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Linguistic Construction of Non-Binary Embodiment: A Discourse Analysis of Body-Related Language on Reddit's r/NonBinary

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the ways in which non-binary people use language to describe their relationship to their body on the social media platform Reddit. It is my aim that this analysis and exploration will contribute to an understanding of how non-binary people use language to construct a discourse about the body. This will be achieved by examining how people in this community use language when writing about their bodies and how this is related to their non-binary identity. The focus will be on the subreddit r/NonBinary, which is a place where people who identify as non-binary share stories, experiences, questions, etc. The corpus used for this analysis will include posts as well as comments by people within the community with the aim of presenting a rich and complex picture of how non-binary and embodied experiences are discussed and how the body is linguistically conceptualised.

Keywords: *non-binary, CDA, corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, communities of practice, Reddit, gender, gender identity*

Resumen

Esta tesis tiene como objetivo explorar las formas en que las personas no binarias utilizan el lenguaje para describir su relación con su cuerpo en la plataforma de redes sociales Reddit. Mi objetivo es que este análisis y exploración contribuyan a comprender cómo las personas no binarias utilizan el lenguaje para construir un discurso sobre el cuerpo. Esto se logrará examinando cómo las personas de esta comunidad utilizan el lenguaje al escribir sobre sus cuerpos y cómo esto se relaciona con su identidad no binaria. La atención se centrará en el *subreddit* r/NonBinary, que es un lugar donde las personas no binarias comparten historias, experiencias, preguntas, etc. El corpus utilizado para este análisis incluirá publicaciones y comentarios de personas de la comunidad, con el objetivo de presentar una imagen compleja de cómo se discuten las experiencias no binarias y corporales y cómo se conceptualiza lingüísticamente el cuerpo.

Palabras clave: *no binario, Análisis crítico del discurso, lingüística de corpus, análisis del discurso, comunidades de práctica, Reddit, género, identidad de género*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Academic Justification

Gender has been a topic of interest within applied linguistics for a long time. There is a lot of research in the area of language, gender and sexuality. In particular, Judith Butler's idea of gender as performative (1990), has been influential. At the same time, the concept of "doing gender" has become a tool to understand how people communicate: "doing gender is regarded as a practice that shapes and transforms bodies as well as relationships and cognitive categorizations" (Kotthoff, 2010, p. 14). Therefore, it is relevant to study how people online are constructing their identities through language in real time. There have been a number of studies that focus on non-binary identity construction—these studies have come from many disciplines, including linguistics.

In recent years, the concept of gender identity has become mainstream and non-binary identities have become more salient. Research has been carried out in the fields of language, gender and sexuality which has shed some light on identities that sit outside of the traditional male/female masculine/feminine binary (Corwin, 2017; Calder, 2020; Steele, 2019). However, there is space for further exploration. In particular, this project will delve into how non-binary-identified people use language to talk about the body and thereby create a *discourse about the body* that is directly related to their non-binary identity. The project is rooted in the idea that the body is discursive as well as material (Bucholtz and Hall, 2016) and that there is a connection between discourse and materiality. While the body is a real, tangible, material entity, the meaning with which we imbue certain physical traits and presentations is created discursively and has the potential to shift.

Social media has become a source of data that linguists can easily access and study. The popularity of social media platforms means that they are a rich source of natural language and they allow researchers to observe and delve into the language practices of different affinity groups. Reddit, in particular, has the slogan "Dive into Anything," with an estimated 52 million daily active users (Dean, 2023). It is a popular social media platform where users ask for advice and discuss an infinity of topics. The platform is organised into different online communities called "subreddits." Each of these communities is dedicated to a specific group of people, hobby or task. There are subreddits with broad topics, such as r/travel and more niche subreddits, such as r/ABraThatFits, which is a subreddit dedicated only to helping members find the perfect bra. There is a large number of communities where

people can have discussions about almost anything. The way this platform is organised is helpful to a researcher since it is already categorised into different topics and many subreddits are dedicated to specific identity groups. Subreddits are searchable and their content is publicly available, which means that using the data does not require permission on the part of the people who wrote the posts or people who comment on the posts. Moreover, people post and comment using avatars and usernames, rather than their real names.

Some research within linguistics has been carried out on Reddit and has applied the concept of communities of practice (CofP) to subreddits (Donlan, 2021). Thus, the idea that subreddits fit into this definition is somewhat established. This makes Reddit an ideal place to study language use and discourse. My aim in positioning this subreddit as a CofP is to acknowledge that this subreddit fits into this category, to focus on how members of this community use language to describe their relationship to their bodies; how they negotiate what is appropriate within this community; and how they indicate that they belong to this community through what they communicate about their bodies. This particular subreddit fulfils the criteria examined by Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999) with regard to CofPs. There is *mutual engagement:* members engage with each other by posting and commenting. There is a *joint negotiated enterprise:* the subreddit has a set of rules of engagement which state explicitly:

> This is a subreddit for people of every stripe who feel that they don't fit into our culture's gender-binary. This is a place to share stories, experiences, questions, images, art, poetry - **anything to help you through the journey of expressing the real you and meeting others who are like you.** From *r/NonBinary Rules* (emphasis mine)

One could argue that the rules are not jointly negotiated, they are set by the moderators of the community and anyone who joins needs to agree to the rules; members do not participate in creating the rules.

This community has existed since October 2012 and it has developed a *shared repertoire of negotiable resources* which has accumulated over time. These resources are shared with other subreddits insofar as communication is similar across the platform; members can give each other's posts "awards" and "upvotes/downvotes." Some of the linguistic resources are also shared with other communities which focus on gender identity, such as "AGAB" (Assigned Gender at Birth), AFAB (Assigned Female at Birth), AMAB (Assigned Male at Birth), enby (non-binary). While we could position this community within

a larger community based on the linguistic resources it uses, the fact that it fulfils the other two criteria provides a strong foundation for considering this subreddit a CofP.

It is worth stressing that subreddits are moderated; they have rules about who can and cannot post and what members can and cannot post. Therefore, these communities are, to an extent, curated. It may appear as though it is an open forum, but there are clearly defined rules of engagement and members cannot violate these. If they do, their posts will be taken down, comments will be deleted, and, in some cases, they may be expelled from the community. I have never participated in this subreddit. Anyone on Reddit can post in this subreddit, provided they adhere to the rules laid out by the moderators. These are the rules as of August 2023:

1. This subreddit is for everyone who doesn't fit into our culture's gender-binary. This is a subreddit for people of every stripe who feel that they don't fit into our culture's gender-binary. This is a place to share stories, experiences, questions, images, art, poetry - anything to help you through the journey of expressing the real you and meeting others who are like you.

2. Binary users: check the archive before posting questions. Anyone binary wanting to ask questions because you don't understand something non-binary must search the archive before posting. Odds are your questions have been answered... multiple times. If it's obvious you haven't done this, your post will be removed.

3. Link posts: comment with context. When making a link post, please make the first comment to your post. You can include a summary of the link, an opinion, and/or a discussion question. Thanks for participating!

4. Mod approval is required for interview & research survey requests. Interviews and research surveys require prior approval from mods.

5. No "guess my AGAB" or "do I look nonbinary" posts. We do not allow posts that ask anyone to guess OP's AGAB/assigned gender at birth, whether it is as the main point of the post or a side-note, etc. If you see these posts, please report them to us.

6. No NSFW content. We're now redirecting more sexy content to r/NonBinaryLewds , r/EnbyLewds , or r/NonBinaryNSFW , as our main subreddit is 13+. Put your steamiest pics there instead.

7. Don't post hate speech, even if it was directed at you. It's okay to ask for support after a hateful interaction, but please don't post screencaps of what was said.

(From r/NonBinary Rules, 2023)

1.2 Objectives

The chief objective of this project is to use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Corpus Linguistics tools to analyse what non-binary people write about their relationship to their bodies in the subreddit r/non-binary on the social media platform Reddit. The aim of this analysis is to begin to shed light on a developing *non-binary discourse of the body.* Alongside this, there are a number of supporting objectives:

1. Compile a corpus based on the word "body" which will provide the data for this analysis.
2. Employ the tools of corpus linguistics, in particular the analysis of concordances, to build a semantic profile of the word "body" within this corpus.
3. Employ Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough's model) to shed light on the following questions:
   a. Whose world view is being presented in the discourse regarding the body produced by the people in r/Nonbinary?
   b. What is the predominant ideology about the body present in the discourse?
   c. How is that ideology being presented and constructed through language?

I will use the questions above as a guide for my analysis and my hope is that both, Corpus Linguistics and CDA, will complement each other, thus providing a robust examination of the data.

2. State of the Art: Literature Review

One of the difficulties in conducting a literature review for this project is that much research in the field of gender is interdisciplinary. If one were to review everything that has been written about language and gender, this would become a rather lengthy review. This is why I have chosen to narrow down the review by focusing on studies that have contributed to the research in language, gender and sexuality in ways that shed some light on the topics I am researching. I have looked at studies in applied linguistics and in other disciplines which use tools and theoretical approaches from linguistics to conduct studies related to gender identity beyond the traditional masculine/feminine gender binary. Even though I mention some studies in the realm of phonetics and phonology, I have stayed away from focusing my review on such research because, while it studies the same population, its focus is less on issues of gender identity and the body as a concept and more about how individuals within

that population use their bodies to communicate and realise different sounds which may or may not be related to their gender identity. My review focuses more on studies which look at identity construction in individuals whose gender identity sits outside the binary and I have included studies where there is at least some research about the body. For a thorough and illuminating review of how the field of language, gender and sexuality used to be and how it has evolved, see Cameron's 2005 paper on the subject. In it Cameron describes the shift from a focus on binary difference to a focus on the diversity of "gendered and sexual identities and practices" (p. 482). This thesis falls under the latter paradigm.

There has been a significant amount of research in the field of language, gender and sexuality related to transgender individuals (Ashton, 2013; Boxall, 2023; Jones, 2023). Much less research has focused solely on non-binary gender identities (Barbee & Schrock, 2019; Corwin, 2009; Darwin, 2017; Horowit-Hendler, 2017, 2018 and 2020; Skubich, 2019; Calder and Steele, 2019 and Steele, 2019) and, so far, I have not been able to find studies that focus on how non-binary people construct their ideas about the body using language. Much of the research I have found has centred on questions of how gender identity is constructed and language is often only one element of that construction (Ashton, 2013; Corwin, 2019; Garmpi, 2021). The studies I have found related to the body tend to examine the concept of "doing gender" by analysing gender presentation and interactions (Barbee & Schrock, 2019; Darwin, 2017; Horowit-Hendler, 2017, 2018 and 2020). Uniquely, Boxall (2023) examines the topic of embodiment and the limits of language.

