman getting married, having straight and cisgender children, and so forth.. It dictates many aspects of society and “No matter how ‘out’ you may be, how (un)comfortably queer you may feel, those moments of interpellation get repeated over time, and can be

experienced as a bodily injury; moments which position queer subjects as failed in their failure to live up to the ‘hey you too’ of heterosexual self- narration” (Ahmed 147). Due to the normalization of the script, enbies and other queer people must battle for their own space and their own existence to be recognized. The more times the script is reworked, the easier it is for others to accept the change due to familiarity; the results in the fall of the “either A or B” relationship society has with gender and other binaries.

Communities can expand to support enbies as society progresses and gender politics and rhetoric move away from stigma. Iantaffi and Barker write that to an extent, nearly everybody deviates from the gender that is assumed from our sex assigned at birth because most people break the stereotypes associated with cisgender boys or girls (87). Not all male babies will grow up to be independent, assertive men who hide their emotions, enjoy sports, and are not greatly phased by violence. Likewise, not all female babies will grow up to be soft, nurturing women who have interests in fashion and makeup and take on more passive roles in their relationships. However, simply by existing, nonbinary people break these stereotypes and juxtapose their own choices with those that society expects them to choose.

Regarding building community, Iantaffi and Barker say that in their experience, “[it] means investing enough into our relationships so that we can start to listen to each other, appreciating the range of our experiences and moving beyond the irritations and reactivity we might sometimes experience” (167). This can look like a collection of enbies’ thoughts such as a book of memoirs and the readers who take the time to read and consider them. This can look like an enby’s parents doing research on gender to better understand their child. This can look like a queer support group with enbies and other LGBTQ+ individuals of various backgrounds sharing their experiences and working together. The rhetorical work performed in these situations such

as researching, sharing and listening, and offering support gives each enby the room they deserve to exist as themselves wholly.

The Queer & Transgender Resilience Workbook: Skills for Navigating Sexual Orientation & Gender Expression by Anneliese Singh

Anneliese Singh's *The Queer & Transgender Resilience Workbook* focuses on building up the self-esteem and security of queer and trans individuals as related to their identity in the LGBTQ+ community and therefore, as an LGBTQ+ individual in society. Nonbinary people are included in this population and are encouraged to be their true selves through knowing their self-worth; they must prepare to take ownership of their gender story as well as possibly share it with others, ideally creating supportive communities.

The identities involved in an enby's personal intersectionality may impact how they tell their gender story. Since each experience looks unique for every individual, so do their audiences and communities. *The Queer and Trans Resilience Workbook* has material that has the reader consider different aspects of coming out when addressing communities based on ability, age, geographic region, national origin, race and ethnicity, religion/spirituality, and social class. All of these are part of an enby's intersectionality and matter to their experience. When coming out or otherwise sharing their stories, enbies may share different aspects and details about their journey that are pertinent to their audience. For example, in the theoretical case study in Chapter 2, Alex refrains from telling Shay about their private moments of struggle regarding their gender; they also refrain from telling their mother any information that may contrast with her religious beliefs. However, Alex may choose to disclose information about their intersectionality that helps their family members understand. Perhaps there are elements that have to do with race or social class that Alex's mother and sister can relate to. The aspects of their journey that Alex chooses to share can help strengthen their familial bonds as Alex offers a look into their life

through identity characteristics that they understand. It is important to note that relationships can change when sharing one's gender story or gender journey. Whether the audience is one's family, like in Alex's case, or anyone who clicks on their article on the internet, like Colyar, sharing one's story can impact others by giving them more perspective and information directly from a nonbinary source.

However, since society is still currently in favor of the idea that nonbinarism is "abnormal" or "weird," it is not uncommon to run into negative messages. Whether these messages are internalized, said to the face, or just implied, there will likely always be people who do not like enbies simply for how they identify. Furthermore, while the hope is that relationships will change for the better after an enby shares their experiences or gender story, it is realistic to prepare for the opposite to occur. Singh prepares her audience to face these occasions by dedicating the third chapter to identifying negative messages; in one Resilience Practice exercise, the reader pinpoints specific unfavorable comments and microaggressions they have heard (55-56). Following that, the workbook has the reader think through these types of comments, how they typically respond, and actions they can take to handle the situation appropriately. This approach supports nonbinary rhetoric and the idea that people inside and outside of binaries deserve to have their identities respected.

In "Out of the Closet: The Importance of Stories and Storytelling in Planning Practice," Leonie Sandercock writes about stories as explanations, which is an accurate description of coming out on many occasions, an explanation of who the enby is and how they identify. She writes that the author of the story is in control, saying that the author "is choosing which facts are relevant, what to describe, what to count, and in the assembling of these facts a story is shaped, an interpretation, either consciously or unconsciously, emerges" (Sandercock 21). This control

by the author is the same control enbies should have during their coming out process as well as answering questions or further representing the nonbinary community with their perspective. On page 201 of the workbook, there is a Resilience Wheel activity that enbies and other readers can use to identify what they learned in the workbook and align takeaways with each of the chapters (Singh). After completing the activities in the book, an enby reader would ideally be able to look back at what they know about themselves and use that information to better understand how they got to where they are. Similar to how a storyteller is the expert on the plot, an enby is the expert on their lives and can share their gender journey in the way that they think is best. They know what they have learned about who they are and possibly about the world and can use their perspective to impact others. In some cases, the event of coming out and sharing one's gender journey or voicing their nonbinary perspective can change the way binary people see nonbinary people; this can be a heavy task. Sometimes this responsibility of sharing such an important part of one's identity can release emotional weight, but other times, it can add to stress.

