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On Doing Non-Binary Gender: An Examination of Perceived Discrimination and Geographic Location

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how non-binary people perceive and manage the threat of discrimination during their daily experiences. Participants (n=9) were interviewed with opened-ended questions about their gender presentation, experiences of discrimination, and use of tactics to navigate perceived discrimination in their communities. The difference of geographic location had the biggest impact on how participants responded to the set of interview questions. Non-binary people from rural areas perceived people to discriminate against them and actively engaged in avoidance tactics including keeping their gender identities closeted and engaging in presentation shifts. In sharp contrast, participants from urban or suburban areas used tactics to affirm their gender presentation. They were less likely to perceive discrimination by others which contributed to presenting their gender as non-binary more openly and without fear of discrimination. When discrimination such as misgendering did occur, these urban participants were more likely to use affirmative tactics to assert their gender identities or lean on support systems to validate their gender performance.

INTRODUCTION

What is gender and what does it mean to perform gender? The difference between gender and sex have been questioned, and gender has been examined as a social construction by a large number of theorists (Ayala and Vasilyeva 2015; Bogardus 2020; Butler 1990; Fausto-Sterling 1993; Haslanger 1995; McKitrick 2015; Moi 1999; Spelman 1988; Stoller 1968; Stoltenberg 1989; Thorne 1993; West and Zimmerman 1987). This research will employ West and Zimmerman's (1987) theory of how people perform gender by "doing gender." Gender, they argued, is a social construction of behaviors, attitudes, and expressions that allows people to be perceived as either masculine or feminine (West and Zimmerman 1987). With this view, West and Zimmerman (1987) argued that doing gender is consistently an achieved status that must be actively portrayed. To achieve doing gender correctly, people must navigate the time, place, and culture in which they are performing. Brown (2017) adds that geographic location shapes all people's identities. There is not one general way of approaching gender and sexual identities because humans are not only social but fundamentally local creatures.

Whether people are performing gender within the family or workplace, at school, among friends, in public, or in private, context shapes what is expected from either men or women. This process is often unnoticed as it partly reflects socialization in the dominant heteronormative culture. Schilt and Westbrook (2009) describe heteronormativity as the normative expectations of each binary category which serves as a way to reinforce assumptions and expectations about heterosexuality and "opposite-sex" relationships. That is, heteronormativity, while also constructing taken-for-granted expectations of heterosexuality, is underwritten by the expectation that people perform gender and have identifiable sex categories congruent with their birth sex for others to easily categorize them as male or female. As people interact with one another, it is

common to look for certain gender characteristics, behaviors, or expressions within the interaction that point to someone's sex. By interacting with one another, people can learn how others will react to them when it comes time for them to do certain things. This is how people know how to interact in given situations.

This thesis will focus on the ways that non-binary individuals perform their gender within the context of discrimination. "Transgender" is used by many as an umbrella term that non-binary people fall under, but this is not always the case. The term "transgender" will be used here to refer to people who perform and self-define as a gender different than their birth-assigned sex, while identifying with a category of either male or female. The term "non-binary" will be defined as people who go beyond the sex/gender binary and deliberately do not perform gender in ways the dominant culture defines as normative. This is useful when considering the target population as it is important to know the difference between people who claim the labels of "transgender" and "non-binary."

For some non-binary people, identifying as transgender can be challenging as they struggle to feel "trans enough" (Garrison 2018). Garrison (2018) explains that non-binary people experience this struggle because their experiences do not correlate with the dominate culture's understanding of what it looks like to be transgender. In addition, challenging the binary can result in different experiences of discrimination. Although there is relatively little social science research on non-binary populations, there is ample research on the transgender population more broadly that consistently evidences such discrimination. For example, the National Transgender Discrimination Survey (Grant et al. 2011) cites instances of discrimination in education, employment, health, family life, housing, public accommodations, identification documents, and police and incarceration. In addition, research shows that within everyday interactions,

transgender individuals experience instances of microaggressions, discrimination, and victimization (Grant et al. 2016; Johns et al. 2021; McLemore 2018; Miller and Grollman 2015; Meyers 2003; Munro et al. 2019; Sue et al. 2007; and Truszczynski et al. 2020). However, these experiences appear heightened for transgender individuals who do not present in ways that align with binary sex or gender categories, many of whom identify as non-binary. As Miller and Grollman state (2015:826), "Gender nonconforming trans adults reported more events of major and everyday transphobic discrimination than their gender conforming counterparts." In turn, these types of discrimination contribute to adverse health outcomes such as depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, attempted suicide, heath-harming behaviors drug/alcohol abuse, smoking, and again attempted suicide (Chinazzo et al. 2021).

The persistent threat of such discrimination is a key aspect of the contexts within which non-binary people must perform gender and seek to have their gender performances recognized and validated. Thus, this research will explore the question, how do non-binary people think about and actively navigate the threat of discrimination as they perform their gender identities? To address this question, I will draw upon qualitative data from in-depth interviews with a convenience sample of nine non-binary individuals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As noted above, social science research focusing on non-binary people is extremely limited, and while there is more extensive research on transgender people, non-binary people are seldom discussed separately, if they are included at all. Thus, throughout this discussion, much of the research cited will focus on transgender people broadly, in some cases including but not limited to non-binary people specifically.

Constructing Gender

As individuals grow and develop, they learn to navigate social situations through processes of socialization. With respect to gender, the binary of male/masculine and female/feminine is at the center of socialization. People are expected to act and present in a feminine *or* masculine way, but not both. From the first agents of socialization, the family, people learn how to perform gender based on the sex they were assigned at birth (Kane 2012; Martin 2009). The early socialization of these binary assumptions influences how people perform gender within families and peer groups. This serves as a way to force gendered expectations on individuals to get them to conform with the heteronormative gender binary (Dentice and Dietert 2013).

Although extensive gender socialization and routine interactions make doing gender feel second nature to many, people who deviate from normative expectations must think much more about how they perform their gender identities. For example, transgender people report being strategic in their gender performance so that they are perceived as doing gender in a way that could be clearly categorized as the gender with which they identify (Schilt 2009). Furthermore, when non-binary people, and others, step completely outside the gender binary, they are likely to be rendered socially unintelligible. For instance, many non-binary people's gender may be entirely unknown to others, and they may be misgendered as men or women on sight (Garrison 2018). Especially if their gender is confusing to others, they will likely be met with negative attitudes and perceptions about them (Norton and Herek 2012). Puckett and Levitt (2015) looked at how such perceptions and attitudes toward binary transgender people result in an internalized stigma about the self, but the effects are likely even more dramatic for non-binary people. This research points to the stress non-binary people undergo when thinking about or strategizing how to do gender in any given situation. How do non-binary people go about performing and

presenting a gender identity if and when they perceive that it will be scrutinized and may result in being discriminated against?