It is pertinent to stress that research that specifically focuses on non-binary communities and how they use language to construct their own discourse about the body is practically non-existent. Most of the research found was outside of the field of linguistics and only addressed this question tangentially.

This project will focus solely on the body and the discourse surrounding this word. It will build on previous research that has been carried out regarding embodiment. This research will be in dialogue with ideas about embodied discourse, in particular Butler's idea that "bodies become intelligible as female or male by entering discursive systems that recognize them as such" (Bucholtz and Hall, 2016, p.181). By focusing on how people who identify as non-binary use language to conceive of their relationship to their bodies and thereby create a discourse about the body, I hope to shed light on how one can enter a discursive system that casts a body as non-binary.

Now I will turn to examining each piece of research in more detail to establish how each of them contributes to knowledge in the field.

Exploring Non-Binary Genders: Language and Identity and *Non-binary Gender Identities: The Language of Becoming* by Sebastian Cordoba

Cordoba's thesis explores the ways in which people who identify as non-binary negotiate "their identities, their authenticity, and their embodied experiences through language" (Cordoba, 2020, p. 7). The main aim of this piece of research was to examine the benefits or negative effects of gender-affirming language among non-binary individuals. Twenty-two participants were interviewed for the project using semi-structured interviews. In addition, they produced writing samples which were analysed. A second part of the project included the analysis of a 2.9 million-word corpus, called *The Non-Binary Corpus,* using corpus linguistics tools. The corpus was compiled drawing information from an online source where non-binary people exchange information. This project is rooted in the field of philosophy, and draws ideas from philosophy, social psychology, queer theory and linguistics. Cordoba develops the theory of *linguistic becomings* throughout the project; he intends this to be his "contribution to the theory and the knowledge base in trans and non-binary studies" (p. 19). This theory centres the importance of language in the *assemblage* (or development) of non-binary gender identities while acknowledging the importance of the body in said *assemblage.*

> I argue that the importance placed on language by non-binary people helps *assemble* a new set of social contexts and parameters, which are constantly being adopted, (re)negotiated, and (re)configured by non-binary-identified people. These processes are understood here as *linguistic becomings.* (Cordoba, 2020, p. 20)

The project focused on analysing the experiences of non-binary people through language, society, the body, and other material factors, which were understood to contribute to the development of the people's gender identities. The participants in the study deem language extremely important; the author examined the participants' use of *non-binary language*, which refers to use of language that eschews language's binary categories in favour of neutral terms. Cordoba also created the *Non-Binary Corpus,* which he analysed in support of his theory of *linguistic becomings.* He found that linguistic patterns were constantly renegotiated in online spaces. Another crucial finding was that the material elements of gender were equal in importance to language; body dysphoria had an important place in this set of elements. Cordoba concluded that "there is no single non-binary embodiment, but multiple iterations reflecting the numerous possibilities of the body"

(Cordoba, 2020, p. 267). The idea that underpins the work and findings of this study is that non-binary identity is not fixed but that it is constantly renegotiated, reassessed and reconceptualised through language and the possibilities of material elements such as the body.

In 2022 the author published a book called *Non-Binary Gender Identities: The Language of Becoming*, which is based on the work done in his doctoral thesis. Cordoba presents the work he carried out in the thesis and he makes recommendations to policy makers and practitioners to "facilitate gender-related communication and decrease language-related distress on non-binary people, as well as the general population" (Cordoba, 2022, p. iii). Cordoba explains that the book explores how

> non-binary-identified people come to embrace and/or understand gender-neutral language (including the label non-binary itself), and how they negotiate and navigate social interactions in a society that, in most cases, is still unaware or what is meant by the mere concept of non-binary gender identities. (Cordoba, 2022, p. 25)

The author remains firmly in the field of psychology, while using corpus linguistics tools to analyse the date he compiled. He also uses tools from other disciplines, as discussed above.

Binary, Bodies, Beyond: An Account of TGNC Embodiment by Lucinda Boxall

Boxall's anthropological study presents the accounts of five TGNC (trans gender non-conforming) individuals; these accounts are meant to encourage an understanding of embodiment both in an internal sense and externally through socialisation. What emerges in Boxall's study are "the limits of language, [the] desire for and rejection of body modification, people's unfinished sense of self, and embodiment as fluid, ever-changing and ongoing" (p. 7). Boxall's study focused closely on the accounts of the participants and included photographs to offer a multimodal presentation. Some of the participants in this study identify as non-binary, making this study relevant to this literature review. Boxall found topics that were common across several individual narratives and which emerged sometimes in conflicting ways: *transmedicalism*, *transexceptionalism*, and embodiment within a conception of gender as evolving, changing and ongoing. From the point of view of my study, Boxall's most interesting contribution is the focus on the limitations of language. This topic becomes apparent throughout the different narratives, when discussing the embodied experience of one individual in the study Boxall observes "the insufficiency of language to

represent these diverse experiences" (p. 60). In another examination of a narrative, Boxall characterises "the practiced discourse of binary womanhood and manhood" (p. 68) as unable to "encapsulate the full range of [the participant's] experience and perceptions" (p. 68).

'I'm a boy, can't you see that?': Dialogic Embodiment and the Construction of Agency in Trans Youth Discourse by Lucy Jones

This study is firmly rooted in linguistics and it uses discourse analysis as an approach to analyse the data compiled by the author. Jones collected the accounts of five transgender people from a youth group. The author's focus is on the discursive dimension of embodiment, as discussed by Bucholtz and Hall in their 2016 paper. Jones advances the idea of a dialogic embodiment, which is achieved when the speakers interact and use language to *recontextualise* their bodies, thereby collaboratively constructing their identities. The goal of the study is not only linguistic in nature, however, since it focuses on putting forward the young people's discourses. The study uses the linguistic analysis to argue that the "young people's collective responses (…) enable them to challenge the ideologies underpinning their marginalisation" (p. 549). The analysis revealed that the participants have a belief that others think they have the right to "inscribe meaning and function on their bodies" (p. 566). Through language, the participants were able to rethink how they see their bodies and "resist cisnormativity" (p. 567). Since this was a support group, the interaction among the participants yielded some interesting results. Jones concludes that the participants "worked together to deconstruct and reconstruct their own bodies, demonstrating Bucholtz & Hall's (2016) claim that the body is produced in interaction" (p. 567).

Construction of Non-Binary Identities in Narrative Discourse by Angel Garmpi

This conference paper examines how non-binary identities are constructed through discourse and performance. Unfortunately, this paper is not available to the public but it bears mentioning since the abstract, which is publicly available, suggests that this study has contributed to the body of research into how gender identity is constructed in discourse. The results show that participants were able to manipulate implicitly and explicitly gendered language, which allowed them to legitimise their self-identification and separate their identity from embodiment. The most intriguing contribution of this study is this separation, which appears to have been initiated by the participants. Garmpi calls for more research where "embodiment and the physical body are seen as central to the production, perception and social interpretation of language" (para. 1).

Un/gendering Social Selves: How Nonbinary People Navigate and Experience a Binarily Gendered World **by Harry Barbee and Douglas Schrock**

Barbee and Schrock's study focuses on non-binary individuals, their main goal was to analyse how non-binary people present themselves and experience the binarily gendered world. This sociological study used an interactionist approach to analyse the interviews that were conducted with the participants. The researchers concluded that the participants use gendered codes of embodiment and discourse to present as non-binary, thereby refuting the binary. Language is one of the tools they use to convey their gender identity, but the study did not focus solely on this. Barbee and Schrock also found that *passing* and presenting as non-binary actually required a high degree of expertise in the gender binary and that non-binary people not always achieve being perceived as non-binary by others.

Gender in Sociolinguistic Variation Beyond the Binary **by Jeremy Calder and Ariana Steele**

This paper focuses on phonetic variables that have been linked to gender and explores how nonbinary speakers either follow or disrupt the model that links phonetic realisations to masculinity and femininity. The researchers propose that a more nuanced look at nonbinary speakers' patterns might index *nonbinary gender* in some contexts.

Non-Binary Speech, Race, and Non-Normative Gender: Sociolinguistic Style Beyond the Binary **by Ariana Steele**

This is a Master's degree thesis which explores speech patterns in nonbinary speakers, specifically how they use /s/ and f0, alongside clothing "to construct non-binary gendered styles" (Steele, 2019, p. i). This study takes an intersectional approach to the topic, looking at variables such as race as well as gender.

Language and Gender: Beyond the Binary **by Daria Skubich**

This is an undergraduate dissertation submitted to the University of Manchester. The study's aim is to analyse four phonological variables in a sample of mainly transgender and non-binary speakers and compare those findings to traditional research where the analysis focused on a binary gender classification. Skubich concludes in this study that gender ought to be classified as a spectrum as opposed to two discrete categories because that helps reveal more information about the evolving relationship between language, gender and how these are related to identity. Skubich also invites an intersectional approach by including class in

the study and inviting future research to do the same and include other variables such as religion and age. While arguing for the expansion of the gender binary in the study of language and gender, the author makes the case that the sex of the participants should not be disregarded since fruitful research may result from analysing how participants use language to either conform or distance themselves from their birth sex.

Emerging Genders: Semiotic Agency and the Performance of Gender Among Genderqueer Individuals **by Anna I. Corwin**

In this article, Corwin examines how individuals who identify as *genderqueer* use the semiotic material available to them to interactively construct their gender, which is outside the binary. The author uses micro-interactional analysis of the speech and usage of embodied signs to conduct her examination of how non-normative genders are created and performed in interaction. Corwin uses recorded interviews to conduct her analysis; linguistic features are only a fraction of the resources available to the participants. This study focuses mostly on the concept of semiotic agency. After a thorough examination of the concept of agency (which, in her estimation, is distinct to intentionality), Corwin defines semiotic agency as "the attention to how agency is deployed in the semiotic environment" (Corwin, 2017, p. 262). The study, then, explores what individuals communicate about their gender through semiotic agency; not necessarily intentionally. Corwin also draws attention to the flexibility of signs—less flexible: height, voice pitch, receding hairline; flexible: clothing, hair style; highly flexible: pitch range, gestures, syntax. Corwin concludes that "genderqueer identity emerges through an interactive multimodal semiotic process and is communicated through continuously emerging semiotic displays that both rely on and challenge a binary system of gender" (Corwin, 2017, p. 273). This study builds on an earlier study in linguistic anthropology, published in 2009, by the same researcher titled *Language and Gender Variance: Constructing Gender Beyond the Male/Female Binary.*

Speaking Outside the Binary: Indexing Non-Binary Gender Identity **and** *Navigating The Binary: Gender Presentation of Non-Binary Individuals* **by Sharone A. Horowit-Hendler**

Both projects by Horowit-Hendler appear to rely on the same data, the first is a paper the author presented in 2018 and the second is an expanded analysis which was presented as a PhD dissertation within the field of anthropology. This researcher also wrote a 2017 paper titled *Navigating a Binary World when You're Not: Gender Presentation of Non-binary*

Individuals, which again seems to be based on the same data as the two projects mentioned above.