Some of an enby's stress is everyday stress; some of it is the minority stress of navigating stigma (Singh 146), and there are still other forms of stress each individual feels differently. Singh writes about three different kinds of LGBTQ-specific stress (147-148). This can be in the form of intrapersonal stress while considering the rhetorical situation and choices about passing, coming out, or transitioning. It can also be in the form of interpersonal stress. Each enby may feel differently about coming out and sharing their story with others. Some may be open and enjoy being a resource for others, while others feel that that component is weighty and may dislike answering questions and any personal curiosities of binary people. Additionally, there is institutional stress, which impacts enbies through systematic oppression and discrimination. This third type is beyond the scope of this thesis but needs to be acknowledged for the massive role it

plays in the daily lives of nonbinary people. Sharing one's gender journey can be intimidating; it is a common understanding among enbies that we are at times, not always inherently welcome in all spaces, if we are even recognized in those spaces. It becomes scarier when one realizes that the government is involved in our lives to this extent.

As part of her advice, Singh suggests that whatever the comfort level of the enby, having an "elevator speech" about their identity may be helpful for situations in which they do want to communicate more fully about their identity (14). Singh defines what an elevator speech is and offers her own before leading the reader through an activity where they design their own. She encourages the reader to include other important parts of their identity such as age, disability, or other parts of their background (Singh 15). This moment to acknowledge intersectionality is important as it encourages the reader to look at how different parts of their identity influence their life experiences. It may also help them connect with others who have some of these aspects in common. This can make coming out and sharing one's gender story more comfortable, as they know they are not alone in each part of their journey. It also allows the enby readers to "let folks know how [they] expect to be treated when [they] get asked questions" (Singh 15), especially when communicating with binary people who may have limited knowledge and sensitivity to nonbinarism.

Frequently, storytelling is a positive act that helps us build community and support. Support can come in many different formats. In one of her Resilience Practice exercises, Singh offers a table of various sources of support, including but not limited to, talking on the phone, spending time alone, connecting with a family member, receiving a pep talk, journaling, etc. (144-145). This list allows enbies to consider multiple sources and formats of support and to understand that there are a variety of options here, too. This is yet another source of variety in

nonbinarism. Nonbinary rhetoric calls for the acceptance and suggestion of these formats to support others however they see fit.

One of the most important impacts that sharing one's gender journey can have on others is to inspire them and offer hope. Singh takes the time to define "cultivating active hope." She writes, "When you cultivate hope as a verb, you are telling yourself, 'I am valuable enough to dream a future that I deserve.' Hope then becomes a shield from discrimination and a reminder of the solidity of your expectations and dreams" (Singh 169). Through encouraging proactivity, Singh is reminding the reader to take ownership of their identity and where they choose to go from there. In the related Resilience Practice exercise, Singh asks the reader to consider their intersectionality and multiple identities as well as their opportunities and needs for cultivating hope (170). By thinking about these, enby readers are likely more susceptible to inspiration. Hope and inspiration work together to keep enbies and other LGBTQ+ individuals driven as they come across challenges. On page 173 of the workbook, a list of tactics for inspiration is given. It includes activities such as being around other LGBTQ+ friends with whom the enby can experience laughter, having deep discussions about LGBTQ+ topics, and learning about LGBTQ+ cultures around the world (Singh 173). These suggestions appear to offer opportunities for enbies to share their experiences and possibly parts of their gender story with others, as well as hear stories from others that they may be able to relate to, potentially strengthening or expanding their community. When carried out in relation to nonbinary rhetoric, the hope and inspiration developed with others improves bonds through acceptance, hopefully making people want to take action.

When stories do effectively push people to take action, they can be used as vehicles of motivation and change. Sandercock writes that "stories of success, or of exemplary actions, serve

as inspirations when they are re-told” (18). When enbies hear stories of other enbies coming out and living their lives the way that feels the truest to themselves, it can motivate closeted enbies to take action to better their quality of life as nonbinary people. One may hear a story about an enby’s bravery as they took steps in their transition and decide to work on their own. Someone else may hear about how finding community helped them feel supportive and may work on building their own support system. Helping people be themselves is an act of a community serving nonbinary rhetoric; it aids enbies, among other people, and embraces the unique diversity individuals have. Additionally, building and sharing one’s story may help them better understand themselves. Finding relatable concepts and experiences in the stories of others can help an enby solidify who they are and understand the validity of their identity. They can then think about these affirming ideas when they may need to validate themselves in times of opposition or oppression to power through them. The more resilience an enby builds, the more control they may feel they have over who they are and how they interact with the world.

Sharing one’s gender journey is one of the biggest ways we see nonbinary representation, which can inspire and bring hope to other enbies. No matter if one is sharing to thousands on social media or one family member to another, stories have the power to carry positive messages and develop resilience. Singh stresses that “The key to increasing your resilience is to find ways to further integrate the who, what, where, how, and why of your LGBTQ inspiration into your everyday life” (175) to help one navigate through society.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on guides that are written for nonbinary people (and sometimes other trans and/or queer people) to aid them preparing for the outside world. First, I discussed *Coming Out: Living Authentically as Transgender or Non-Binary* by the HRC and its advice.

Next, I looked at *How to Understand Your Gender: A Practical Guide for Exploring Who You Are* by Iantaffi and Barker, which talked about owning one's body and one's gender story. Lastly, I wrote about Singh's *The Queer and Transgender Resilience Workbook: Skills for Navigating Sexual Orientation & Gender Expression*. This chapter serves to bring attention to gender stories as accepted and shared by nonbinary people while discussing ways in which different texts guide enbies to do so.

As guides such as these become more prevalent in society and people feel empowered to share their gender journey with others, the normalization of nonbinarism is pressing forward. Nonbinary people ideally should feel comfortable and prepared should they make the decision to come out to a given audience, and they should be able to reap the benefits. The concept of coming out in a healthy fashion should strengthen relationships as having a mutually trusting bond that leads an enby to feel they can share this part of themselves; this is not something to be taken lightly. It is not just affirming, but necessary, for binary people to acknowledge and respect a nonbinary person's gender identity in whatever form they embody it. The greater the community grows, the more normal it becomes to see, hear about, and meet enbies with various backgrounds and forms of gender expression. The growth of diversity is part of this nonbinary rhetoric and serves all of us, binary and nonbinary people alike. The next chapter will detail my sharing of my own gender story and the way in which I embody the nonbinary identity.