Discrimination

As a minority group, transgender people face external stressors such as structural discrimination and microaggressions that may lead to the individual feeling stigma based on their identity (Johns et al. 2021; Munro et al. 2019). Microaggressions have been defined as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative…slights and insults." (Sue et al. 2007:271). Both discrimination and microaggressions create a hostile environment that can lead to mental health problems for marginalized populations (McLemore 2018; Meyers 2003). Due to holding a minority identity, higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation are often seen regardless of high or low levels of perceived identity importance among transgender individuals (McLemore 2018). Minority stress theory states that mental health differences between sexual and gender minorities and heterosexual and/or cisgender people can be explained largely by chronic stress that results from living within a hostile culture, which creates the conditions for experiences of harassment, discrimination, and victimization (Meyer 2003; Munro et al. 2019; Truszczynski et al. 2020). Marshall et al. (2016) takes it one step further saying that because of the discrimination the transgender community faces, they often look for and need acceptance and approval from others at a higher degree than cisgender people.

Overall, transgender people have a cumulative disadvantage, and 63% have experienced at least one serious act of discrimination (Grant et al. 2011). Discrimination in school was studied by Grant et al. (2011), who found that 78% of students who performed their transgender identity at school faced discrimination, and 31% reported being harassed by teachers or staff.

Thus, the performance of their gender can have a direct relation to the success students have in school. At the university level, there is also discrimination that stems from doing gender in a way that deviates from dominant gender expectations. Whitley et al. (2022) studied the chronic misgendering of transgender graduate students at the university level, and of the students who reported chronic misgendering, a large percentage (73.97%) were from the natural sciences. These students often faced instances of bullying, ostracism, or other pervasive microaggressions on top of the chronic misgendering, and the students who were visibly transgender experienced these at a higher rate (Whitley et al. 2022). What is most alarming is why this kind of mistreatment was allowed to continue. As Whitley et al. (2022:20) state, "This is an environment that privileges the comfort of cisgender people over the fair treatment of transgender people." With the challenge of misgendering, bullying, or other microaggressions, transgender people can struggle to achieve academically. In Whitley et al's study (2022), some transgender students left their program altogether, changed programs, or did not return to higher education after facing unfair treatment based on their gender identity.

Another place where transgender individuals experience discrimination is the workplace. Grant et al. (2011) found that 90% of transgender people reported experiencing harassment, mistreatment, or discrimination in the workplace. Furthermore, Waite (2020) found that transgender people are between 2.2 and 2.5 times more likely to experience discrimination in the workplace compared to their cisgender coworkers. Misgendering in the workplace is common, as it is with education. Grant et al. (2011:61) found that 45% of their sample reported being referred to with the wrong pronouns "repeatedly and on purpose" at work. This finding does not attest for the instances of unintentional incorrect use of pronouns in the workplace when someone may not pass when doing gender. Also, it only accounts for individuals who were able to find work.

Grant et al. (2011) found that people in the transgender community have double the rate of unemployment, with 47% reported being fired, not hired, or denied a promotion due to their gender identity. Another 71% report trying to hide their gender identity at work, and 57% delayed transition due to the discrimination in the workplace. This leads to people within the transgender community experiencing economic insecurity and homelessness. In their study, Grant et al. (2011) found the respondents four times more likely to live in extreme poverty and twice as likely to be homeless when compared to general population.

This research focuses on the transgender community broadly, and many of the samples analyzed include numerous transgender people who identify as non-binary. However, the discrimination faced across these domains may be even more severe for non-binary people specifically given that they are less likely than transgender-binary people to be socially intelligible as non-binary (Shuster 2017). Truszczynski et al. (2020) found that non-binary people experience discrimination daily ranging from microaggressions and verbal harassment to physical assaults.

As transgender people go through the process of transitioning, there are documented experiences of discrimination in areas of education, employment, health, family life, housing, public accommodations, identification documents, and police and incarceration (Grant et al. 2011). The earlier the transition, the fewer resources that a person is likely to have before emergent forms of discrimination start to affect their daily life. For example, if a young adult starts to transition, they will face very different discrimination in their education, family, and work, compared to a middle-aged adult who may be already established in a workplace, obtained an education, and created a family. These are all resources that the young adult would not have available. Lombardi (2009:988) states, "Discrimination because one is transgender or transsexual

will likely be a constant experience for people once they transition." That discrimination, Van Schuylenbergh et al. (2000) states, can lead to lower self-esteem, mental health issues, suicidal thoughts, a fatalistic attitude, and the need for acceptance and approval from others.

Importantly, though, people experience acts of discrimination differently depending on the context in which it occurs, and existing research points to the importance of geographic context for sexual and gender minorities specifically. For example, Dalh, Scott, and Peace (2015) found that LGBTQ people often have significant trials coming out within rural communities. In these communities, there are difficulties coming out due to religion, interpersonal relationships, information and structural support, and intrapersonal processes. Furthermore, in a study by Flores et al. (2021) on acceptance of LGBT students by teachers, there was a much lower acceptance of LGBT students in rural areas than in urban or suburban areas. Interestingly, students within these schools also perceived the number of LGBT students present quite differently. In rural areas, students assumed there were very few LGBT students. In urban areas, there was much different perception that matched the number of students who identified as LGBT. Not surprisingly, then, rural LGBT students are less likely to feel comfortable within schools as teachers show low levels of acceptance . This has an impact on their perceived discrimination and reluctance to come out. Roberts et al. (2022) found that high school students who identify as LGBTQ+ in rural towns experienced school as antagonistic, and rife with internalized homophobia, discursive violence, and institutionalized heterosexism. These students often viewed college as an escape from their rural communities and the discrimination that comes with them. Given the importance of geographic context for sexual and gender minorities, in this research, I pay particular attention to how non-binary people's gender performances and perceptions of discrimination vary by their geographic locations.

Resources

The transgender community as a whole often serves as a valuable resource to individual members when navigating such pervasive threats of discrimination. Self-narratives are created to find and understand one's "true self". Within the transgender community, people often model what they see, read, or watch on television of other transgender people in order to affirm their own narratives (Mason-Schrock 1996). People within the transgender community who already feel their narratives are valid tend to act as guides when interacting with other members by providing identity-making tools such as stories, questions, and other experiences they may have had (Mason-Schrock 1996). These tools act as validation and bring people out of denial, affirming their "true self" (Mason-Schrock 1996). For non-binary people, this may look the same or different. Narratives are often strategic and are used to validate chosen identities (Garrison 2018). The narratives of non-binary people often model what is seen as something that was different with their gender very early in life, potentially to validate their feelings of being "trans enough" (Garrison 2018). The transgender community thus serves again as a resource, but may cause feelings of uneasiness within the non-binary population that they are able to take on that identity (Garrison 2018).

Families also serve as a potential resource for people in the transgender community to rely on financially or emotionally. Erich et al. (2008) state that family relationships are directly related to life satisfaction scores when transgender individuals have high-support families. Additionally, marital status gives people a certain advantage in resources when transitioning. When transgender people are in relationships, which qualify as an emotional and economic resource, people are less likely to perceive discrimination from other institutions (Liu and Wilkinson 2017).