Horowit-Hendler does not primarily focus on language, however, the semi-formal interviews that were conducted for these projects were analysed using discourse analysis. Moreover, the projects focus on the population that I hope to study in this thesis. Horowit-Hendler's findings add an important dimension to understanding non-binary identity specifically—out of 26 participants, 10 are non-binary, 4 are genderqueer, 1 is genderfluid, 4 are agender, 6 are trans women and 1 is a trans man. My focus is on non-binary identity, but there is likely an overlap among those who identify as genderqueer, genderfluid and even agender. All of these identity groups sit outside the gender binary and there is a degree of flexibility. It would not be surprising to find individuals whose identity matches these groups in the r/Nonbinary subreddit that I am studying.

The focus of Horowit-Hendler's work is to examine the gender presentation of individuals whose identities sit outside of the traditional gender binary and who wish to be perceived as such. One of the resources that these individuals use in their presentation is language. The findings of this research suggest that gender-neutral markers or signs, including language, do not exist at present. Non-binary individuals currently draw aspects of their physical appearance, body language and language use from existing masculine and feminine signs or markers. Furthermore, there are distinctions between individuals of different birth sexes: males appear to be more aware of markers of physical appearance, while females are more aware of body language and speech patterns. The author concludes that this is evidence that what is associated with females is marked, while what is associated with males is neutral. Horowit-Hendler also highlights that non-binary gender presentation is "done primarily for the sake of the cisgender gaze," (p. 5) meaning that individuals who identify as non-binary are more aware of their presentation when in the presence of people whom they perceive as cisgender.

Self-Authoring Gender outside the Binary: A Narrative Analysis of (Trans) Gender Undergraduates **by Kasey Ashton**

This researcher works in the field of education. This is a PhD thesis whose focus is on exploring how transgender university students "construct, experience and make meaning of gender" (p. 7). Ashton used self-authorship theory and queer theory as the theoretical background for the thesis and then employed narrative inquiry methodology to analyse the

data. Ashton's thesis confirmed long-held post-structural views of gender. Namely, that the process of building meaning around gender involves an ongoing cycle of dismantling external frameworks, acknowledging the limitations of universally accepted truths and absolutes, nurturing individual values and beliefs, and reshaping personal manifestations of both masculinity and femininity. Ashton concluded that both gender expression and identity are fluid.

***Doing Gender Beyond the Binary: A Virtual Ethnography* by Helana Darwin**

This sociological study, rooted in symbolic interactionism, examines data from the *genderqueer* subreddit on Reddit. Genderqueer can be understood as belonging to the non-binary category. Darwin chose both posts and selfies for the analysis and used the tools of discourse analysis and content analysis to conduct a virtual ethnography of this population. The researcher's aim here was to advance the "doing gender" framework by highlighting the interactive challenges that non-binary people face—Darwin wanted to find out how non-binary gender is done; how one can "succeed" at performing non-binary gender in interactionist terms; and how this *doing* of non-binary gender contributes to the undoing or redoing of binary gender. The study's main conclusions were that there is no one way of *doing* non-binary gender and that this term functions as an umbrella for other gender identities. Non-binary people are "held accountable to binary misconceptions of transgender during their interactions with others and even within their own dialogues" (p. 14). According to the interactionist model, success only happens if others recognise what is meant by one's performance, which is not always achievable. Darwin concludes that non-binary evades definition, which means that the potential to redo gender is considerable.

3. Methodology

In terms of methods, I will draw from the disciplines of discourse analysis and corpus linguistics. Discourse analysis will provide a qualitative angle to the project, while corpus linguistics can be employed to provide a quantitative angle.

My aim is to compile a corpus and analyse the corpus using AntConc to establish the semantic relationships between the word "body" and others and thereby build a semantic profile of this word within the corpus. I will employ other tools within this software to support my analysis—a more detailed description of the process will be laid out later.

The qualitative part of the analysis will focus on selected posts and employ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the following questions:

1. Whose world view (or ideology) is being presented in the discourse regarding the body produced by the people in r/Nonbinary?
2. What is the predominant ideology about the body present in the discourse?
3. How is that ideology being presented and constructed through language?

I will use the model designed by Normal Fairclough as presented by Sauntson (2019). My analysis will have three stages:

1. Description

2. Interpretation

3. Explanation

Using these tools will ensure that the qualitative part of the analysis is systematic and, as much as possible, objective. This project aims to foreground what people who identify as non-binary say about their bodies and how people in this particular virtual CofP use language to communicate their ideas about the body and thereby construct a *non-binary discourse of the body.*

3.1 Project Structure

This thesis is divided into five sections. I will give a brief description of each section below.

Section one (Introduction) contains a brief introduction in which I outline the reason for choosing this topic and the general aims of this thesis. This section also contains a brief description of how these aims will be accomplished and the tools that will be used. Within this section, I lay out the theoretical background which supports the concepts in this thesis. I explain why the use of language of the population I am studying is worth exploring, why I chose to focus on social media, and why subreddits can be considered Communities of Practice. Subsequently, I move on to detailing the objectives of this thesis.

In section two (State of the Art: Literature Review) I carry out a literature review, which aims to provide the reader with an overview of the research that has been done in the area of language, gender and sexuality with a particular focus on non-binary people. Given the interdisciplinary nature of many studies, it was impossible to stay within the bounds of

applied linguistics alone. Therefore, the review includes studies carried out within applied linguistics, but it also includes studies from other disciplines that are relevant to this project.

Section three (Methodology) lays out the methodology employed in this thesis. I start by giving an overview of the tools employed in my analysis and then move on to detailing the contents of the project. This section also includes information about the project design, the corpus compilation, and the processes employed during the analysis phase.

In section four (Analysis), I present the analysis and results. First, the results of the corpus data are presented and then I turn to presenting the results of the analysis carried out using CDA.

Section five (Discussion) and section six (Conclusions) will contain a discussion of the results and the main conclusions, present their implications, acknowledge any limitations and it also will discuss possible avenues for further research in this area.

3.2 Project Design

This project started as something much bigger. My initial intention was to compile two specialised corpora that drew data from the following subreddits: r/TheGirlSurvivalGuide, r/Women, r/FtM, r/LesbianActually and r/NonBinary. The first two subreddits are for women and the last three are for trans men and transmasculine people, lesbians and non-binary people respectively. r/TheGirlSurvivalGuide and r/Women would provide data for a female-focused corpus, while r/FtM, r/LesbianActually and r/NonBinary would provide data for a LGBT+-focused corpus. My aim was to analyse the emerging discourses of the body in these different communities of practice and thereby develop an understanding of how the people in these communities are using language to express their views of the body and their experiences. Ultimately, I wanted to perform a comparative analysis between female and LGBT+ discourses to establish points of convergence and difference—e.g. I wanted to know how people in r/Women talked about embodied experiences like menstruation and compare that with how people in r/FtM handled the same topic linguistically.

I started data collection and realised that my project was too ambitious given the parameters of a Master's Degree thesis. I am grateful to my tutor for helping me narrow down the focus. Additionally, the comparative angle might not have worked given the populations of each subreddit—the points of departure of the people in these communities are different. To avoid a conflation of biological sex, gender identity and sexuality, it is best

to analyse each of these communities in its own terms. There is perhaps a way to conduct the analysis that I initially set out to do, but that is beyond the scope of this project.

I decided to choose one subreddit to focus on and abandoned collecting data from the other subreddits. I settled on r/NonBinary because, as I outlined in the literature review, this community has not been very well-researched and I think there is space here to make a contribution to the literature. A linguistic challenge with this particular identity group is that the term non-binary eludes definition and, in some ways, upholds the very thing it purports to disrupt, starting with the term itself. *Non-binary* does not say much about what it is, but rather about what it is not. This linguistic challenge made me curious to find out how people who belong to this gender identity category see the tension in the term and, more specifically, how they use language not only to shape their identity but to reimagine their bodies according to that identity.

Deciding on the analytical tools also took some time. Corpus Linguistics was appropriate since I wanted to compile a corpus and I needed tools from this discipline for the analysis. However, the decision to use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was not as straightforward. It is well-known that one of the flaws of discourse analysis is that, in the interpretive phase, it may be skewed by the analyst's views on the data. This is why I wanted to find a framework that would allow for the systematic analysis of the data and thereby let the data lead and minimise the risk of my views clouding the analysis. Initially, I wanted to use Narrative Analysis, but I realised that given the length of the posts in the subreddit, this approach would not work. CDA lacks a standard systematic approach, however, during my reading, I came across Fairclough's model and deemed it appropriate for my analysis. It is my hope that using this model, I can let the data speak for itself and also invite thoughtful challenges to my interpretation.

3.2.1 Corpus Compilation

The parameters for my specialised corpus are as follows:

1. The selected posts span a year, from July 2022 to July 2023. There were 246 posts in r/NonBinary during that time.

2. The selected posts focus on the word "body": I searched the subreddit and filtered out posts that did not contain this word. There were 84 posts that fit this description; this makes up 34.1% of the posts in r/NonBinary. I also included the comments in

my corpus. However, some posts had hundreds of comments, which meant that I had to be selective so I chose only comments that contained the word "body" in them for the corpus.

3. Out of those 84 posts, I excluded 6 based on the following criteria:

    a. Image-based posts: five posts fit this description, three of them were photos of the person who made the post and the other two were based on illustrations.

    b. One post was about a body scanner at airport security; there was no discussion about the body, it was focused on the body scanner.

I compiled my corpus manually. There are ways of scraping data from Reddit using Python, for example, but I am not programming-literate enough to run those applications. Moreover, there is still a degree of post-processing required when using a Python application. Compiling the corpus manually also allowed me to do an initial reading of the data that I will be analysing in the next phase of the project. The corpus has a total of 54,110 tokens and its name is the Non-Binary Body Discourse Corpus (NBBDC).

3.2.2 Post selection for CDA analysis

It would be difficult for a single person to carry out an analysis of all the posts in the corpus, this is why I decided to select a few posts for this part of the analysis. A preliminary analysis of the corpus using AntConc revealed that, excluding functional words, the most common collocates for the word "body" are as follows:

1. Body hair

2. Body dysmorphia

3. Body image

4. Body mods (modifications)

5. Wrong body

6. Body type

7. Female body

The terms can also be appreciated in this word cloud created by using the word cloud tool on AntConc to generate a visual representation of the most common collocates of the word "body" in the corpus. The size of the words is an indicator of their frequency.