IV. IN MY NONBINARY FINERY

Autoethnography

At what would be the final meeting of our rap/song/poetry creative club, one of the leaders, Evan, stood up to read a piece he had been working on. He presented a piece at nearly every meeting, so when he rose, I already had high expectations. Each time Evan read his writing aloud, it was a proper performance. Finesse oozed from his lips, as it always did, but this time, he said words he would never be able to take back. Misogyny was spilling onto the floor like an overflowing cup, tearing down the subject of the poem, tearing down her body, and tearing down his limited respect for both. My mind was blown in the worst way. He was clearly one of those guys who not only felt entitled to a woman's body, but also reduced a woman to only her body. I felt each line jab into my gut. I was sickened in way that was more than a warning sign; it was as if every word that fell out of his mouth was directed at me.

As a result of such powerful and overriding feelings, along with Evan showing his true colors, I joined the women of the club in quitting immediately following that meeting. I then went back to my dorm and wrote an entry in my notebook.

The entry is shown in the scanned image. It is from a small black notebook that has nail polish swatches on the front cover. The entry is on lined paper and is dated April 20, 2018. I wrote this entry as soon as I got back to my dorm, post-meeting. I was enraged at

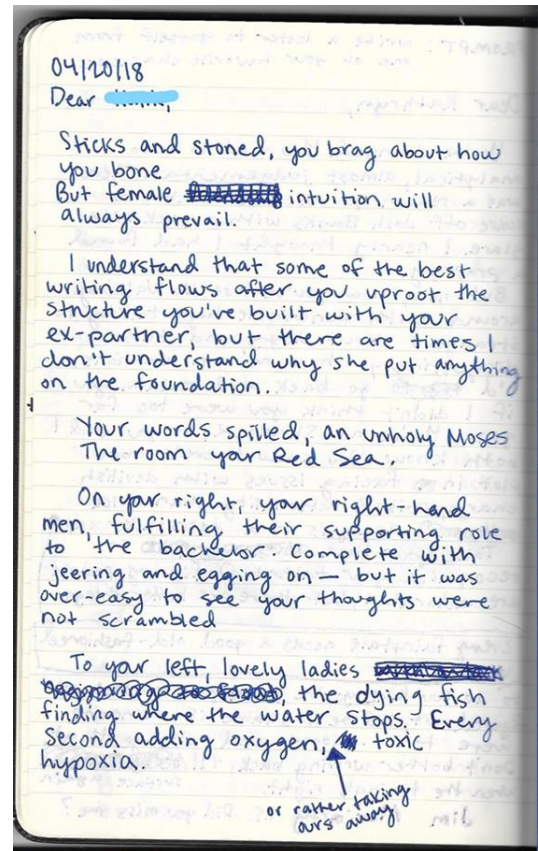


Figure 1. A page from my notebook written on April 20, 2018.

Evan for his performance and more importantly, his intentions. I also felt a sense of power, having quit the club with the girls. I felt a surge of energy fueling me as I put my pen to the page in a way I had not felt for years. Unfortunately, I must have been interrupted because the entry is not complete and never will be (something I continue to regret).

When Evan had performed his piece, I was first enraged, then confused. I had to wrestle with the thoughts for a while before I realized that this connection I was feeling was no coincidence. Even though I identified as nonbinary, I was not immune to the guttural reactions that the women in the room were feeling because the person I am is made up of all the of former selves I have previously been. I knew what it was like to be under those types of comments too. I knew what it was like to face sexism; I knew what my family, my past partners, and the world expected from a woman and what it felt like to overwork oneself trying to meet those standards starting from young girlhood. I thought about how people perceived me daily and the ways that they treated me. Parts of me that I had initially dismissed as my past bubbled to the surface. I felt my inner child crying at what was being said, a child who dreamed of a world where this did not happen but grew up to become someone who witnessed and felt the backlash of such outbursts. This journal entry would become a critical piece to mark my journey of where I stood as a nonbinary person and the connection I felt between myself and womanhood. At the time, I struggled to understand that my ties to womanhood could coexist with what made me nonbinary. I was also concerned about the way that others saw me. The way in which I lumped myself together with the women in the room directly reflected the way I felt I was perceived. The room became a men/not men binary the second the words exited Evan's mouth. We were suffering in this moment together and I felt as feminine as ever.

As I passed through childhood, I began to pay attention to the gender binary. I can remember being a small child and wondering why the men and women in the pews at church took different positions when they prayed. In middle school, I did not understand why boys and girls would carry their books differently. I felt an urge to combine the masculine and feminine. I gained confidence in taking interests in typically masculine areas such as engineering and pop punk music. I found myself drifting from the pink and purple elements of girlhood. In my junior year of high school, I came to terms with being nonbinary. Many nonbinary people express their identity through an androgynous appearance; I wanted people to take me and my identity seriously, which made me think that I had to look the part at all times.

My physical body that always felt too feminine and too petite had always been shown off in bright colors and body conscious clothing. My gender dysphoria grew powerful while I was in high school. I felt like my physical body was betraying me, as it did not fit into two binaries. It did not fit in the man/woman binary, nor the perfectly feminine/perfectly androgynous binary. I did not feel fully masculine nor fully feminine. My physical shape was neither curvy enough nor ambiguous enough to look like an ideal girl or the ideal androgyne. Working with Karma R. Chávez's definition of the assumed or default body, it felt like a losing game every time I looked in the mirror. At times, I wished I did not have to have a physical form because I hated grounding myself in the body I had.

The images below depict the first time I ever brought men's shirts that weren't t-shirts to a dressing room. They were a size too big, but I felt better about myself and my gender than I had in years. In the first picture, I am recognizing that it is, in fact, *my* body in the clothing. It made me feel like the person I was inside was being expressed outwardly. In the second picture, I am covering my face, but I am actually super excited. I was starting to feel gender euphoria.

My small frame was not being expressed to the world; the colors and prints were not girly; and I actually felt comfortable.