Evans and Rawlings (2019) researched the effects of positive and negative relationships on the development of transgender people's performance of doing gender. For example, having the resource of a teacher willing to call a student the correct pronouns can provide students stability and validation within their gender performances. To compare, McGuire, et al. (2008) identified and surveyed both transgender students and gender-conforming students to address how they each experience the school setting. The difference between their experiences within the school comes from the amount of psychological distress, and the fear of safety regarding others finding out about their transition. In response to harassment and fears in school, oftentimes transgender students respond by transferring, dropping out, or avoiding school (McGuire et al. 2008). These studies are important to the current research as they may give direction to the question of why people use certain tactics to navigate discrimination. When doing gender, there are often threats of discrimination or harassment at play that transgender and non-binary people need to navigate during any given interaction. The ways they do that work, and especially any strategies or tactics involved, has yet to be explored in the existing research.

The purpose of this research is to address the following questions: how do non-binary people think about and actively navigate the threat of discrimination as they are performing their gender identities? Specifically, I will explore what tactics they may use, if any, to navigate these threats of discrimination, and how, if at all, these practices are shaped by the geographic contexts in which they occur. To address this question, this study uses qualitative in-depth interviews with a convenience sample of nine (n=9) non-binary individuals.

METHODS AND DATA

The unit of analysis for this study are individual non-binary people. To collect data on their experiences, I used qualitative interviews to ask open-ended questions of participants.

Interviews allowed me to answer the specific questions of this research by getting to understand the lived experiences of non-binary people when performing gender and how they understand these experiences. The technique of interviews allowed me to do this, mirroring several researchers who gain insights on transgender people's experiences using interviews (Dentice and Dietert 2015; Dozier 2005; Edwards, Fisher, and Reynolds 2007; Evans 2019; Garrison 2018; Mason-Schrock 1996; and Schilt and Westbrook 2009).

Recruitment and Data Collection

This research took a multi-faceted convenience sampling approach. This was used to find non-binary people who were comfortable talking about their experiences performing gender in different social contexts and the tactics they use for themselves and/or others. The only requirements to be part of this study were for the participants to identify as non-binary (including but not limited to specific categories such as genderqueer, genderfluid, or agender), to be 18 years of age or older, and to reside in the United States. Due to the limitations of the study, requiring any more qualifications of the participants would have been highly inconvenient and may have further restricted the number of individuals who took part in the study.

The recruiting method used in this research made use of social media to locate prospective participants. A flyer of the research questions and goals was posted to academic Twitter, Reddit, and other social media platforms to get the word out about the study (see Appendix A). In the end, I was able to recruit nine participants who responded, signed the informed consent, and participated in an interview. This research is not aiming to make broad, generalizable claims. Rather by having fewer participants, I was able to focus on getting rich detail of their experiences.

Table 1 below shows all of the demographic information for these participants. Each participant chose their own pseudonym, and I honor their choices by using their chosen pseudonyms throughout. These participants ranged from the age 21-31, with early life location, current location, and occupation also known for each participant. Of the nine participants, four reported growing up in a rural community. However, only one of those four currently resides in a rural location, compared with eight of the nine who currently live in an urban location.

Table 1. Sample pseudonyms, geographic locations, and selected demographics (n=9)

Name	Early Life Location	Current Location	Occupation	Age
Alek	Rural	Urban	Student, Funeral Home Staff	21
Sesame	Urban	Urban	Office Job	25
Gray	Urban	Urban	Real Estate Development	25
Juno	Rural	Rural	Cook	27
Woodpecker	Rural	Urban	Bartender (Urban) Fish processing (Rural)	28
Dave	Rural	Urban	Student, Server	21
Sophie	Urban	Urban	Uber Eats	31
Jib	Urban	Urban	Paraprofessional	27
Sam	Urban	Urban	Ceramic Artist	24

The one participant who did reside in a rural community, Juno, lived there out of convenience and for economic reasons, as they live with their parents. Additionally, two of the nine participants reported attending college and working at the same time. Not including the

students, one of the participants reported working more than one job, compared to six only reporting they work at one job.

Once the respondents agreed to participate in the research and the interview was scheduled, I emailed them the informed consent document through Qualtrics (see Appendix B). Participants read and signed the informed consent form before the interview took place. Each individual also was given the link to the consent form to keep for themselves. All interviews took place on Zoom. When interacting with the participants, I worked to create the most comfortable and inclusive environment possible. Due to respondents discussing personal experiences with gender performances, it was a very personal experience they were sharing. I facilitated this by engaging in small talk with participants, reviewing that they did not have to answer any questions if they did not want to, and offering to share my research with them.

I often answered questions about why I am conducting this research and what it means to me. To this I would reply that allowing non-binary people to tell their own narratives in a safe space allows outsiders to recognize the experiences of their everyday life, by bring to light their perspectives. As a diverse, small segment of the transgender population, non-binary people may not have opportunities to share their unique narratives. This can help the general misinformation and misunderstanding surrounding the non-binary population. This allowed me to connect with my participants and eased the interview process.

Each interview lasted around an hour. All participants were asked many of the same questions, but I also asked impromptu follow-up questions, in order to get clarification or elaboration on any question needed. Using a semi-structured interview strategy like this allowed me to gain a more accurate understanding of my participants' experiences. Based on the responses in initial interviews, I also developed new questions to ask in later interviews,

specifically about the significance of geographic context, as this emerged as a theme during initial interviews. The main questions I asked were about how they think about their gender identity, what experiences they have when doing gender in public, how discrimination plays a role in their gender performances, how they respond to this discrimination, and their tactics used to navigate discrimination. See Appendix C for full list and discussion of questions.

With the participant's permission, data was recorded using Zoom and then uploaded to MediaSpace, a password-protected platform. After the interview, I then transcribed the interviews myself. This was done by listening to the interview and making any corrections to the auto-generated transcript that MediaSpace provided. After each interview was transcribed, it was then deleted. I also replaced participants' real names with pseudonyms and omitted any potentially identifying data.

Data Analysis

I used a modified version of grounded theory to analyze the data. To start the process, I coded initially by finding themes that were very close to what the respondent said, in order to not deviate from their intended meaning. After this, focused coding took place where I started to identify frequent initial codes and synthesized them. Coding this way guided the knowledge drawn from interviews and prevented prior assumptions from leaking into the analysis.

To further develop these codes into concepts, I wrote memos to attempt to bring concepts together during the interviews, during transcription, and while coding. These memos helped to analyze the data further as more interviews were conducted and new codes emerged. This started during the interview process, coding a few initial interviews, looking for themes, writing memos, and being able to ask in future interviews about the emerging themes. Then I

finished by coding the remaining interviews, looking for additional themes, and again writing memos until I had examined all aspects of all interviews.

Ethical Considerations and Limitation or Implications

I reduced harm by using procedures that are congruent with sound research design and do not risk respondents to unnecessary exposure to harm. Due to the potential risk of psychological distress, resources were provided to participants. These resources included a list of free mental health hotlines that they could call, including Crisis Call Center, IMALIVE Online Chat, National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, and Crisis Text Line.