Figure 1. Common Collocates for "Body"

This indicates the topics which have generated the most discussion in the subreddit, so it is fitting to choose posts that are related to these terms. I have chosen six posts that overlap with the collocates and also have a significant number of comments, further confirming that these posts generated discussion within the subreddit. Below is a table of the posts I selected. The titles have been formatted to fit standard spelling and orthography rules.

Title	Flair (topic)	Upvotes (likes)	Comments
How do you take care of your body hair?	Discussion	92	248
What body do we want?	Discussion	172	168
Non-binary bodies can look like anything. How do we communicate this to the outside world?	Discussion	164	40
How would you describe your relationship with your body as a non-binary person?	Ask	22	42
Does anyone else see getting tattoos (body mods in general) as part of their gender expression?	Ask	354	88
***TW* What does body dysmorphia feel like to you?**	Discussion	20	21

Table 1. Posts for CDA Analysis

Apart from being discussions that generated many comments, these posts are the most likely to shed light on the questions that this thesis aims to address. By closely analysing the topics that generate the most discussion in the subreddit, we can establish with more clarity how the people in this subreddit use language to communicate their ideas about their bodies and by extension construct a discourse about the non-binary body. The posts provide the analyst a window into different aspects of how this discourse of the body is constructed; there are lengthy discussions on seemingly mundane topics like body hair, and discussions that delve into questions of identity, distress and identity expression.

4. Analysis

4.1 Non-Binary Body Discourse Corpus (NBBDC) Analysis

The purpose of this analysis is to establish how the word "body" is related to other words and concepts and thereby create a semantic profile of the word in this context. Ultimately, this profile will serve to better understand how non-binary people use language to discursively construct the body, how they explain it to each other and how they negotiate the concept of the body with others.

The start of my analysis was centred on looking at the words that cluster with "body." I looked at clusters of two and considered words that appeared both on the left and the right. To present the results, I have excluded the following functional words which clustered with "body": my, your, a, the, of, and, this, 's, own, with, whole, that, their, have, or, for. The reason for excluding these words is that, as a cluster of two with "body," they do not contribute to an overall semantic picture of words related to the word that I am researching.

The graph below shows the results of the remaining words that clustered with "body." The graph shows the frequency with which the cluster appears and also its range, i.e. the number of texts which contain this cluster within the corpus. Even though "wrong body" is the most frequent cluster with a frequency of 19, the clusters "female body" and "male body" have a higher range, indicating that they are considered across more discussions in the subreddit.
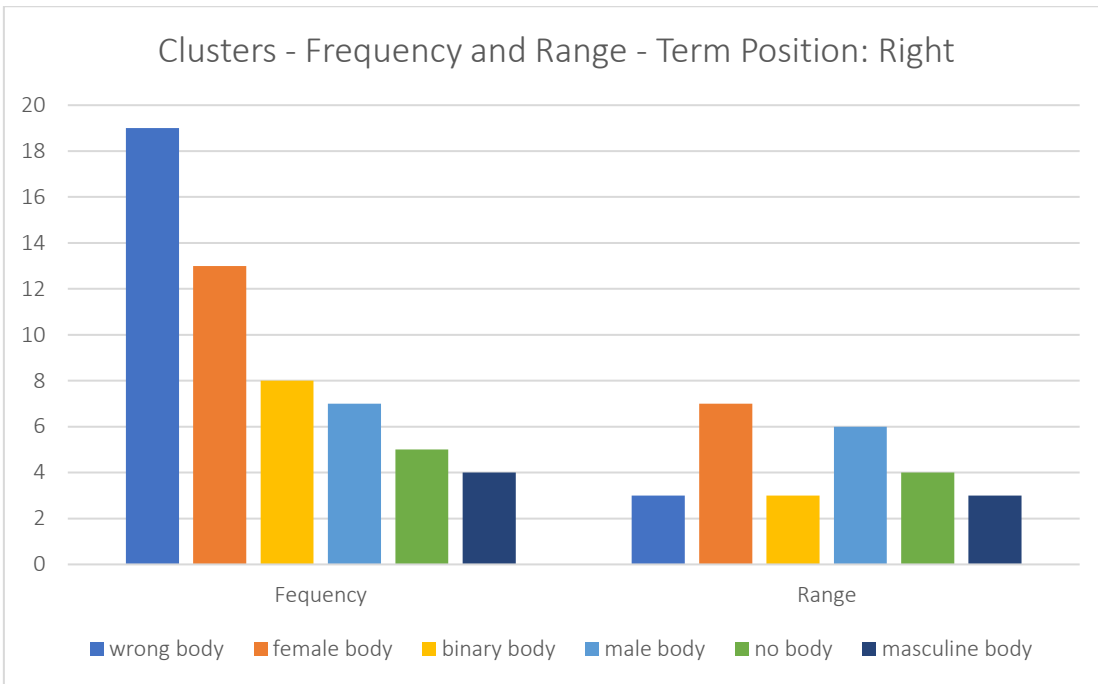
Figure 2. Clusters - Frequency and Range - Term Position: Right

I applied the same procedure to the clusters with the term position on the left. The words that were excluded are as follows: I, and, is, that, but, with, it, or, to, as, so, for, isn('t), can, in, at, has, makes, if, like. The chart below shows the results.
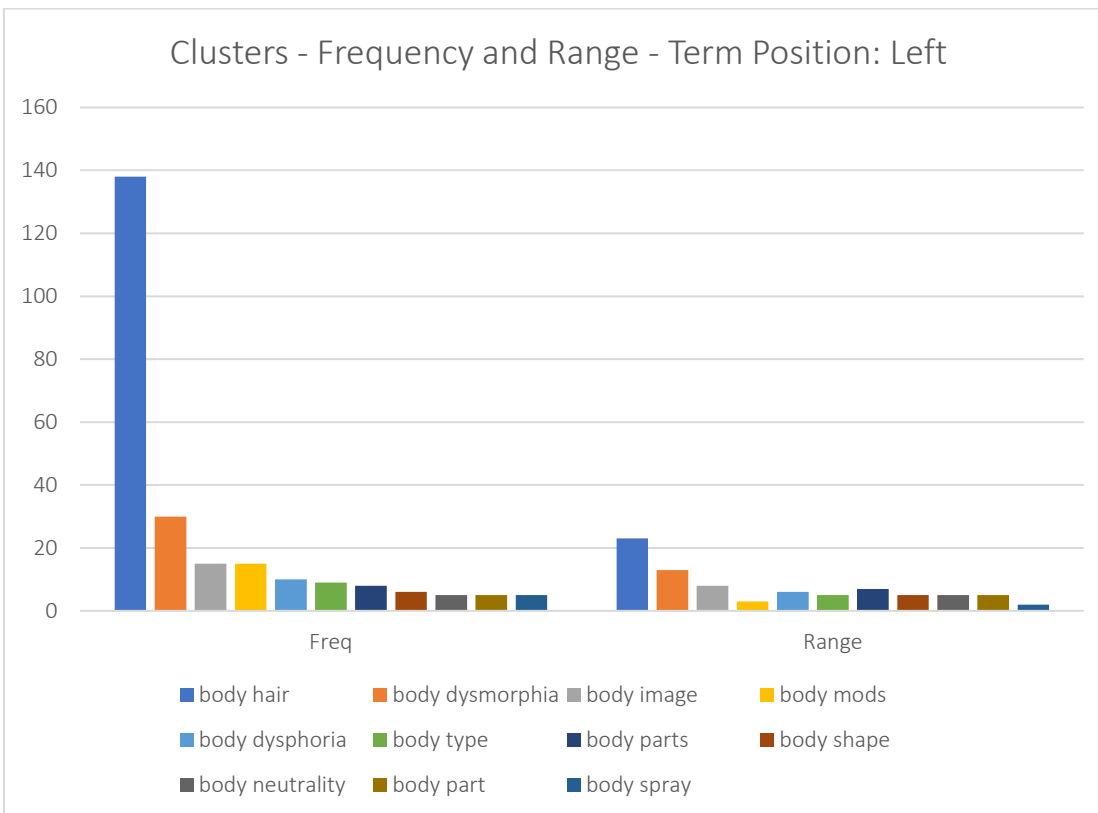
Figure 3. Clusters - Frequency and Range - Term Position: Left

The clusters show that one topic generates the most discussion and is most closely associated with the body in this subreddit: body hair. This cluster has both a high frequency (138) and range (23). In terms of frequency, in between "body hair" and the next most frequent cluster "body dysmorphia," there are a range of different function words that clustered with "body."

In order to better understand how these clusters are being used and what they mean within the conversations on this subreddit, I now turn to look at each of them briefly. I will provide some examples of each of the clusters in context using the KWIC tool in AntConc.

Body Hair

These are five random results from the corpus. Body hair is the focus of many conversations in the subreddit. As the examples below show, people are concerned about what body hair says about one's gender: "Body hair is not inherently masculine or feminine." Someone asserts that body hair is "natural" and another that it is not "unhygienic," presumably as a reply to someone else.

	Hit	
have any impute on it because it's your body.	Body hair	is not inherently masculine or feminine that most
who isn't a seal? - I hate people like that.	Body hair	is not unhygienic. If it was then why
thick beard which I trim from time to time. My	body hair	is kinda light in color and not thick
is too light (im dirty blond and most of my	body hair	is light blond- only place that isnt is
it means. I hope that makes sense. - Im afab, i	body hair	is natural and meant to be there and

Figure 4. KWIC: Body Hair

Body Dysmorphia

Body dysmorphia, often referred to as Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD), is a mental health condition in which people cannot stop thinking about perceived flaws in their appearance. Some characteristic feelings associated with this condition are embarrassment, shame and anxiety in social situations. This is a serious condition and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine or establish whether the participants in r/NonBinary have this condition. However, the examples below give some insight into how the term is being used in this subreddit.

	Hit	
	Body dysmorphia	and dysphoria Does anyone have resources to look
a lot of times it's just background noise now. -	Body dysmorphia	and gender dysphoria go hand in hand for
to start HRT, specifically estrogen, so I can battle my	body dysmorphia	and get closer to the image I want
How do folks deal with	body dysmorphia	when binding? TW: mention of trauma briefly So
	Body dysmorphia	when I see my face but not reflection (

Figure 5. KWIC: Body Dysmorphia

The examples above suggest that some of the people in this subreddit conceive of both body dysmorphia and gender dysphoria as going "hand in hand." One person sees body dysmorphia as something they have to battle. And another experiences dysphoria when practising binding, which is the use of compression garments to flatten the breasts and thereby obtain a flat chest appearance. The examples suggest that the people in this subreddit suffer due to perceived flaws in their appearance. "Body dysmorphia when I see my face" appears to be the title of one post, one can safely assume that this is a title since there is nothing to the left of the sentence.

The fact that body dysmorphia or BDD is a common cluster in this subreddit indicates that the body is the locus of suffering for at least some of the people in this subreddit. Without venturing into territory too far from linguistics, it is possible that some of the people who engage in conversation about body dysmorphia on this subreddit have adopted this linguistic label to express their distress without a formal diagnosis.