Figure 2. A mirror selfie of me the first time I wore a button-down shirt from the men's department.



Figure 3. A mirror selfie of me posing in another button-down shirt from the men's department.

After trying on those shirts, (which I did not buy because I was not ready to explain my purchases to my family) I had more hope related to my identity. It was validating to see myself how I wanted to see myself, presenting and appearing in a way that was comfortable. Reflecting today, I think that some of those feelings were submissive to needing to “perform” androgynously as a nonbinary person. I felt like I had to compensate for my physical lack of masculinity and diverge from femininity. That year, I chopped my hair into a pixie cut. I started buying clothes from the men's section at Old Navy. I adopted masculine mannerisms such as

nodding at people in the hallway.

These gender-affirming changes led me to feel so optimistic about my identity that my high school graduation was the last time I wore a skirt until after I graduated college with my undergraduate degree. Making these changes felt like ticking boxes on an imaginary checklist on how to be nonbinary. It can often feel like there are certain criteria to appear nonbinary, a routine to perform to be recognized as part of the nonbinary community. In my experience, it seems that it is the people who are binary who care more about “what it takes” to be nonbinary than nonbinary people themselves. Expressing nonbinarism can feel just as much like a performance as other expressions of gender; there just is not an “ideal” enby, so anyone can make an enby feel like they are “doing it wrong.”

It depends on who you ask, but society certainly has a definition of “nonbinary,” and it seems to be made by people who aren’t nonbinary. Lara Bochmann and Eric Hampson write in their article about trans and nonbinary people preparing for the outside world, called “Anxious Breath,” that “one can argue that appearing as a non-binary person is possible, but it is up to others to govern what and how this appearance manifests” (116). I have been told before that I don’t fit into other people’s understandings of the word “nonbinary,” and their desire to sort me into being either a boy or girl:

Does this mean you want to be a boy?

But you’re still a girl, right?

But you still use the girls’ bathroom.

But you don't look nonbinary.

This is immensely frustrating to hear. If I do not look nonbinary, what does nonbinary look like? I have passed for my entire life thus far as a girl/woman. In some circumstances I desired this and in others I did not. Passing is important because of the freedoms I have while passing, primarily lack of judgement, and because I change how I navigate the world depending on how I am received. Alternatively, there is a feeling of repression when I pass. I feel the pressure of the heterosexual script and how it is reinforced by the people around me. I face the constant battle of where the discomfort with my identity is placed. Do I want to take it on, myself, and bear the weight while I pass? Am I willing to place it upon others and deal with being seen as a freak or a threat?

Throughout the different phases of gender expression in my life, I can remember distinct moments in which I was dressing in ways I did not want to because it was seen as what I **should** be wearing. I remember in early high school, wearing skirts and dresses, as if my dislike towards them was something I had to get over. This was my forced attempt at passing for a girl. Whether or not someone passes is “complex, context-dependent, and not absent of autonomy” (Bochmann and Hampson 114). However, first and foremost, it is frequently a tactic of protection. Due to pressure from outside forces, I felt anxious about the way that I looked and did what I felt I had to do to avoid backlash. Being seen as a girl is safer; it is expected, so there are less worries about how others will interact with me. I felt that I had to fit into society's expectations for girls in order to keep myself safe and to navigate through daily life unbothered by others.

After realizing I am queer and discovering the spectrum of gender, I took the liberty of coming out to begin expressing myself by dressing authentically to my character. In doing so, I have never really tried to pass as anything. I realize that due to my body and physical features,

without making any changes, I will likely always be seen as a woman. This is something I am still coming to terms with, even years later.

The majority of the time, when it comes to my appearance, I choose to genderblend, or balance my masculinity and femininity to appear gender neutral. This is a common method for people who identify outside of the gender binary. For example, a response in Seth T. Pardo's interviews of AFAB nonbinary people: Participant #154 said that they "...like to mix men's & women's clothing together sometimes, such as wearing a skirt over pants, or a men's shirt with women's jeans and colorful socks. I feel this expresses my androgyne identity. I like having short hair as it gives me a more androgynous appearance..." (14). For nonbinary (and other trans) people, representing oneself through clothing is one of the most prominent ways we let the world know who we are. Expressing gender in this way is not always as nonchalant for nonbinary people as it is for cisgender people; it can take bravery and courage to appear androgynous in scenarios in which many people are not or to dress against the norms for your gender assigned at birth. Genderblending is one way to express oneself in a way that is evident, but not too showy; I think it helps me fit in neutrally with most gatherings of people. It doesn't typically draw much attention, unless everyone in the group is dressed very feminine or very masculine.

Frequently, there were times when I did not want to look any more feminine than I had to, but simultaneously, I felt the pressure of society to look like the girl I was expected to be. At first, my mom indicated I could only cut my hair to a certain length, and it took a while for her to get used to it before I felt I could have the hairdresser cut it with clippers without receiving backlash. I was also pressed to "dress nicely" and "act appropriately" when seeing extended family members, which included the acts of dressing femininely such as acting "like a lady," and responding to she/her pronouns. I struggled with this for years and still do due to the strong

gender roles being forced upon me. Like the various range of emotions listed in the Human Rights Campaign's guide to coming out, I feel multiple ways simultaneously. In some ways, it is tedious to pass. I must remember that it is best for me to lead life with choices that are true to me without getting caught up in my ties to what I "should" be doing as someone who passes as a woman or without trying to appear "more" nonbinary and androgynous. At times, I feel proud in my identity, but at others, I wonder if thinking these thoughts makes me an impostor and if I am "nonbinary enough."

I really resonated with the idea from Participant #101 in Pardo's study of AFAB nonbinary people who reported "despite being in the mood to wear a skirt on occasion, to do so would feel like 'giving in' to what was 'expected' of cisgender women. A more comfortable solution for this person was to dress and appear androgynous and 'not [draw] too much attention' to one's self'" (Pardo 13). I lived by this as a rule for six years straight, starting halfway through high school and carrying on the act through my undergraduate career. I remember when being presented with dresses and skirts, I felt like my silhouette would immediately look feminine, especially those that were close fitting or body positive. I remember wishing that my body could be shapeless. I made the rule in an attempt to feel better about my physical body, but I don't think it made me feel better; I retained the tolerance I had for it in less feminine clothes, but nothing really improved. Minimizing the discomfort was enough of a success at the time.