Challenges that limited my research is the way in which I targeted participants. By using social media to find participants recruited a young, middle-class population. This is due to the fact that not everyone can afford have access to social media through the internet. Additionally, I faced challenges with social media. The timing of my post impacted whether or not if people would respond to the feed, so I worked to try different times and days to overcome this issue.

RESULTS

My analysis shows that gender presentation, the types of discrimination experienced, and the tactics used to manage that discrimination vary significantly by where non-binary individuals are located during interactions. According to the participants, performing a non-binary gender within a rural location placed constraints on how they felt during interactions. These interactions are actively shaped by repeated negative and perceived hostile interactions that lead to a shift with respect to their gender performances. Within more urban or even suburban areas, however, participants not only felt comfortable doing gender in a way they wanted but also felt more likely to be perceived by others positively when doing gender as non-binary.

Thus, each of these will be discussed along two dimensions: rural and urban places where the performance of gender occurs. How people believe they are being perceived by others in these settings and the different types and degrees of support they receive from family members and peers provide non-binary individuals with confidence or insecurity when presenting their gender identities within rural and urban settings.

Rural Experiences of Discrimination and Gender Performance

According to my participants, doing gender as non-binary within rural communities is very difficult. My participants shared examples of discrimination or perceived discrimination when presenting as non-binary in their rural communities. For example, Alek grew up in a rural area but eventually moved to an urban area for college. When coming out to a therapist back home in a rural community, Alek was shoved further into the closet. They stated,

> I mentioned to him that I identified as non-binary. And what he said, it was something along the lines of, 'A lot of young women think they're non-binary. They go through that process and are confused,' or something like that. And he made it a point to call me a young woman like every five seconds after that. And that kind, that was really upsetting to me because at the time I had been brought up thinking that didn't exist, and that was bad and all these things and, um, it just kind of made me question everything again and made me think that I wasn't real.

The therapist, along with a heteronormative upbringing, made Alek believe that their non-binary identity was somehow wrong and invalidated them in the process. Needless to say, Alek did not present as non-binary in this community. However, there was a very stark difference they found when moving for college. After asking if they felt more acceptance after moving, Alek explained, "It's like they asked for your pronouns before referring to you and all these things. It wasn't like, 'I will ask for your pronouns because I'm required to as a question,' but it was like, 'I'll ask you pronouns because I care.'" The support and acceptance of presenting as non-binary

in this area served as validation and reduction of the internalized hatred that Alek experienced as a result of their rural upbringing.

Like Alek, Dave, a participant who also grew up in a rural community, internalized hatred in their non-binary identity brought on by experiences in a rural setting. When Dave tried to come out to their family and friends, it was often ignored, and they became ostracized. Due to this self-doubt and internalized hatred, much like Alek, Dave did not go about presenting as non-binary until they moved to an urban area. When asked if the smaller community where they were raised had an impact on that decision, Dave stated,

> Like, you'd get made fun of, and people like, wouldn't really want to associate with you if they thought you were like that or whatever. And even just like, also going back to like, I guess, how people don't learn, like I didn't even know that being trans was a thing because I thought it was, like…I also thought it was wrong when I was little because I'd ask, adults things like can girl turned into a boy or something like very basic. But then obviously they respond saying something like, no, that's the wrong. And that held me back a lot, especially with realizing myself, a lot of internalized hate towards myself. Like, why do I feel like this or like I shouldn't feel like this? And the pressure to conform is pretty strong. Like people would talk about me in a way that I wasn't like a person or something.

Experiences of discrimination like these resulted in the participants being less likely to do gender as they would have liked to. Either being invalidated in their experiences of discomfort with gender presentation, or being bullied and ostracized from people around them, was common response from people around these participants when trying to disclose how they felt about gender. By going against the normative gender binary, these rural participants were often faced with discrimination in regard to their gender performance. Sophie felt this discrimination when in a rural community in the Midwest, saying, "I was in a bad atmosphere, I was going out hoping that I would find something but still looking for all of the bad things [microaggressions]." When asked if they noticed microaggressions and discrimination, Sophie talked about their gender

presentation as something that was influenced by the bad atmosphere. When the atmosphere was bad, they were more likely to notice the microaggressions and discrimination. When asked what they do after they notice the atmosphere, Sophie said, "I will change most whatever I can in order to prevent any of that discrimination. I kind of switch I guess I will mirror what I see from men that are around there because I don't want to end up on a missing persons case."

Not all of the participants were able to mirror the social norms of gender presentation around them, however. Dave, for example, said, "There are a lot of times where I don't really like fit in either like men or women spaces. So, it's kinda like hostility from both." When doing gender and presenting as non-binary, Dave was faced with hostility from both masculine- and feminine-presenting people. Individual within these communities may have less exposure to diversity throughout their entire lives and when faced with non-binary people they get nervous as their gender performance goes against basic social norms that are largely followed in these rural communities.

Urban Experiences of Discrimination and Gender Performance

Within urban communities where the participants resided, there was a stark contrast to the experiences of non-binary people from rural areas. The differences are in how urban non-binary people perceive others responding to their gender presentation. For example, the perceived discrimination that may happen when coming out is nonexistent for Gray. When asking about coming out at work, they stated they assumed the company would be indifferent but maybe surprised. Sesame, a participant who was raised in an urban community was also fast to say, "I think most of the time it's just people not getting it, really. I do not know that it's ever discrimination."

Sam, a participant who grew up in a suburban area and later moved to an urban city, said that they do not feel discriminated against in everyday life due to their gender presentation. Furthermore, Sam believes that if someone does misgender them, it is out of misinformation or lack of understanding but never malice. They said, "So I generally don't see much discrimination, if at all. That's like, again, it's just being misgendered here or there." When I asked if they thought others misgender them on purpose, they replied, "No. No, not to the point of like malice or anything." Similarly, Jib said, "I might occasionally remind you I prefer the they/them over the she/her/hers. And it's just, it's frustrating. But at the same time, like, I'm always going to assume ignorance over malice."

Based on these interpretations of misgendering, the discrimination that urban participants experienced, they reported presenting gender no differently out of concern for how others might perceive or treat them. This is due to the assumption that others are not misgendering them on purpose, rather there is just a lack of knowledge or perhaps misinformation surrounding the topic. In addition to not perceiving significant discrimination, urban participants discussed feeling supported within their gender identities from different institutions in their environment. For example, within the workplace, people in urban areas reported being more likely to present as non-binary and be accepted for it. Sam experienced this when coming out to their boss, explaining,

> It was like when I came out to my boss, I was like, 'Hey, so I think I'm transgender and non-binary.' I wasn't even using they/them pronouns at the point, I was still using he/him for a while. My boss is just like, 'Alright, cool. Just like let me know if you change your pronouns. And we are supportive of that if you do that.' I was like, 'Oh shit.' I didn't like, I knew that...I knew that was gonna be kind of like roughly the answer coming from those people. But to actually have it was great. It was straight up just that and that alone that was like, 'Okay, cool. I can actually do this and I can be comfortable talking to my coworkers.'