Body Image

Body image is a topic that likely generates discussion in many realms. Let us consider some of the examples found in this subreddit.

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
still unsure. I just don't identify with anything. My	body image	issues consist of trying to forget I have
Gender dysphoria or body dysmorphia? I've been having	body image	issues recently and I can't tell if
gender they assume I am. A lot of my previous	body image	issues were coming directly from how well I
Does this sound like gender dysphoria or	body image	issues? Disclaimer I'm not 100% sure if I'
Dysphoria and	body image	issues? I'm really conflicted on what I

Figure 6. KWIC: Body Image

With a frequency of 15 and a range of 8 across the corpus, this cluster is followed by "issues" six times. This indicates that the difficulties surrounding one's body image are a somewhat frequent topic of discussion in this subreddit. The word "dysphoria" also comes

up in the vicinity of this cluster, sometimes as an added difficulty that the author presents or in juxtaposition to dysphoria: "Does this sound like gender dysphoria or body image issues?".

Body Mods (modifications)

This cluster has a frequency of 15 and a range of 3. Many of the clusters come from two long discussions on body modification and its relationship to gender expression. There will be a more detailed analysis of these discussions later in this thesis. We turn now to looking at some examples of this cluster in context.

the tattoos I want are more species affirming. Also some	body mods	are incredibly gender like a triangle piercing that
piercings I suppose), but yes. The plans I have for	body mods	are inextricable from my personal identity and my
it's not even legal in my country, very few	body mods	are now, all because one single guy fucked
to have elf ears, sharp teeth, and a split tongue.	Body mods	are so androgynous, I want them so bad!! -
does anyone else see getting tattoos (	body mods	in general) as part of their gender expression?

Figure 7. KWIC: Body Mods

As the examples above show, body modification is seen by some in this subreddit as "inextricable" from their identity and by others as something that can be considered a part of gender expression. One person sees body modification as "androgynous." Overall, body modification is held in positive regard.

Body dysphoria

This cluster has a frequency of 10 and a range of 6 and is linked to the aforementioned cluster: body image. Here are some examples in context:

how to sew, I highly recommend it because it makes	body dysphoria	a lot more manageable - In summary disappointed and
you want to talk more about this 😊 Because of both	body dysphoria	and some past traumatic experiences, I had difficulty
a rather common consequence. However, people with gender dysphoria and	body dysphoria	can also suffer from body dysmorphia. Because it'
pronouns that don't match your gender identity, for example.	Body dysphoria	is a part of gender dysphoria. Not necessarily,
do it to help them after surgery to help their	body dysphoria	when they lose a part. See the lovelies

Figure 8. KWIC: Body Dysphoria

Considering "body dysphoria," "body dysmorphia" and "body image [issues]" together, one starts to see a picture emerge of the way this subreddit's participants communicate about distress regarding the body. "Dysphoria" is most often shorthand for "gender dysphoria," which appears 22 times across the corpus and has a range of 14. Furthermore, the word "dysphoria" alone has a frequency of 115 and a range of 37, indicating that it is a significant concept in the language used in this subreddit. What dysphoria means

to the people who participate in the subreddit is less clear without a thorough analysis of the use of this word. A full analysis of the use of "dysphoria" in this subreddit is outside of the scope of this thesis, but it would merit further research.

By itself, "dysphoria" is a specialised term from the fields of psychiatry and psychology and it is used to denote a feeling of unhappiness or unease. "Gender dysphoria" is also a medical term which is used to describe a feeling of deep unease and unhappiness that a person experiences, often as a result of their anatomical characteristics, due to a mismatch between a person's biological sex and their gender identity.

The participants of this subreddit use a mixture of "dysphoria," "gender dysphoria" and "body dysphoria." I three expressions exist within the realm of distress, which is often related to the body, but not always. It appears that the people in this subreddit use "body dysphoria" to indicate that the unhappiness they feel is due to the body, and not other factors. However, without deeper analysis into this term, we cannot explain exactly how "dysphoria" is being used more broadly.

Body + Type, Shape, Part(s), Neutrality, and Spray

These last six clusters have a frequency of less than 10 each, four of them have a range of 5 each, "body spray" has the lowest range at 2 and "body parts" has a range of 7. The discussion around "body type" and "body shape" are similar. Both clusters likely appear in many other discussions in different populations and communities. Here are some examples:

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
AF and mens clothing does NOT fit well on my	body type	at all, which just makes me feel more
someone looks at me. - Well. You should go for whatever	body type	makes you feel good about yourself. And remember
I have to love myself in my own skin. My	body type	might be perceived as gendered, but I know

Figure 9. KWIC: Body Type

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
a dream where in my dream I could change my	body shape	depending on how I felt, because sometimes I
body generally. I don't experience much dysphoria about my	body shape	otherwise. I am fat with large breasts and
should know better, but don't - harass me about my	body shape &	how i "should fix it", & then not understand

Figure 10. KWIC: Body Shape

Some of the discussion is about clothing, but what comes through in these examples is the idea of change. "You should go for whatever body type makes you feel good about yourself" points to a view of one's body type as changeable. In these examples we do not

see the means being suggested to achieve that change. Another person writes "in my dream I could change my body shape depending on how I felt." This does not necessarily express a desire but it does indicate that the idea of the body as malleable is part of the backdrop of discussions about the body in this subreddit. By contrast, another theme that emerges is one of acceptance: "I have to love myself in my own skin. My body shape might be perceived as gendered, but I know…".

The discussion of "body part(s)" further confirms the idea of changeability. Here are some examples:

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
wants boobs and an hourglass shape and we could swap	body parts	to help each other out. What a lovely
somehow worked for me. - Wishing that I could have removable	body parts	to swap in and out, and that I
size reduced. I had always assumed my distress around these	body parts	was normal and that all afab people lived

Figure 11. KWIC: Body Parts

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
in the dysmorphia category but not fully. You dislike the	body part	because it influences how people treat you but
a world where any & every given variation of any/every	body part	could be non-binary, bc there would be
wish i was just a fucking vessel and every fucking	body part	didnt have so much stigma and labels on

Figure 12. KWIC: Body Part

Two of the examples above use the words "swap" in relation to body parts. One of the participants writes: "wishing that I could have **removable** body parts to **swap** in and out." The use of modal verbs of possibility—"we **could** swap," "that I **could** have," "any/every body part **could** be non-binary"—brings out another idea related to the use of language about the body in this subreddit: the people posting here have unrealised wishes about their bodies, which means that they have to turn to the language of possibility and imagination to express those wishes and sometimes their frustration, as the last example in the image above shows.

Body neutrality has both a frequency and range of 5, and appears across 5 different texts in the corpus. Here are all five hits for this cluster:

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
guess i just want there to be more resources for	body neutrality,	positivity, & joy in the non-binary community - for
coincided with me doing a lot of conscious work on	body neutrality,	so I'm not sure which bits of
How do you practice	body neutrality	with gender dysphoria? - My body is a spaceship.
address some of this dysphoria? - Best I can suggest is	body neutrality.	It's not 100% effective and it probably won'
exploring body positivity/body love/	body neutrality/	anything other than body hate as a non-

Figure 13. KWIC: Body Neutrality

These examples suggest that there are people in this subreddit who desire a neutral, if not positive, narrative about the body in non-binary communities. It is easy to see the more painful sides of the discussion, after all both dysphoria and dysmorphia feature heavily in the corpus as explained above. One of the people in these examples, by contrast, wants "more resources for body neutrality, positivity, & joy," while another is "exploring body positivity/body love/body neutrality/anything other than body hate…". Another person asks how to "practice body neutrality with gender dysphoria?" indicating that this idea of neutrality, if not positivity has a place in the semantic world of the word "body" as used by non-binary people in this subreddit.

"Body spray" has a frequency of 5 and a range of 2. Here are all the hits for this cluster:

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
What's your favorite gender neutral	body spray	or cologne? I'm finally running through my
Agender autistic looking for	body spray	recs I like smelling nice and wearing scents,
Does anyone have any suggestions for a more neutral smelling	body spray	that isn't too strong? Thanks! 🔲 - I am
time though. - i really like the body shop's arbour	body spray -	I recommend always trying things on your own
very feminine. I currently am trying to use men's	body spray,	but it is so strong and I hate

Figure 14. KWIC: Body Spray

The two texts where this cluster appears centre around fragrance recommendations. This cluster shows that part of the semantic world of "body" is focused on how one is perceived in the world by others, i.e. presentation. As with the discussion around body hair, the discussion on fragrances considers whether fragrances are gendered in some ways: "What's your favorite gender neutral body spray or cologne?" reads one of the examples above.

31

Wrong body

This cluster has a frequency of 19 and a range of 3. Here are some examples from the three texts where this cluster appears:

I don't feel like I was born in the	wrong body.	I feel like my body is mine, and
one - & my ED is directly tied to being in the	wrong body,	in a body that doesn't read the
Aside from the bdd, it feels like im in the	wrong body,	but there isnt a correct body for me. -
felt is that I felt like I was in the	wrong body	and that's what I told everybody at
are wrong for our genders. I don't have the	wrong body,	I have a trans body. It is not

Figure 15. KWIC: Wrong Body

One of the texts is a long discussion about the idea that one is "born in the wrong body." As a result, many of the clusters are preceded by "born in the," this is the case of the first example in the image above. The post itself and many of the comments express a resistance to the idea that one is born in the wrong body. This will be explored in more detail in the second part of the analysis. This idea of being in the wrong body is countered in some of the examples from the other texts as well: "I don't have the wrong body, I have a trans body." However, other participants lean into the idea: "it feels like I'm in the wrong body, but there isn't a correct body for me."

Female body

This cluster has a frequency of 13 and a range of 7. Here are some examples:

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
switch back and forth between a male body and a	female body,	depending on the circumstance, I am pretty sure
be MtF trans because I'd much rather have a	female body	at that point. Hard to say exactly when
off my breasts or nah. And I LIKE having a	female body.	I don't like my uterus, I'd
Im also amab but still want to transition to a	female body.	But I realized my dysphoria has been less
and mum asked me straight up would i want a	female body	or to be a woman, i said "i

Figure 16. KWIC: Female Body

The first example in this set will most likely come up later in the analysis, since it includes the cluster "male body". This example suggests the idea of changeability again. The whole sentence context for the cluster is: "If there was a way to **switch back and forth** between a male body and a female body, depending on the circumstance, I am pretty sure that would be my version of paradise" (emphasis mine). The examples above reveal an ambivalence about the female body and its anatomical characteristics: "I LIKE having a

female body. I don't like my uterus"; "I'm also amab but still want to transition to a female body"; "I'd much rather have a female body at that point."