When people are interacting with nonbinary people who genderblend, they sometimes pay extra attention towards the individual, as if they can settle on deciding the label "man" or "woman" for them. One study by Alison Ash Fogarty and Lily Zheng found that due to this, people crafting labels for others' genders were often "putting a modifier—like poorly passing, ignorant, cross-dressing, or unconfident—before the binary gender, rather than challenging the

binary genders themselves” (109). It frequently seems that society is more comfortable tearing down and devaluing nonbinary people than they are reflecting on labels in which to describe them. To choose words that are derogatory, intentionally or not, towards nonbinary people is something we will have to deal with until the majority of society validates us enough to normalize vocabulary that accurately describes us such as “nonbinary,” “gender neutral,” “androgynous/androgynous” and uses words that give context such as “femme,” “butch,” “genderblend” and “genderfuck.” These words already exist, they just need to be used.

Society provides a lot of judgement in area of appearance, so I think it is important to give terms like genderblending and genderfuck their own space. “Genderfuck” is the usage of very polar gender expressions to “fuck with” the idea of the gender binary on purpose. People who are genderfucking often present using stereotypically gendered clothes like skirts or ties, as well as other expressions like makeup and facial hair in order to convey their lack of conformity to gender norms. This relates to nonbinary people “because genderfucking offers an intensely destabilizing experience as an experience of gender” (Fogarty and Zheng 111). After growing into myself, so to speak, this concept has encouraged me to be myself and express myself how I felt best, though I don’t feel that genderfucking is for me, at least on a regular basis. I think that this stems from the amount of attention that can be drawn from doing so. I have become accustomed to blending in and attracting minimal attention based on my clothing; additionally, I am not a person who generally likes being in the spotlight. I have previously said that I was trying to work up the confidence to genderfuck, but I think this is related to personal matters more than gender matters and this does not mean that all nonbinary people agree with me.

One area in which nonbinary people may need to protect themselves is in the workforce.

This may include passing as a gender they may not feel connected to or holding back part of their identity in their work environment, both as means of protection. In “Doing Gender and Being Gendered through Occupation: Transgender and Non-Binary Experiences” by Rebecca Swenson et al., a nonbinary person says they “would not have got their job if they had revealed their gender identity to their employer and, in not doing so, felt that they had ‘*discarded part of [themselves]*’” (4, italicization in original). To add to the discomfort, gendered uniforms were required at their workplace, which “further heightened their dissonance with the environment” (Swenson et al 4). Since there is such a lack of understanding of the fluidity of gender and minimal acceptance that various nonbinary people can look and dress in many ways, uniforms can be a particularly brutal implementation for nonbinary people. Experiencing feelings of isolation or exclusion due to elements of the workplace they cannot control can cause nonbinary employees to put necessary space between them and their working environment in order to protect themselves.

I, personally, have never felt the pressure that comes with work uniforms. I have, however, in one position, been constantly misgendered at my job and felt afraid of telling my coworkers and bosses about my identity. It is not uncommon, especially in the food industry, for coworkers to use phrases where call you labels or terms of endearment that are gendered. For example, “Girl, please” “Hey, Handsome,” “Excuse me, Sir,” or “Yes, Queen!” When you don’t identify with these terms, they can feel like microaggressions. I was called feminine pet names daily, typically by older waitresses who did not mean any harm, but they still made me feel extra self-aware of my identity. I was beyond uncomfortable, but I did not feel like my workplace was a safe space to come out in. The employees were comprised of a healthy mix of people, and one of my coworkers was out as LGBTQ+, but judging by how judgmental the servers could be of

their customers and how rigid the manager was, I did not feel warm fuzzies when I was at work. There was not a reassuring community for me in that space. Having a stable and supportive environment is crucial to making an inclusive environment for others, nonbinary people included. Knowing that the staff one works with is respectful can positively influence the nonbinary individual's mindset about the situation, transforming how they feel about work, where they likely spend much of their time.

In an interview conducted in Swenson et al.'s study, interviewee Fred, who is masculine and nonbinary, discussed his experiences at the gym. He explained that his local gym only has gendered changing areas. To get through that situation, he goes with someone else. "We both use the same changing room," he says. "[There is] strength in numbers" (4). This is one tactic nonbinary people may use to navigate uncomfortable public spaces. Feeling such a way in spaces that should be safe and comfortable impedes one's ability to do personal actions in a public place. In doing so, almost no public spaces are safe for nonbinary people to express themselves; there is often a feeling of judgement.

There was a time in which locker rooms were my personal version of hell. It was uncomfortable for reasons related to both gender and sexuality, but my main problem was this: I felt that there was no good option for me. Being AFAB, I used the girls' locker room, in which people who anatomically matched me were around me, but I felt a disconnect. The problem was not that I wanted to use the boys' locker room either. Existing out of the binary, I simply wanted a place to change where I didn't feel like people were judging me and my body as if they were expecting a radical difference between them and me, like an extra limb or something. In a study of trans and nonbinary students conducted by Susie Bower-Brown et al., one fifteen-year-old

nonbinary student said that their school made the issue more complicated by ““want[ing] [them] to find a disabled toilet (only one available and it’s all the way in the sixth form that wasn’t always available) to get changed in despite me saying I was fine in the female changing room”” (8, parenthesis in original). Allowing nonbinary students to perform daily activities, such as changing clothes, in the space that they are most comfortable in is something that should not be radical.