Having the acceptance and support of their boss allowed Sam to feel comfortable in the workplace and not fear discrimination from coworkers. Similarly, Gray experienced acceptance and support with coworkers when they came out. When telling me about their experience, Gray said, "I told them, 'Hey, I'm coming out as non-binary, and I wanted to let you guys know.' My two coworkers, they were the most supportive, kind, loving people, and I was just very fortunate to have that." This acceptance in the workplace allowed Gray to feel less anxious about being misgendered in the workplace and allowed them to present as non-binary without worrying about their job. Jib experienced this when a coworker went out of their way to tell others that they use they/them pronouns and to explain that their name is different than what was listed with their employer. Jib said, "Um, I was not expecting him to do that because I didn't, like, I didn't ask him to do that. He just did it, and I felt incredibly supported. I thought it was very, very sweet, proactive thing to do." By having a coworker start the dialogue about their gender identity, it allowed them to feel supported in that environment at work. This support reduced the perceived discrimination that was felt by Jib in the workplace.

Furthermore, after moving away to college, even participants from rural areas experienced this acceptance once they relocated to an urban location. Dave started presenting as non-binary, and they said, "I feel very free to be, to show masculine and feminine traits, or yeah, it's good." Without the pressures to conform and beliefs about the transgender community imposed on Dave from their former rural community, they were able to explore their gender presentation and begin to feel good about it. Another participant, Sophie, also explained the use of presentation shifts by perceiving acceptance in certain areas. To minimize this discrimination and perceived discrimination within their current location, Sophie explains,

> I was basically inside the home just, um, taking care of dishes and the house and
> stuff for a year because I was terrified of going outside and seeing some random

bad looks. And because of my anxieties at the time, I was looking for the bad looks, which is the worst thing to do, but you can't quite help it. I think at that time I was just looking for some validation in a space where I was having no validation at all.

Here Sophie explains the impact of moving from an urban to rural community. They no longer could present gender as they were used to and felt great anxiety doing everyday things. When Sophie relocated to a rural area, they experienced and perceived discrimination of their gender performance very differently.

Doing Non-Binary: Tactics

The emotional toll that can come from presenting as non-binary can be extensive, light, or somewhere in between. The former is experienced more often by the individuals in this study who grew up in a rural area. They use tactics to deal with their emotions and others' such as changing their gender presentation, behaviors, or emotions to fit a certain situation; acting passively to discriminatory actions; or using avoidance tactics where perceived discrimination is situated. In comparison, people engage in affirmative tactics such as asserting their identities when in an urban location and looking to support systems to affirm their gender performance. The difference in the use of tactics between the participants could also result from a number of things including how long they have been out as non-binary, who people are out to, resources, support from others, and location in which people are presenting gender. However, this section will illustrate how geographic context shapes the different tactics used in navigating the threat of discrimination or perceived discrimination.

Rural Tactics

When people live in rural environments, there are fewer avenues to gain support of a gender identity that deviates from the dominant gender expectation. Instances found in this research demonstrate strategies such as going back into the closet or hiding their gender

identities, presentation shifts, and throwing themselves into work or other activities to avoid discrimination. Overall, there is a general approach of avoidance of gender presentation done by hiding and presentation shifts. As seen with Juno, Alek, Woodpecker, and Dave, they all used these tactics as a way to navigate discrimination and to minimize its impact on them.

Getting pushed back into the closet with respect to their gender identity serves as a type of tactic as it changes how participants feel to fit the outside expectations surrounding one's gender presentation. An example of this is when Alek came out to their therapist in their rural community. When asked how the interaction with the therapist influenced their gender presentation moving forward, they said, "I don't know, it really forced me back in the closet for a really long time after that." Similarly, Juno mentioned that they caught themselves stopping their performance of gender as non-binary. Their own internal sense of self was weighing on Juno when they said, "I really want to wear women's clothes, but I just shut myself down really quickly." Instead of claiming the identity of gender non-binary they stayed closeted, not disclosing their identity as non-binary. Finally, Woodpecker explained, "I had initially tried to come out and just got a ton of ton of backlash. So, it was kinda right back in the closet and pretended that I wasn't experiencing gender dysphoria for like ten, almost ten years until the pandemic happened." These participants keep themselves in the closet and hide their gender identity longer than if they otherwise would in order to avoid or prevent discrimination within rural communities.

Going along with this, presentation shifts act as a way to avoid discrimination when out interacting with others. Participants actively hide their gender identity by shifting their gender performance within different situations. For example, Woodpecker describes the shift between urban to rural life as,

> It's kind of like a head-space thing, I guess. Like, I can be fluid at home and that's great and awesome and I love it, and that's why I live in the city. But it takes, like, a week of adjusting and trying to police my own behavior and my thought processes to kinda get into headspace like, 'Okay, I'm a guy for these next six weeks as three-month period, I'm a dude.'

The shift and active participation in internal framing to fit the expectations of others is a tactic in these situations of gender presentation. Woodpecker often engaged in a shift and active management of the way they framed a situation. Within rural environments that are unknown in public, they are more hesitant as they do not know if it is generally a supportive environment. They will default to performing in a masculine way to fit the expectations of others. However, when they are at home (in an urban area) it is easier to be fluid and to find the supportive atmospheres that would allow for their non-binary presentation of gender.

Likewise, Sophie describes similar presentation shifts within different locations to avoid discrimination saying, "But even before I leave, I'll usually just try to boy mode as best as I can as to prevent any sort of discrimination like that." This ties directly into the navigation of discrimination. As a response to discrimination, participants know what to expect from future interactions and thus use the tactic of presentation shifts to prepare and actively manage that threat of discrimination. Woodpecker discussed different environments where they do gender. When thinking about how they present gender when they go to their rural hometown, Woodpecker stated, "So I presented as masculine, and I interacted with people as a guy out there. I'd hear what they say, and I, you know, I know their attitudes so, you know, I, I just don't want to interact with it." Likewise, when on the boat or processing fish, which Woodpecker does in a rural location on seasonal hours only, they engage in gender presentation differently than when back home in an urban area. To explain why, Woodpecker said that one night, after a night of seasonal hours talking with bunkmates, conversation escalated quickly. Woodpecker recalled,

But they started talking about there's someone who works in housekeeping was a transgender woman and they noticed and one of them was complaining because he felt that the women in the factory got treated better than the men. And the other one made a joke like I will just identify as a woman. And it had escalated to the point where the first guy was talking about how he wanted to kill trans people and democrats and this and that. So, I kept my mouth shut and booked the plane ticket while I was listening to him.

The fear after that interaction influenced how Woodpecker went about taking their injections, keeping their locker locked up, sleeping without a shirt off (even when the temperature is excessively warm), showering at inconvenient hours, actively pitching their voice down, and referring to their partner with she/her pronouns out of fear of provoking physical violence, rumors being spread, or getting called names.