Male Body and Masculine Body

These clusters have a frequency of 7 and 4 respectively and a range of 6 (male body) and 3 (masculine body). Here are some examples of both clusters:

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
was a way to switch back and forth between a	male body	and a female body, depending on the circumstance,
this body. Some days I would much rather have a	male body.	Most days, I want neither - full androgynous, think
that out. Honestly if I had been born in a	male body	I probably would have identified as a camp
made me understand were: • if i woke up with a	male body	would it change my gender identity? No, still
Chastity to "switch off" my	male body	So apologies, I guess this is nsfw. Something

Figure 17. KWIC: Male Body

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
i know to hell and back i dont want a	masculine body	or a man's body, i do not
but I feel like I want to have a more "	masculine" body	and even use he/they pronouns and althought
to implant every feminine thing possible on top of my	masculine body,	and its working with hrt rn. So very
to all suggestions. - I'm Also AMAB 6'1 with a very	masculine body,	I've been strive if for a more

Figure 18. KWIC: Masculine Body

There are differences between the clusters due to the difference between "male" and "masculine", but the most striking thing is that these terms, along with "female body" are linked to the subreddit's conversation about the body. Combined, they have more frequency than "non-binary" body, which suggests that there is at least a tendency to explain the concept of the body to each other in binary terms male/female and masculine/feminine. This is why examining the discussion about the body and the linguistic resources used in order to construct the *non-binary body* is so compelling. As with "female body," there is ambivalence about having a male body and a masculine body: "Some days I would much rather have a male body"; "I don't want a masculine body or a man's body"; "I feel like I want to have a more "masculine" body."

Binary Body

This cluster has a frequency of 8 and a range of 3. It is slightly deceptive because the examples reveal that the cluster should be "non-binary body." so it is likely that the software picked up "binary" only due to the hyphen. Here are some examples:

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
wanna find ways for us to communicate that a non-	binary body	can look like anything, i do mean that
cases? is there any way to communicate that a non-	binary body	can look like anything, including our bodies? or
of people understand that any body can be a non-	binary body.	i guess it's a double-edged sword
into getting people to understand that i have a non-	binary body, &	then it ultimately doesn't matter bc it'
my truth as a non-binary person in a non-	binary body	bc my body reads as a cishet woman'

Figure 19. KWIC: Binary Body

The first two examples come from different texts and have the exact same pattern: "to communicate that a non-binary body can look like anything." This indicates a strong sense some of the people in this subreddit have of trying to explain to the people outside of their community that they want to embody their identity, which means that no matter what their bodies look like, they are still non-binary. The three remaining examples come from the same text and unsurprisingly have similar language, the use of the verb "understand." What comes through the most from this cluster is a sense that non-binary people in this subreddit want to communicate and want to be understood by those outside of their community.

No body

This cluster has a frequency of 5 and a range of 4. Here is the cluster in context:

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
the way I do about stuff. - As someone who experiences	no body	dysphoria, "born in the wrong body" definitely convinced
always shave my armpits and legs. I like to have	no body	hair. Idk why I think I just like
or female. We made that shit up - Best case scenario:	no body	Alternative: a mix of all and nothing - I
this body type on my worst enemy. - I'm sorry,	no body	is for touching and grabbing without consent but
right now is some damn muscles which take FOREVER womp -	No Body! (	tbh I wouldn't mind being a formless

Figure 20. KWIC: No Body

One of the examples is about hair and another about dysphoria, both of which were discussed above. Another example is unclear since we cannot see enough of the context here. The interesting examples are those where there is a suggestion of not having a body: "Best case scenario: no body Alternative: a mix of all and nothing" and "No body" to be honest I wouldn't mind being a formless…". These two examples come from the same text and are likely answers to a question someone posed. There is an idea in the cluster "no body," a negation of the body, a desire to not have a body. It does not have sufficient frequency to be representative, but it is part of the constellation of ideas related to "body" in this subreddit.

This concludes the analysis of the clusters that appear with the word "body." A constellation of ideas and semantic relationships emerges from these examples, each of them has been discussed in some detail above and some of these ideas will be explored further in the second part of the analysis.

I also looked at the collocations of the word "body," both left and right. I present the results here, including function words.
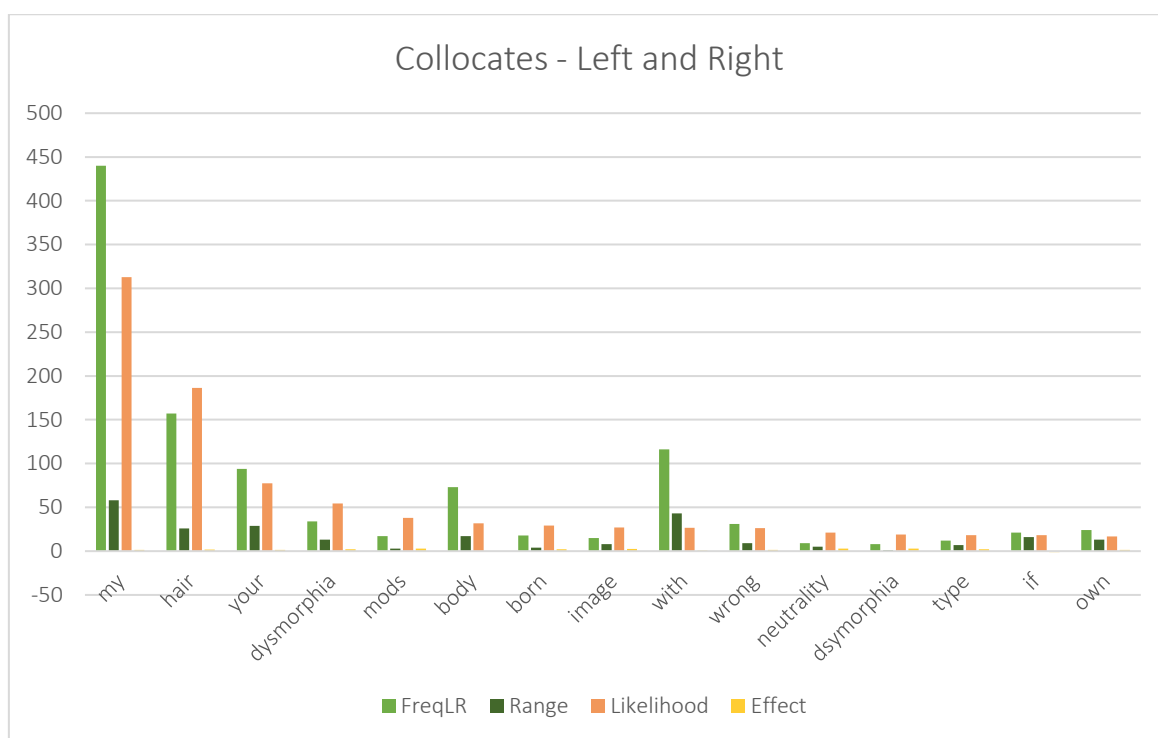
Figure 21. Collocates - Left and Right

Some of these words also appeared in the clusters. The most common collocate for "body" in the corpus is "my," indicating the main purpose of this subreddit, which is for people in the community to express their ideas.

Finally, I took a broader look at the corpus and compared it with both the American English 2006 Corpus (AmE06) and the British English 2006 Corpus (BE06). This was done to tease out its keywords. The results for these are best presented in word cloud form, the size of the word is an indicator of keyness (likelihood, in this instance). I anticipated that the word "body" would feature prominently, since the corpus was built around this word, but some of the results were surprising.
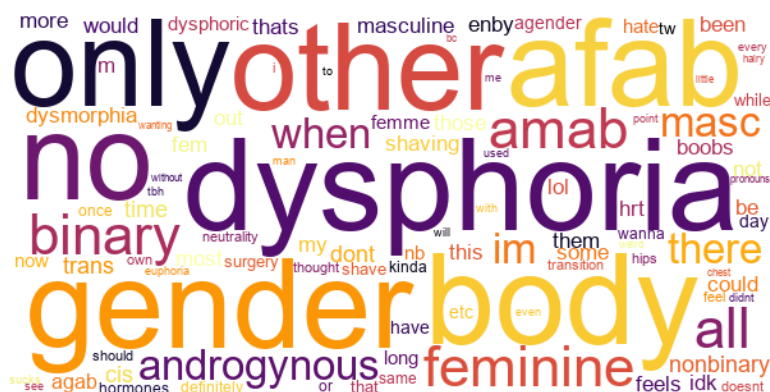
Figure 22 Keyword Results. Reference Corpus: AmE06

Figure 23 Keyword Results. Reference Corpus: BE06

Both of these images show that "dysphoria" is the most prominent keyword, followed closely by "body" and "gender." After this top three, the results diverge only slightly. The results show that this is clearly a specialised corpus which focuses on gender identity and the body. In fact, some of the words in this corpus had zero frequency in the AmE06 and BE06.

Ame06	BE06
afab	afab
agab	agab
amab	agender
dysphoric	amab
masc	androgynous
idk	binder
didnt	boobs
tw	didnt
hrt	doesnt
dysphoria	dysmorphia

Table 2. Keywords from the NBBDC with 0 Frequency in the Reference Corpora

Some of these words are intentional misspellings, most likely done deliberately in service of speed when typing: e.g. "didnt" and "doesnt." Others are very closely related to gender identity and have become common acronyms: "afab" (assigned female at birth), "agab" (assigned gender at birth), "amab" (assigned male at birth). Some of the words that appear here are also semantically closely linked in the NBBDC with the word "body," namely "dysphoria" and "dysmorphia." Other terms are typical internet initialisms: "tw" (trigger warning), "idk" (I don't know), while "hrt" (hormone replacement therapy) is an initialism related to gender. Many of the words in this list and in the word clouds above appear in the glossary of terms at the end of this thesis.

4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis of Selected Texts from the Corpus

This part of the analysis will look at ten texts from the NBBDC up close. Fairclough's CDA framework has been used to give the analysis structure. The analytical stages were outlined in section one, so here we take a closer look at how these stages are related to Fairclough's view of discourse. Fairclough laid out a three-layered model of discourse, which consists of three dimensions and is accompanied by a three-part analytical system. Here is a brief explanation of what Fairclough's model is and how it will be used in this thesis.

Fairclough's CDA Framework	
Dimensions of discourse	Layers of analysis
Text: Texts have formal features that can be linguistic and visual. Texts have potential meanings, not fixed meanings.	**Description**: Analyse the formal properties of the text: vocabulary, grammar, text structure, e.g. lexical items, metaphors, evaluative language (semantic fields and adjectives), intertextual references, grammatical and syntactic structures, among other features.
Discursive practices: The text is a resource of interaction and interpretation depends of what one brings to it—one's knowledge of certain discursive conventions, one's knowledge of the social world, one's values, beliefs and ideologies.	**Interpretation:** This stage is concerned with the relationship between the text and interaction. Here we must consider assumptions about social identities and which of those are presented as "common sense," assumptions about shared knowledge, and the assumed social relations of power. We must also consider intertextuality and the voices that are heard in the text and the way this happens.
Social/cultural practices: This layer is about the wider sociocultural practices and processes of change.	**Explanation:** At this stage we must examine "the relationship between the text, its immediate context of interaction and its wider social context" (Sauntson, 2019, p. 53).