Bathrooms can be equally awkward. I’ve been stared at plenty of times for entering the women’s bathroom while presenting masculinely. They look at me like I don’t belong, which in one sense, they are correct; I feel that way, too, but I rarely have the option to find a gender-neutral bathroom. The lack of gender neutral bathrooms in public, but particularly in schools, affects many nonbinary individuals on a daily basis. In Bower-Brown et al.’s piece, one fifteen-year-old nonbinary student “described feeling policed by other students for using gendered facilities (‘told I’m using the wrong bathroom’)” (7-8, parenthesis in original).

This is a common issue for nonbinary people, particularly students, since most schools do not have gender neutral bathrooms. Having to make that choice can unfortunately be significant. While the bathroom should just be an environment to function in, people notice when they believe you do not belong there. Sometimes there is retaliation, like getting pushed out or being called names that harms how the nonbinary person feels about their own identity. The insensitivity that comes with not providing a space for nonbinary people to exist in makes us feel even more out of place than we may already feel. Furthermore, this lack of respect for nonbinary students’ wishes and the policing of them does not show them that they are valued as students and as human beings deserving of the comfort many people take for granted.

For students, there can also be discomfort in the form of dismissal in the classroom. In

Bower-Brown et al.'s study, a sixteen-year-old person who identifies as "non-binary but unsure" said "Sometimes teachers actually laugh at the [negative] comments or don't do anything which is really upsetting and makes me anxious as someone who doesn't identify as their assigned gender" (10). To have a figure of authority invalidate one's gender identity can be traumatizing. Students spend many hours a day at school and some see their teachers more than they see their own parents. To feel such an unwelcoming feeling is detrimental to students' self-worth.

These examples highlight the discomfort nonbinary people feel when they are forced to express a binary gender. It does not feel authentic and can even feel like a threat to a nonbinary person's ability to function in society. For example, many times strangers refer to me as "ma'am" when speaking to me. I feel so detached from that term that often I will not respond. If they are speaking to my face, sometimes the disconnect feels stronger, and I end up staring and zoning out while the person continues talking to me. At times, I do not feel real, or I cannot process that this is happening to me. These moments, combined with discomfort created by public surroundings, affect my ability to function properly.

It should also be noted that there are also some positive experiences by nonbinary people, including students who contributed to Bower-Brown et al's piece. For instance, one fifteen-year-old non-binary student said, "I wore a skirt and my science teacher asked me to stay behind after class and said how boys might think it's ok for them to come to school in skirts if I was wearing one. This is now different and I'm allowed to wear both skirt and trousers" (13). Another seventeen-year-old student who identifies as nonbinary/genderfluid/agender contributed: "I spoke to a teacher last week who tried to justify using gay as an insult. Though they were willing to listen to me explain how using it as a negative implies you believe there is something wrong

with being gay” (Bower-Brown et al 13). These examples illustrate that though slowly, there is progress happening and young people’s lives are being influenced positively by acceptance and inclusion.

I feel lucky to have grown up in a primarily liberal suburb such that I was never harassed about who I was and how I presented. Were there microaggressions? Sure. Were there people who opposed me and my identity? Absolutely. I consider myself very fortunate to have not had anyone bully me to my face or physically harm me for being who I am. I can remember having teachers in school who were dismissive and/or appeared ignorant of the nonbinary identity, which caused me to be selective about who I came out to and the battles I picked to fight.

Unfortunately, misogyny seeped into my life just as it does for all other girls and feminine-presenting people in our society. I was accustomed to the perils of the patriarchy including men who feel they are entitled to women and their bodies. I grew up getting objectified. I had been whistled at on the street by strangers. My uncle once told my father that he would have to lock me up “to keep the boys away.” Hearing myself as the subject of these comments infuriated me, but it also confused me. I could not, and still cannot, understand why men (Evan included) thought it was okay to make this sort of commentary about women, or about anyone at all. We were all equally human and my body should not dictate the way the world sees me, but it did.

Pitfalls such as this made me wonder about my position with womanhood. I understood the anger towards the unfair circumstances women faced when compared to men, but I did not fully feel like a woman. Particularly, I did not feel attached to the feminine future I was supposedly intended to have. Society always told me that women were always kind; women

were always gentle. Women cooked and cleaned; there was a pay gap for women. Women used to be considered inferior, and despite the progress we have made in society, women still reap the losses of that history in today's world. I was accustomed to the direct correlation society creates between femininity and weakness. I would not allow myself to be seen as weak; did that mean I would not allow myself to identify as a woman?

I felt this terribly unfortunate, lose-lose situation when it came towards the idea of strong women or empowerment of women. Women want to be seen as equal to men, which is a valid and important. I agree with that. However, in order to reach that status, women must be kind of approved by men; men would be the ones granting that respect and honor. This would mean that the actions taken by women towards equality would need to appease or appeal to men, still satisfying their set (but hopefully expanded) expectations for women. In other words, feminism is a men's issue as well. By performing such actions, are women empowering themselves to an audience or themselves? On the other hand, if women seek to gain status through their own actions that may not appease men, how would they know that they are really gaining the respect and honor they deserve from others? These questions help fuel my lack of identification with womanhood and caused me to identify outside of the gender binary. I recognize that most people do not see society in this way, and I see no problem with others identifying as women; it is simply not where I stand.

Since gender and aspects of femininity, masculinity, and androgyny are all so performative, I have accepted that I will be judged no matter how I present. I feel drawn to the nonbinary identity because of the way I see gender performed around me. The struggle that women face while looking for true equality is something I understand, having identified as a girl before coming out, and it is still a problem that I can relate to as an enby. I must navigate through

different but similar struggles regarding what equality, representation and community look like now as I reject gender norms and make my choices of how to express myself for me.

Conclusion

I may know what it was like to be raised and projected to be a girl, but I also know what it was like to defy those expectations from society. I know what it was like to bring button down shirts from the men's section across the store to put them on in the women's dressing room. I know what it was like to hear a hairdresser ask, "Are you sure you want to cut all of this off? That's a lot." I know what it is like to adjust your mannerisms to fit in with different groups and what it's like to not know which ones you wanted to use when you are alone. I know what it is like to be unsure if I am being "nonbinary enough."