Experiences with shifting gender presentations and perceived negative reactions when presenting as non-binary in their rural communities was a common theme among participants. For example, due to perceived discrimination, Woodpecker does not even try to present as non-binary when leaving the urban area they now reside in, engaging in a presentation shift from non-binary to masculine:

If I was presenting more fem, I would expect to get a lot more shit just in general. This is why I don't do that. I would expect them to start getting a lot more shit because they are generally perceived as a woman. Like, people are just don't know better. So that I can, I would expect that to cause problems with them. And so, I present masculine even when I leave the area.

Alek also spoke to the shifting gender presentations. They said, "I think part of it is a little bit of insecurity on my part because I spent so much time being told that non-binary is an invalid identity." Invalidation of identity in this sense becomes a type of discrimination as it has an impact on the individual's sense of self and presentation of gender. When being invalidated within the gender identity, it can lead to this shifting of one's gender performance.

Another example, Sophie, a participant who has moved around a lot, is met with a lot of perceived discrimination in areas that are more rural. When living in a rural community, Sophie spoke to why shifting gender presentations is so important, saying,

> I will present in a certain way to prevent any harm, any other time where I do not have any sort of way that they could legally discriminate against me. You know like, um, every now and then I just travel out of the blue. But even before I leave, I'll usually just try to boy mode as best as I can as to prevent any sort of discrimination like that.

The use of presentation shifts in this instance was connected with feelings of terror, anxiety, and invalidation with their gender identity and performance. It was better for Sophie to police their behaviors when doing gender when going outside in this rural community than get random bad looks from others. Using internal frames to understand how others will perceive them allows these participants to avoid discriminatory interactions.

All these participants actively think about discrimination and how it impacts the ways in which they perform gender and specifically whether they perform their non-binary gender identities in rural communities. The use of one of these tactics or a combination of several them serves as a way for these participants to navigate through rural locations and deal with the stresses that come from perceived discrimination or discrimination interactions.

Urban Tactics

To compare, the participants who spent more time in urban areas have a different approach to the active toll that presenting as non-binary may take. They are more likely to use tactics that are overall affirmative of their gender presentation. This appeared in bolder confrontations actively asserting their gender identities, brushing off microaggressions, or leaning on support systems when performing their gender performance. The bold assertion tactic was used by Sophie as the main type. After their short time spent in rural areas, Sophie decided

to move to a more suburban area like where they grew up. They do not shift how they present gender at all now, but rather live as their authentic self within their suburban community. Sophie explained,

> I've found that in the area that I live now I've been known as that one person who will just do it [gender presentation] because they want to do it. And I've found out recently that people get disappointed when I'm not doing that. So, in that respect because it's it is a more supporting atmosphere and even if they don't know my gender identity, they know that I'm that kind of person.

Sophie would present gender in the way they wanted to within the context of the suburban or urban area, asserting their gender identity. Without having to specifically know someone's gender identity Sophie experienced in this supporting, suburban, atmosphere that asserting their gender identity as non-binary allowed them to present as such without any perceived discrimination. When asked about discrimination, Jib discussed a time a feminine-presenting coworker engaged in a conversation with them about wearing dresses to work. Jib explained,

> I was trying to describe the way that I identify, and she could not understand it. So, it was, 'But you're so pretty, but it looks so good.' I'm like, 'I'm not asking you to hype me up. I'm asking you to please understand that I literally don't understand what you're talking about. I don't really have an interest in those things, I support you being into that. But I can't give you another side to this conversation because it's not a conversation I ever really wanted to be a part of.'

Instead of shifting gender presentation to fit in to this interaction, Jib went out of their way to assert that they were feeling uncomfortable with the discussion of dresses as something beautiful and girly. Jib went about asserting their identity as a non-binary person who wore dresses simply because it kept their legs cool on hot days.

Similarly, Sam, when asked about misgendering, said, "I'm cognizant of it. Like especially with like with the incorrect ones. I always correct people." By always correcting people, they are directly asserting their gender performances and identities. When met with discrimination via misgendering, Sophie explained how they handled it as,

> Whenever I do hear it at this point, I now just think they're not referring to me unless I'm in some place where they would need to refer to me by that name. So, it's, like, in public dead name. Well, it's not me and I'll just wait for them to say my chosen name. If they don't then they're obviously not talking to me at least mentally. I mean, I get a lot of people who get angry at me for doing that but I would rather they refer to me as who I am than who they thought I was.

Thus, in addition to asserting their preferred pronouns, Sophie also sometimes ignores being referred to by their dead name, even if doing so can provoke anger, as another way of asserting their gender identity.

If discrimination may bother them, participants look to support systems such as friends or coworkers who validate their experiences, rather than changing their gender presentation as participants did in rural locations. This serves as an outside resource to manage or mitigate unwanted emotions. For example, support within the family serves as a resource for Sam. When talking about coming out to extended family by presenting as non-binary at the next family get-together, they stated,

> Like, the next, like, broader family thing I go to, like, I'm probably going to show up presenting how I do. And my mom's gonna be like, 'AHHHHH!' Okay, I really do need to have a talk with them. 'So, this is just gonna be the normal now. And if anybody says anything, I'm going to need you to have my back because otherwise like I can't do this.' I'm not gonna, I'm not gonna show up to a place where I'm not welcome. Knowing that person has my back is incredibly important.

For Sam, having family at their back meant all the difference when coming out and presenting gender as they wish with extended family. Sophie talks about their support systems as "my girlfriends, my sister, my grandparents, and, um, a group that I found through doing TikTok, the high dad project…it was very nice being around people who were very supportive as well as other people who were like me and really showed me that I wasn't alone." Having these types of support systems and resources to lean on could also impact why there is such a difference within location.

To be clear, these categories of tactics are not black and white. Many of my participants engaged in tactics from both categories, but for the most part, they actively did one more than the other. For example, Jib uses avoidance when talking with coworkers, Sam uses presentation shifts when with family, Sophie uses a presentation shifts and avoidance when in rural areas traveling, Alek uses their support system with coworkers, and Dave uses them at work.

DISCUSSION

The current study uses in-depth qualitative research to answer the following question: how do non-binary people think about and actively navigate the threat of discrimination as they are performing their gender identities? The participants of this research varied on the ways in which they present gender, perceive discrimination, and engage in tactics based on the geographic location in which they are doing gender.

Within a rural community, especially when growing up in a rural community, there is a hesitation associated with presenting one's gender as non-binary. The participants actively navigate the perceived threat of discrimination by using tactics such as hiding their gender identity, using presentation shifts, or avoidance. Among the urban and suburban participants, they view their gender presentation differently. Instead of playing on the defensive side, always expecting discrimination, they play offensively. They actively present gender as they wish, and when they are met with discrimination or perceived discrimination, they are more likely to offer excuses such as misinformation or general not understanding. Often these participants did not even categorize these instances as discrimination; rather they perceived them as less than that, and as a result, it had little effect on their gender presentation. These participants use tactics such as asserting their identities or leaning on support systems.