Table 3. Adapted from the information in Sauntson, 2019 (pp. 52-53).

This system will act as a map for the analysis of the selected texts. It is pertinent to start with an overview of the features that all of these texts share in common given their particular mode of production and their place. As laid out in section one, the subreddit r/NonBinary can be considered a Community of Practice (CofP). As such, there are shared formal features and discursive practices of the texts which are common to the Internet as a whole, to Reddit as a platform and to this subreddit in particular. I will start by laying out the formal features which are shared among all the texts and explain, where relevant, whether those features are common across the online world and where they are specific to this CofP.

Visual and Interactive Features

As explained in section one, this CofP has a set of rules which govern the communication that happens in it. This set of rules is always visible on the right-hand-side of the screen. Below it, there are a series of colourful tags called *flair* that one can add to a post when writing it. *Flair* is used to organise posts into different topics.
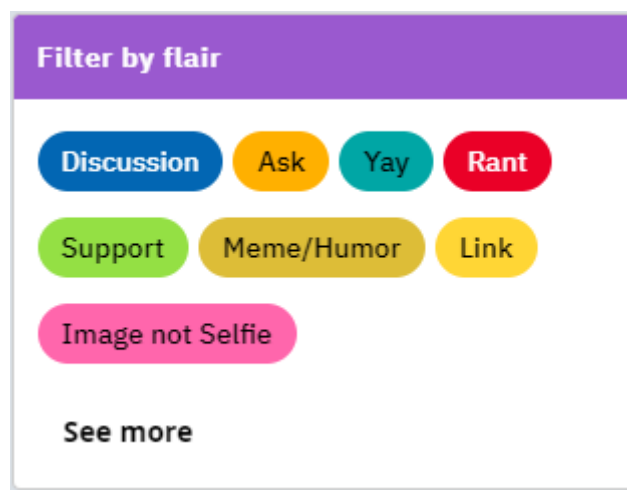
Figure 24. Flair tags in r/NonBinary

There are many categories, but the ones that are immediately visible below the rules can be seen in the image above. Flair is a formal feature that is available all across Reddit and it is used by all communities on the platform in some way.

Another feature that is common, not just across Reddit but across the Internet as a whole, is the post/comment dyad. In each subreddit, people write a post and expect others to comment below their post. Some posts have many comments and others none. The comments are part of the texts that will be analysed below. Comments can be organised in different ways: by best, top, old, new, controversial and Q&A. The first two categories

indicate the most upvotes (more on upvotes below), old, new and controversial are self-explanatory, and Q&A will yield the longest comment thread.

The post/comment dyad generates a relationship between the person who posts and the people who comment. On Reddit the person who posts is called "OP" (original poster). This language has spread to other social media platforms, where people in the comments will often refer to the person who posted the original content as "OP." However, on Reddit, this label is highlighted. Ops can reply to other people's comments and when they do, the platform indicates their role by adding "OP" in blue next to their username. While the text includes the voices of many people, the voice of OP is often recurrent and it will feature as one of the topics of analysis when looking at each text separately.

One important feature is the function of the "top comment," which is usually a comment that appears at the top of the comment section because many people have upvoted it. The default sorting for comments is "Best," which means that the comment with the most upvotes appears at the top, hence "top comment." Often the content of the top comment resonates throughout the comment section.

Upvotes and downvotes are interactive features that are available to everyone who uses Reddit. Upvotes can be roughly understood as "likes" and downvotes as their counterpart. However, upvotes are not only used to *like* posts and comments but also to help highlight posts since upvotes increase the popularity of a post or comment and that increases the likelihood of a post appearing in the highlights part of the subreddit. It is important to note that Reddit gives you an automatic upvote when making a comment, so the first upvote is always guaranteed. This means that comments with only one upvote have only been upvoted by Reddit's algorithm, not by other members of the community. These interactive features, alongside the possibility of sorting comments in different ways, give the reader ways to manipulate the text. The reader, in some ways, participates in the final production of the text by using interactive features and has direct influence on the text's reach by upvoting or downvoting it since that will have an impact on how much this particular text is seen in the subreddit and across the platform. People who simply read content and maybe only upvote or downvote without writing posts or commenting are called *lurkers* on Reddit and other social media platforms.

Emojis are commonly used across the Internet and Reddit is no exception. They add a layer of texture to communication and will be considered when delving into the analysis of the posts and comments.

Linguistic features

Punctuation and some grammatical conventions are disregarded online and this is also the case for Reddit. It is common to see typos, non-standard use of capitalisation, abbreviations, first-person pronoun elision, and other features that indicate a casual style common on the Internet. Here are some examples:

- Elision of the first person: "Still scared to do it, though."

- Capitalisation used for emphasis: "LOVE THAT FOR YOU!"

- Lower case first person singular pronoun and non-standard spelling of the auxiliary verb "do": "As for my arms, i rarely shave them at all unless i got a new tattoo on my lower arm just so it doesnt look weird to have a random patch of shaved arm".

- Abbreviations and symbols: rn (right now), idk (I don't know), lmk (let me know), fem (feminine/femme), fave (favourite), @ (at), w/ (with), tbh (to be honest), lil (little), HRT (hormone replacement therapy), T (testosterone), E (oestrogen), lmao (laughing my a** off), LMFAO (laughing my f*cking a** off).

Discursive Practices

There are assumptions made across all the texts. On a macro level, those assumptions are related to knowledge of the formal features of the texts, as laid out above. It is also assumed that the participants (the OP and commenters) understand the language of gender identity with its myriad abbreviations, or at the very least, that they are open to understanding new terms as they are introduced in the posts and comments.

The semantic landscape regarding gender identity has been explored in the literature elsewhere, and to an extent, all academic studies related to gender identity share similar terms. There is language related to (gender) dysphoria and euphoria, body dysmorphia, hormones, surgery, gender expression, gender presentation, and acceptance through language (e.g. the use of pronouns). The people who participate in this CofP assume that those posting and commenting understand these terms and if they do not, that they are open

to understanding them. As we shall see in the analysis, each text presents its own specific semantic landscape and brings new terms and concepts into the discourse.

Underlying the discussions, there are often references to marginalisation, feeling misunderstood and the desire to be perceived in a particular way. These are all topics that will be explored in more detail through each text and the topics that are specific to each text will be highlighted.

As explained above, the voice of the OP and commenters is heard throughout the texts. The OP and commenters are in dialogue with each other, but there are also *lurkers,* whose participation is minimal and may only involve reading and up or downvoting comments and posts. At the same time, the texts are in indirect conversation with voices outside of the CofP, as will become evident, there are explicit and implicit references to the material and virtual worlds outside of the community. In one text, a commenter references "gender forums" elsewhere on Reddit, implying that there is a wider range of forums dedicated to gender identity. These other communities are well-known, in fact it was the original aim of this project to compile corpora from at least a few other "gender forums" (r/NonBinary, 2023) and build a larger picture. However, it is significant that such explicit references exist to other communities on Reddit since it shows that the participants are engaging in conversation with full knowledge that their discussions are public. Moreover, despite the openness and candour that an open forum such as this encourages—in no small part because participants can be entirely anonymous—it is pertinent to consider that a participant's knowledge of the rules of the forum and the fact that the discussions are public must have some effect on the text's production. The extent to which voices from outside of the CofP are brought into the discussion, either implicitly or explicitly, will be considered when presenting the analysis of each text. I now turn to analysing each text in more detail.

The usernames of participants are not provided for privacy reasons. The content is publicly available, however, so if the reader has sufficient interest, the full texts can be found online unless they have been deleted by the participants. The author of this project has created archive links for each text in the corpus and these can be made available upon request for research purposes. r/NonBinary is referenced as the source of all the texts.

4.2.1 "How do You Take Care of Your Body Hair?"

In terms of flair, this text is a "discussion," which is one important formal aspect of the text. This post has 95 upvotes and 248 comments. The OP expects people to comment and the language used in the post is an invitation.

> **How do you take care of your body hair?**
>
> Hello fellow enbies! Regardless of what gender you were assigned at birth, unless you are albino or have alopecia, everyone has body hair!
>
> So I'm curious, what are y'all's shaving habits? Do you shave your limbs? Your genitals? Only the armpits? Clean shaven or do you have a soft, sexy beard?
>
> Do you say "FUCK THE PATRIARCHY" and not shave anything at all?
>
> Well, here's mine: I shave my limbs once a month, w/removal hair cream cause it's easy and hassle-free. My armpits are shaven about once every 2 months or so, w/ a razor and in front of a mirror. Privates well it's maintained and well groomed about once a week or at most once every 10 days.
>
> Feel free to share yours if you are comfortable doing so! ♡ [white heart]

Figure 25. How do You Take Care of Your Body Hair?, r/NonBinary, 2023

This part of the text is the post that initiates the discussion, the OP starts with a friendly greeting which acknowledges the CofP's members' identity: "Hello fellow **enbies.**" This greeting is followed by a preface, which introduces the topic of body hair, to OP's central question: "what are y'all's shaving habits?".

OP's grammar, punctuation and syntax are mostly standard with a few modifications. OP uses capital letters for emphasis and the contraction "y'all" instead of the second-person plural pronoun "you."" The style and tone are casual and OP employs abbreviations "w/" instead of "with." The tone is communicated through the use of friendly language, the exclamation marks at the end of the first two sentences and the last sentence communicate lightness. The use of the conditional "if you are comfortable doing so" adds to the overall friendliness of OP's tone throughout the post. OP wants the people reading this to know that they are in control of what they share. OP also uses a white heart emoji at the end of the post, the precise meaning of which is unclear. Hearts typically symbolise affection, so we can safely assume that the white heart is intended to communicate a positive feeling since there is nothing else indicating the contrary.

This initial post in some ways sets the parameters of the discussion. OP's questions are direct and the post offers information as well as requesting it, which is likely to influence the commenters' decision to share. I will come back to the other layers of this post.