The journey to get to the label "nonbinary" can be filled with other challenges as well. For example, there is such a lack of representation that often people do not know or incorrectly know what it means to be nonbinary. Chassitty N. Fiani and Heather J. Han's work on navigating identity yielded quotes from nonbinary people about having "no frame of reference for what I'm going through" or that they "didn't really know that there were other options" (186) during their search for their identity. Sometimes nonbinary people may not know what other nonbinary people look like or what they have gone through. Due to this inability to compare their experiences, nonbinary people can often feel alone in their exploration of their gender.

I would also like to return to the common feeling of not being "trans enough" and how it is something many nonbinary people have in common. It is certainly something I have experienced; this not-quite-feminine-enough, not-quite-masculine-enough, lack-of-fitting-in feeling in many public spaces is isolating. At the same time, there is internalized transphobia in society that keeps many people from being themselves. In "Challenging the

Cisgender/Transgender Binary: Nonbinary People and the Transgender Label,” Helana Darwin points out that even when nonbinary people are not explicitly excluded from support groups for trans people, they may feel as if they are not trans enough as conversations may discuss binary transitioning that binary transgender people may go through. (367-368). Related to this, some nonbinary people may struggle with the decision to identify as transgender or not. Having such a loose term means that some people see the term as stricter than others. This relates to queer communities even being judgmental about nonbinary people and their identity, furthering feelings of aloneness or displacement.

Learning to navigate these situations and find solutions is part of what it means to be nonbinary. Coming to terms with that is something each of us go through; not everyone has every problem, but as a community, we face these every day. This autoethnography does not even touch on systemic challenges such as bias and discrimination, as well as lack of representation in the media (Fiani and Han 186). The normalization of nonbinarism and building of supportive spaces and communities is integral to our ability to live and thrive. This can start by providing space for enbies to share their stories in ways that they choose to.

When it comes to parties that are not LGBTQ+, nonbinary people often find themselves explaining their gender and the gender binary to people who are not educated on it. For example, in Abbie E. Goldberg and Katherine A. Kuvalanka’s work on identity development and community belonging, “several participants noted that because they were ‘so out with their gender’ (Rory), they felt ‘a lot of pressure pretty consistently to advocate for [themselves] as gender nonconforming people.’ One student said: “‘It’s just difficult and awkward, and I try my best to inform them and not give them any bad impressions’” (Goldberg and Kuvalanka 118).

Carrying the burden of being the gender-explainer is something I can relate to. I have

kind of taken it upon myself to try to improve how I do that since I have been asked so many times. This is something other nonbinary people I know experience as well. I think that everyone who is true to their selves and happens to have gender expression that indicates they are anything other than cisgender gets questioned--- mostly about their own gender, but sometimes the greater concept of gender, too. It's all just a social construct, as gender is so performative.

Who I am is complex, but not complicated. To me, being nonbinary is about rejecting the traditional gender roles society has laid out for us. I feel I exist to break down expectations of femininity by example. This does not mean I would not be nonbinary if I still present feminine at times; my gender expression does not change who I am. I also have the freedom to express myself androgynously, and I will still be nonbinary on days when I feel that represents me best. I do still feel some connection to womanhood, as defined by my deep offense at Evan's reading, and that is something that is a part of my identity without it being my entire identity. Who I am and how I feel are very personal and are ultimately up to me to determine. Regardless of how I present, I hope that my existence as an openly nonbinary person will continue to help me make connections with other enbies. As I grow as a person, I hope to expand my support system and connect with the LGBTQ+ community. Over the years, my confidence in my story has grown as I have made choices to live authentically and I hope that other enbies are having or will have similar experiences as they determine what is best for them as they pass, come out, and/or transition.

V. CONCLUSION: THE NECESSITY OF NONBINARY RHETORIC NOW

With the recent drafting and passing of anti-trans legislation in American society, nonbinary people may find themselves in the peak of discomfort daily. Trans and nonbinary rights are being opposed and nonbinary rhetoric exists to combat injustices such as the legislation that is being crafted and enacted across the country.

For example, the Iowa House passed Senate File 482 (2023) that bans students from going into a bathroom, changing room, or locker room that does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth; additionally, students would need parental consent to obtain an accommodation in order to use a single-stall or faculty bathroom. As of March 17, 2023, the bill is moving forward to Gov. Kim Reynolds to be signed into law (Akins). By denying trans and nonbinary students the right to live freely as their true selves, especially while they are growing up and finding out who they are, this decision by Iowa officials will undoubtedly cause young (trans and) nonbinary people to have to repress their identities. Not only is this going to impact their experiences at school, but it will change their personal comfort levels and socialization skills as they are isolated from their cis peers. This has the potential to leave lasting negative effects that will follow them into adulthood.

Furthermore, State Senators Bob Hall, Tan Parker, and Charles Perry of Texas have introduced Senate Bill 1029, which would outlaw “public funding for gender modifications and treatments,” including sterilizing surgeries, mastectomies, puberty blockers, supraphysiologic estrogen (to males) and testosterone (to females), as well as “the removal of any otherwise healthy or non-diseased body part or tissue”; additionally, the bill aims to prevent some health plans from providing coverage for procedures such as the ones listed above. Lastly, it aims to increase legal liability for physicians and health care providers who help trans people with

gender-affirming care (S.B. 1029, 2023). If passed, this bill would effectively terminate all gender-affirming medical care for trans people, both binary and nonbinary, of all ages due to issues such as funding and intimidation through liability. This is one of the harshest pieces of legislature against trans rights in the country.

Michael Knowles of the *Daily Wire* spoke at the Conservative Political Action Conference on March 4, 2023 using blatantly anti-trans rhetoric. Gustaf Kilander of *The Independent* reposted a clip of Knowles saying, “There can be no middle way in dealing with transgenderism. It is all or nothing” (0:00-0:06), clearly stating a binary. Knowles adds, “... transgenderism must be eradicated from public life entirely-- the whole preposterous ideology at every level” (0:42-0:53).