People who grew up and stay in urban areas are less aware and less likely to perceive discrimination when presenting gender as non-binary. Once a participant relocates from a rural to urban areas, they also perceived less discrimination in those areas and reduced or no longer engaged in presentation shifts to minimize perceived discrimination in rural locations. They are fast to assume that if someone misgenders them it is purely due to the fact of misinformation or a general misunderstanding of what non-binary is. This is a sharp contrast to what the non-binary participants who grew up in rural areas expect within their presentation of gender.

The social construction of gender within rural communities is seen as hostile and discriminatory towards people who do gender beyond the binary. They are more likely to expect people to react negatively and with hostility towards them due to their gender presentation and actively navigate in a way to prevent or avoid any discrimination. This may be due in part to a relative lack of gender diversity within these rural communities. If gender diversity is relatively rare in these communities, in the sense that few non-binary people are out and presenting in affirming ways, people within these communities may be less likely to come into contact with non-binary people. As a result, non-binary people may then be seen as outsiders within these rural communities. This can result in rural places as being perceived as hostile.

These findings may also reflect the social and cultural construction of rural places as always hostile and urban places as always progressive and affirming, especially within the queer community. Indeed, going back decades, queer culture has tended to portray rural communities as inhospitable to queer people and queer life, whereas urban and perhaps even suburban communities have been portrayed as safe havens to which rural queer people could escape to live more freely (D'Emilio 1983; Weston 1995). These portrayals have even encourage mass movements of queer identified people into cities like San Francisco and New York, thus playing

a role in the formation of queer neighborhoods and enclaves (D'Emilio 1983). Perhaps to an extent, then, the participants in this study, in perceiving the threat of discrimination in rural communities and no such threat in urban ones, were echoing the social and cultural construction of each, which some scholars have characterized as "queer anti-urbanism" (Herring 2010).

Whatever the underlying reasons, these finding are congruent with research done by other authors such as, Dalh, Scott, and Peace (2015) discussed in the literature review. They found that LGBTQ people often struggle when coming out within rural communities. These difficulties within the LGBTQ participants from Dalh, Scott, and Peace (2015) are much like the difficulties faced by the participants in this study, non-binary people. According to my analysis, the rural non-binary people I interviewed have a lot higher perceived discrimination than the urban non-binary people in my sample. This is very evident in the results as rural non-binary people take an active role navigating these perceived threats of discrimination to stay safe in their day-to-day life. One active way they do this is by engaging in presentation shifts that hide their non-binary traits and they present gender in a cisgender manner. This is done to bypass any discrimination and negative feeling from others. Much like the difficulties Dalh, Scott, and Peace (2015) found, non-binary people would not challenge certain social norms to be seen in the identity of non-binary within rural areas. This is done to stay safe and navigate the threats of discrimination. The differences within this study and Dalh, Scott, and Peace (2015) is the population of interest. Sexual minority people within the LGBTQ communities faced many of the same issues that gender minority people face as non-binary. This study adds to the literature on discrimination of minorities as non-binary people face many of the same perceived discriminations when coming out and presenting gender as other minority groups.

When looking at the perceived acceptance by non-binary people, people within urban areas are much more likely to perceive acceptance in many situations whereas rural non-binary people perception of acceptance is restricted to close friendships. In the study of acceptance of LGBT students by their teachers done by Flores et al. (2021), acceptance and perceptions of LBGT students were different in rural and urban areas. This study found that non-binary people from a rural area felt the same degree of discomfort. With less perceived acceptance by others around them, non-binary people in this rural context will avoid negative situations. This study is different from Flores et el. (2021) as the minority group of interest is that of non-binary. Future studies would benefit at looking at the overlap of minority identities whether sexual minorities, racial minorities, socioeconomic minorities, or others. The intersection of minority identities could uncover new tactics used to navigate such discrimination.

Finally, participants with early-life experiences in a rural area viewed moving to college as an escape. They faced instances of discrimination when they tried to come out as non-binary to family, friends, religious groups, and in school. Likewise, Roberts et al. (2022) found that high school students who identify as LGBTQ+ in rural towns viewed college as an escape from their rural communities and the discrimination that comes with them. Both Alek and Dave within this study perceived discrimination very differently after moving to an urban area for college. They then felt comfortable expressing their gender identities because the perceived discrimination was different. Like the LGBTQ+ minorities, rural non-binary people found the geographic move as an escape from perceived discrimination. Again, these studies differ by the use of participants. This study adds to the discussion how non-binary people face similar experiences within rural areas.

However, there are several noteworthy limitations associated with this study. Limitations of this study include the sampling approach used. This sample was a convenience sample found through the use of social media. Therefore, although this was not the stated aim of the study, this data is not statistically generalizable to the larger population. Age was also a factor within research. All of the participants ranged from 21-31 years old. Due to the study being recruited online, specifically on the media platforms of Reddit and Twitter, it may have reduced the chances of an older population seeing and reaching out to be a part of this research due to the users of these platforms consisting of younger users. Additionally, this study's main focus was on the gender minority experience and did not explore how this could vary by race, ethnicity, or other demographic differences. There could be a loss of knowledge due to the lack of focus on multiple identities.

Despite these limitations, this research still raises questions for future research. In addition to looking at intersectional identities of minority groups, the cultural component of these participants was an interesting aspect that differentiated perceived discrimination and navigation. Within an urban context growing up, in two of the nine participants, the influence of religion in their areas impacted how they viewed their own gender identity. These religions of Mormon and Catholic held certain cultural assumptions that influenced how the participants thought about their gender identity and how they presented gender. It would be useful to study cultures outside the US to get an idea if this perceived discrimination cuts across different cultural assumptions. Second, COVID-19 came up in a few of the participants answers to why they came out when they did. With more time to think about personal happiness and to look inward participants attributed this self-exploration to the extra time provided by the pandemic. It would be

interesting to see if this pattern is cut across the transgender population as well as non-binary people specifically.

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Appendix A

Appendix B- Informed Consent

To Whom This May Concern:

My name is Megan Ridler. I am currently a graduate student at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I am doing research on how non-binary people perform gender within the context of potential discrimination. The PI of this research is Assistant Professor, Dr. Aaron Hoy. His role is to guide my research and aid in the process to assure all goes smoothly. In my research, I will be conducting interviews with participants who are 18 or older and identify as non-binary. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are more than welcome to discuss your decision whether to participate with anyone that you are comfortable with. Potential benefits of participating in this research could include enjoying the experience of being interviewed and being heard and affirmed in your gender identity. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits.

I will be conducting the approximately 10 interviews, which will last anywhere from 60-90 minutes. The interviews will include questions about basic background information, gender identity, discrimination, emotion work, and strategies to mitigate discrimination. The procedure that participants will be asked to follow includes signing this document, scheduling an interview via zoom, and then attending the interview. Any time during this procedure a participant can terminate participation in this research study. Interviews will be done via Zoom and recorded (audio and video) to be transcribed by the researcher. Participants privacy and confidentiality will be protected by only the PI and myself having access to these recordings. You will be downloaded to MediaSpace, a password protected website, and then deleted after transcription.

If you do not understand something and/or have any questions or concerns during the interview, feel free to stop me at any time. If you have any questions or concerns prior to the interview, do not hesitate to ask me. I can be contacted at megan.ridler@mnsu.edu or at (507) 389-1561. The potential ethical issue that could arise from this research could be bringing up past traumatic experiences, which could cause psychological distress. To minimize the potential harm to participants, I will make sure to inform you that you do not need to answer questions if you do not want to and can stop the interview at any time. Additionally, I will make sure the respondent knows that the interview is confidential, and no one will be able to trace what you say back to you. To ensure that the interviewees will not be traced back to the respondents, once the interviews are transcribed, the original recordings will be deleted and the transcripts will only be referred to with the pseudonyms of the participants that will be chosen by you.

I will reduce harm by using procedures that are congruent with sound research design and do not risk respondents to unnecessary exposure to harm. Due to the potential risk of psychological distress, resources will be provided to the respondents. With these resources, the respondents will be able to talk through any issues that may arise during the interview. These resources will include a list of free mental health hotlines that you can call. As educators and employees of Minnesota State University Mankato we are required to report any child abuse, abuse of vulnerable adults, criminal activity of which we are aware, incidents of domestic violence, dating/relationship violence, sexual assault, or stalking, discrimination/harassment.

Initials _____

To terminate participation in the research prior to the interview, simply an email to the research will be required to cancel the interview, no reasoning of why a participant has chosen to cancel will be asked. During the interview, if a participant wishes to terminate participation, you may tell the interviewer at any time that you do not wish to continue. Again, the researcher will not ask why you wish to terminate the interview, but thank you for what the data you have provided prior to ending the interview. If a participant wishes to terminate and interview and remove the data you already gave to the researcher, you should tell the researcher this when informing you no longer want to be part of the research study.

I am working under the direction of the Principal Investigator, Dr. Aaron Hoy, assistant professor of sociology at Minnesota State University, Mankato. To get into contact with him, you can email at aaron.hoy@mnsu.edu or contact him by phone at (507) 389-1038. If you have questions about participants' rights and for research related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board, at (507) 389-1242. If you would like more information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online surveys, please contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato ITSolutions Center (507-389-6654) and ask to speak to the Information Security Manager. Participants have a right to a copy of the consent form and it may be obtained by logging onto Qualtrics and printing or downloading a copy of the form while reading over this to sign. The subject's information or biospecimens collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used or distributed for future research studies

I have been asked to provide consent to participate in this research study which will involve participating in an interview. I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any question that I have asked has been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to participate as a participant in this study. I agree I am at least 18 years of age or older.

Print name of participant_____   Date:
Signature of participant_____

Appendix C- Research Questions

Do non-binary transgender people think and actively navigate the threat of discrimination as they are performing their gender identities, if so how? And what sorts of emotion work do they engage in during these performances to manage the threat of discrimination?

The first question the participants are asked is how do they navigate interaction when performing their gender identities. This question is regarding how individually the participants go about performing gender in different interactions. Before I can get into how they use interaction to avoid discrimination, I must first understand how they do gender and construct gender for their self in different interactions. From this question should derive anything that influenced their construction of gender as they practice doing gender. For example, was there an interaction in which shaped the decision about how to do gender? When did they begin to question their gender identity and what propelled them to do gender differently than the heteronormative expectations? How did they go about reconstructing their gender? How does the misgendering during the transition impact them? Did it influence how they go about performing gender now after they identify themselves as non-binary? All of these things are can be understood by asking participants about how they navigate interactions when performing their gender identities.

The second question will ask the participants about how they determine how to do gender in different settings. This question should highlight the different interactions that take place and have an influence on the doing of gender. For instance, how do people do gender in public settings out with friends? Is that different than how they do gender when interacting with family? Why do these settings make a difference when doing gender? How do they proceed when an interaction goes well or not well? Does that shape how they do gender in that situation the next time when they are in that situation?

The third question is what emotions went along with these interactions? This question is regarding how these individuals used emotion work within different interactions to control the impressions of others. For example what does a good interaction look like and make the participant feel versus a bad interaction? What makes an interaction good or bad? How does the use of emotion work shift in different settings and with different audiences?

The fourth question will ask what discrimination has been faced due to their performance of gender. This question will give background on the personal experiences of discrimination faced for people who perform gender as non-binary. This question will be asked about various institutions that past research has found discrimination against transgender people to expand the literature and try to fill the gap about non-binary discrimination.

The fifth question that the participants are asked is how they move forward interacting after discrimination occurred. This will be asked about in directly after each instance of discrimination disclosed. The goal of this question is to understand if emotion work is done as a response to discrimination and used as a resource to aid their performance of gender moving forward. This will be moved back and forth with the fourth question regarding interactions resulting in discrimination.

The last question the participants are asked is if there is any other information that was not asked or discussed that they feel would benefit the study. As I am not from this population, I feel any questions they wish to be asked is more valuable than anything that I come up with the ask about. Whatever the participants what to know will be used in the interviews moving forward. From there, the participants will be thanked for participating in the study.

Interview Guide

Background-

 "Why don't you tell me a little about yourself?"

> Ask follow up questions regarding different domains of interest (f**amily, friends, work, religion, school, ect)** and any areas that have been noted with discrimination but do not ask about discrimination unless they openly talk about it. Instead this will be used to get a background on the respondent and to build rapport. This will be different for each interview seeing that the participants will take this question in different directions.

> Ask if they do not clearly state their age and race

> Can you give me a background of your education?

Gender Construction-

 "Tell me about how you would describe your gender"

> When did you begin to identify as non-binary?

> How did you come to your non-binary identity?

> How have the people in your life reacted to your non-binary identity?

> Tell me about a time that you believe your gender identity impacted a social interaction.

>> Did this influence how you saw your gender identity? How so? If not why not?

>> How do you think other people's interactions influence your gender identity?

>>> Can you give me an example?

Discrimination-

How often do you feel discriminated against in your everyday life?

Tell me about a time you felt discriminated against due to your gender identity.

Where did this occur, with whom, and how did it shape your next interaction in that setting?

What influences how you determine how to do gender in regard to social settings? Ask for examples of interactions in each occurrence…

Work

How did that make you feel?

How did you control your emotions?

Did you try to control the other person's emotions? How so?

School

How did that make you feel?

How did you control your emotions?

Did you try to control the other person's emotions? How so?

Family

How did that make you feel?

How did you control your emotions?

Did you try to control the other person's emotions? How so?

Friends

How did that make you feel?

How did you control your emotions?

Did you try to control the other person's emotions? How so?

In public

How did that make you feel?

How did you control your emotions?

Did you try to control the other person's emotions? How so?

What makes an interaction present good or bad emotions?

Emotion Work-

What **emotions** presented themselves before, during, and after these interactions of discrimination?

What ways did you change your emotions to fit the situation (cognitive, bodily, and expressive)?

So, given all of this discrimination, do you ever present your gender differently to avoid or minimize discrimination?"

How or why not?

Does it vary with different social settings or with different people? If so how?

Is if there is any other information about gender identity that was not asked or discussed that they feel would benefit the study you that you would like to share?