Knowles’ rhetoric was not accidental and is a prime example of why nonbinary rhetoric is needed. In order to accommodate people of all gender identities, especially the nonbinary ones, there is a clear need to break the all/nothing and true/false binaries that he speaks of. In contrast to Knowles’ words, I believe there is a “middle way” of “dealing with” us; more than that, there is also a diagonal way, a twisty way, a loop-de-loop way, multiple ways of navigating transgender existence and recognition in society. There are genders that exist both beyond and in between men and women; there are numerous ways to describe and experience the transgender ideology. Nonbinary people fill these roles. Nonbinary rhetoric accepts these roles and many iterations of them and with people like Knowles openly willing to violate not just our rights, but our existence, we need that rhetoric.

Regardless of the level at which the anti-trans legislation passes, effects are occurring socially; the stigmatizing and marginalizing of trans and nonbinary people is being passed down from people with power and platforms, to people who may not have those positions but still

influence others with their negative rhetoric, to everyday people who may or may not educate themselves on the matter, which is alarming not just from the perspective of nonbinary rhetoric, but also human rights.

Unfortunately, it is too often that people do not care greatly about causes, even when related to human rights, such as nonbinary (and trans) rights and normalization until they affect people in their social circles. It is hearing about the triumphs and struggles of people we know, people we do not know, people who are nonbinary too, to make positive change that supports nonbinary people. Others need to know about the experiences of injustice and discrimination that tarnish our society. The actions that both binary and nonbinary people take are crucial to nonbinary people's rights in this country, and the nonbinary population is not large enough to successfully combat this on our own. Nonbinary rhetoric is everyone's business and creating community in our society is of utmost importance.

Nonbinary rhetoric is a boost for humanity as it encourages people to truly consider other options and varieties as related to binaries of all kinds. Whether we, as people, do or do not have language to encompass every experience, each one is deserving of respect. Nonbinary rhetoric acknowledges minority stress theory and the hardships of minority experiences and encourages each individual to voice their opinions and story in an effort to be understood and build community. No one should have to explain or define their existence, and we praise those who do when blazing their own trail and expanding the definitions that we currently have. Nonbinary rhetoric provides comfort in exploring between binaries and room to grow. This includes with one's body, grounding oneself in it for the body that it is, and how it contributes to one's existence.

Intersectionalities are important, especially for normalizing enbies who live in queer, disabled, and/or plus-sized bodies of color and building confidence while understanding one's gender story is a key part of thriving in resilience. It is here that we see variety. Variety is appreciated in emotions, experiences, methods of support, and other aspects of nonbinarism and the representation of these varieties is crucial to the survival and flourishing of the nonbinary identity. As more nonbinary people feel they can share their stories, the more help, support, and action can be associated with the community, embracing fruitful diversity in society, which benefits all of us, binary and nonbinary humans alike.

APPENDIX SECTION

APPENDIX A: Glossary of Useful Nonbinary and LGBTQ+ Terms

- **Assigned Female at Birth (AFAB):** refers to one's sex assigned at birth as female, but not necessarily indicate their gender now
- **Cisgender (adjective, abbreviated as "cis"):** identifying with the gender one was assigned at birth
 - o Ex: a person with a penis identifying as a man or a person with a vagina identifying as a woman
- **Come out (verb):** The act of queer people announcing their identity and/or sexuality to a culture where being straight is the standard
 - o In academia, this refers to the process of deviating from the norm or dominant culture, sometimes in opposition, and making that known to others
- **Enby (noun, plural enbies):** Pronounced like the letters "n.b." this term simply means a nonbinary person—this term gained popularity through Tumblr
 - o In some instances, this term is used to refer to a nonbinary child. For the purposes of this thesis, it is not used in a child-specific way.
- **Enbymisia (noun):** hatred towards those who identify as nonbinary
 - o This is distinct from transmisia as it focuses on nonbinary individuals, not all trans individuals
- **Enbyphobia (noun):** fear towards those who identify as nonbinary
 - o This is distinct from transphobia as it connects to issues that impact nonbinary people that may not impact binary trans people in the same way.
- **Gender nonconforming (adjective):** describes someone who does not adhere to typical binary gender expression and/or gender norms
- **Genderqueer (adjective):** a gender identity rooted in the queerness of being separate from the masculine/feminine binary
 - o Sometimes this word is used as a synonym for nonbinary, a subcategory of nonbinary, or an umbrella term over nonbinary.
- **Gender identity (noun):** How someone self-identifies regarding being a man, woman, both, neither, enby, etc.
 - o This may or may not correlate with the sex the person was assigned at birth.
- **Gender expression (noun):** How someone chooses to outwardly portray their gender identity through clothes, makeup, posture, mannerisms, voice, etc.
- **Nonbinarism (noun):** the concept of being nonbinary
- **Pass (verb):** The act of outwardly appearing to meet society's standards for a given gender identity, usually through their gender expression
 - o In academia, it refers to blending in with a dominant culture or group
- **Queer (adjective):** Describes someone who is not cisgender and/or straight —this term was once used as an insult and has recently been reclaimed by the LGBTQ+ community. It is more popular with younger members of the community.

- **Transgender (adjective, also called “binary transgender,” abbreviated as “trans”):**
Describes someone whose gender identity does not match the gender they were assigned at birth. It can be used as an umbrella term to include nonbinary identities, but is most often used as the opposite of cisgender and refers to men and women
 - Ex: a person with a penis identifying as a woman or a person with a vagina identifying as a man
 - Ex: A person with a penis identifying as nonbinary or a person with a vagina identifying as nonbinary
- **Transition (verb, noun):** the act or process of making changes to one’s gender expression and/or body to accurately express themselves as they go from one gender identity to another
 - Potential elements of transitioning may include but are not limited to a change in fashion, altering one’s voice and/or mannerisms, name change, use of hormones, and gender affirmation surgery
- **Transmisia (noun):** hatred towards transgender people. This word may be inclusive of nonbinary people but is not always.
- **Transphobia (noun):** fear towards transgender people. This word may be inclusive of nonbinary people but is not always.

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