Description of the Comments

This post has 248 comments, making it impossible to analyse each one in depth. I have identified a few common traits and will offer some of the more salient examples. Most of the comments are shorter than the original post. Many also do away with the pleasantries that OP exhibits and simply answer the questions:

I've gone to laser hair removal all hair disappeared nice and smooth (Top comment: 55 upvotes)

I only shave my lower legs once a week, and my armpits every 3 or 4 days. For my genitals, I sport a full bush. I have dysphoria around that area, and if it's covered with a nice fur coat, it helps. Out of sight, out of mind, right? (Second most upvoted comment: 34 upvotes)

Figure 26. r/NonBinary, 2023

It can be argued that the commenters do not have to display the same type of friendliness because they are answering/giving, rather than requesting information. Many of the comments exhibit non-standard use of language to a higher degree than the original post, however, these non-standard uses are not consistent:

As for my arms, **i** rarely shave them at all unless **i** got a new tattoo on my lower arm just so it **doesnt** look weird to have a random patch of shaved arm" (partial comment, 2 upvotes)

Figure 27. r/NonBinary, 2023

The full comment is well organised and the dropping of apostrophes and lower case "I" is not observable consistently throughout. The use of abbreviations is also common, as explained above, this is a trait across all texts, but it is word looking at an example from this text:

I always shave my armpits and legs. I like to have no body hair. **Idk** why I think I just like being smooth **lol**" (2 upvotes)

Figure 28. r/NonBinary, 2023

The semantic world of this text is firmly rooted in a discussion about body hair. This topic appears to be salient across other "gender forums," as per one commenter:

I've actually been having some trouble lurking in gender forums, cause I actually quite like my body hair, and it seems like everything about it in transfem-land is "How do I get rid of my body hair??" (No shade to that question, though - it is a very legitimate question!) But like, I want to know what I can do with my hair!" (3 upvotes)

Figure 29. r/NonBinary, 2023

Some of the recurrent terms in this text are related to hair removal: laser hair removal, waxing, shaving, epilating, electrolysis, plucking, tweezing, hair removal cream. There is

also a discussion of body parts which follows from the original post; arms, armpits (or "pits"), legs and genitals are liberally discussed. The discussion about genitals is interesting as some commenters use more explicit terms (e.g. *labia*, *vagina*, *butthole*) while others employ a range of euphemistic terms: *nono*, *down there*, *downstairs*, *privates*, *(the) bits*, *the hedges*, *crotchtorial area*, *neither [nether] regions*, *bushes*, *bitties*. All of these terms indicate at the very least an awareness that this text is happening in public and their use of these terms likely reflects their personality. However, it is important to note that this text is being produced by individuals who may experience a degree of discomfort with these areas of their bodies, as the second top commenter explained: "For my genitals, I sport a full bush. I have dysphoria around that area, and if it's covered with a nice fur coat, it helps" (r/NonBinary, 2023). "Genitals" is certainly a word one can use to get around having to name specifics, but many of the people in this CofP have chosen to display a degree of playfulness when making references to these body parts instead.

Another important topic of discussion is hormones and how these affect hair growth. The discussion about hormones is sometimes linked to the evaluative language the commenters use when referring to body hair. It certainly is for the discussions on testosterone, less so for discussions about oestrogen. It is important to note that both hormones are being administered exogenously, hence the discussion on the effects of them on body hair.

I personally **dont like body hair**, so I shave anything and everything I can. Of course, **being on T doesnt help** lol. Sadly it took away my head hair and put it everywhere else" (2 upvotes)

Head - shaved with a #5 guard whenever it gets long enough to annoy me
Face - shave every day to every 3 days when I'm feeling lazy. I don't want facial hair but I like the act of shaving, it feels like a nice little bit of self care
Pits - shaved clean every couple of weeks cause i dislike having hair there
Downstairs - trim sometimes but i don't do much beyond that tbh
Everywhere else I don't shave. I was pretty hairy pre T so now I've been on it for a few months I have a LOT and I love it." (3 upvotes)

I shave my legs every few weeks, depending on my mental state, on my time capacity, how much it **disturbs** me and since two months also **depending on how strongly the estrogen effects [affects] it** 🫠 My genitals and armpits every once in a while, **whenever I feel the need to**. Similar with my facial hair but luckily I have very little of that. (2 upvotes)

Figure 30. r/NonBinary, 2023

The commenter who discusses oestrogen is fairly neutral to positive about the effects of the hormone on body hair, this is indicated by the use of the partying emoji. By contrast the two commenters referencing testosterone take opposite positions depending on how they feel about body hair in the first place. The first commenter does not like body hair and credits exogenous testosterone with their lack of hair on their head and its presence everywhere else. The second commenter already had a lot of hair before exogenous testosterone and now has more and is very happy. Overall, there are more discussions about testosterone in the comments than about oestrogen so the first two comments are more representative of the text.

There are a range of affective stances towards body hair, maintenance and removal. As we have seen, some commenters love their body hair, while others loathe it. Some associate armpit hair in particular with a lack of hygiene, a position that OP does not understand and some commenters take a position of disregard:

Again w/the "hygiene reasons" when it comes to armpits and shaving! Interesting!
Personally, I don't understand that statement, especially if you use antiperspirant. But all of it is valid either way ♡ (2 upvotes)

I don't shave anything at all. Partly because **I don't care** and partly because it's exhausting just to shave one leg, never mind two. (1 upvote)

Figure 31. r/NonBinary, 2023

Other commenters have taken the invitation from the original post and echo it by repeating "F*CK THE PATRIARCHY" in their comments. Sometimes this implies that the OP meant in the original post and sometimes it does not.

i just say fuck the patriarchy and dont shave anywhere, i think the last time i shaved was years ago" (2 upvotes)

I like being soft and shaven myself, but I still yell 'fuck the patriarchy' all the same ;)
Face I shave daily, armpits every other/3rd day, torso and arms about 1-2x a week and legs once every two weeks. Mind you it's winter here now, in the summer I shave my body hair more like every other day! Pubes is the only area I only trim, but thats mostly because I have a lot of skin tags there and I'm afraid to cut into them by accident :'((14 upvotes)

Figure 32. r/NonBinary, 2023

A final feature that merits explanation is the use of positive statements and the use of exclamation marks and emojis to communicate a positive affective stance, not towards body hair, but towards other commenters. The comments are organised in threads and, while one

can up or downvote a comment, one can also reply to comments, which is where most of these types of statements are found:

LOVE THAT FOR YOU! KEEP IT UP! 🤗 🤍 ” (3 upvotes)

And that's 1001% valid! Good for you! 🤗 🤍 ” (2 upvotes)

Yeah that's a very VERY common feeling! Perfectly understandable and valid too!” (1 upvote)

Second comment mentioning the goal to be a warewolf when it comes to body hair! LOVE THAT FOR YOU MY FINE WANNABE FURRY FRIEND! 🤗 🤍 ” (2 upvotes)

Figure 33. r/NonBinary, 2023

Interpretation and Explanation

This text presents a range of assumptions about shared knowledge and social identities which were laid out above and it shares these features in common with the other texts in this analysis. The particular features of this text centre around the voices that are heard in the text and the use of intertextuality of both the OP and commenters.

The voice of OP is present throughout the text, not only in the original post. In fact, it is OP who is responsible for most of the upbeat comments and emojis in the comments. OP uses the party and sparkling heart emojis several times at the end of replies and sometimes ends replies with a white heart, as seen in the original post. These replies usually result in a few upvotes, but they are not always well received: Here is OP having a conversation with one commenter:

Commenter: Hi, I'm intersex without body hair. (2 upvotes)
OP reply: INTERSEX YOU SAY?! Awesome. GOOD FOR YOU! 🤗 🤍 (2 upvotes)
Commenter: No, no good at all, this condition ruined my body. No need to be sarcastic. (2 upvotes)
OP reply: What?! I actually wasn't sarcastic. Like at all. I like different. I am happy that there are intersex people in the world and I think they're awesome 🤍 I'm sorry it ruined your body though… (1 upvote)

Figure 34. r/NonBinary, 2023

In this example, we see that OP's upbeat and friendly tone is misunderstood as sarcasm by a commenter, indicating that the particular discursive parameters that OP tried to create with the original post are not shared by everyone in the comments section. It is impossible to establish the reasons for this misunderstanding; it could be cultural since people from a wide range of countries interact in this CofP. This also indicates that while this tone is a feature of OP's writing, it may not be a common feature across all texts in this

subreddit. In this reply, something about OP's beliefs is revealed: OP displays a positive affective stance towards *being intersex*. OP has revealed something about their world view and perhaps about the expectation that others might view *intersex* as something positive. The term is not explained in detail and it is outside of the scope of this thesis to discuss the particulars of a definition. However, the commenter who introduced this term into the text refers to it as a "condition" that "ruined [their] body."

OP's voice also comes through as affirming the gender identities of the people in the comments. This feature is already present in the original post and can be observed in the replies that OP writes in the comments section, the relevant words and phrases have been highlighted in bold:

Fuck man. The power of brainwashing in this society man. Fuck. I'm glad that you're learning to be comfortable w/your own body! Self-love is a journey! You got this **my hella fine Nonbinary friend!** 🥰 💚" (4 upvotes)

YOU WAX YOUR PRIVATES?! 🙊 You got more guts than me **my fine genderless friend!**

For me, I trim and maintain it w/a razor. I would never ever wax my privates omg THE HORROR 🙊 ♡"
(6 upvotes)

YOU WAX YOUR ARMPITS?! Omg that's horrifying. The two places I do not want wax on are my private and my armpits. You are brave, **my fine non-gender-confirming friend!**" (2 upvotes)

Figure 35. r/NonBinary, 2023

There are plenty of references to other texts, I have already mentioned a reference to "gender forums," of which r/NonBinary is one. The discourse in this text is in some ways determined by the material world and how the people who create this discourse are perceived or want to be perceived by others.

I only shave my pits because **I'm afraid it will make women uncomfortable at the gym**. I know I shouldn't care what people think but honestly I just want to workout without getting sneered at. Love feeling the breeze in my leg hair! (5 upvotes)

Oh I don't blame you, I don't shave my armpits often and when summer is there, **I get stares**. Mind you they don't smell @ all bad. In the summer I keep a bottle of antiperspirant in my bag just in case. (2 upvotes)

I haven't shaved in like 2 years. I'm still, for some reason, a bit too scared to wear tank tops in public, I feel like I will be perceived as a girl with armpit hair and some asshole will make a rude comment, but other than that I love it!

Figure 36. r/NonBinary, 2023

These comments display the way the commenters feel about the outside world, the world offline and away from this CofP and it is not positive. They express fear and discomfort. The last commenter mentions not wearing tank tops due to fear of being "perceived as a girl with armpit hair" and fear that someone will make a rude comment. The social conventions about body hair are present in this text, in the commenters' fear of doing what they want with their body hair because it will not conform with expectations set outside of their community. This is not to say that all commenters display this fearful attitude. Others, as mentioned above, have decided to say "F*ck the patriarchy" and not conform to the ideal of smooth skin that looms in the background of this text, at least for some of the text producers. The word "patriarchy" is found twelve time across the many comments in this text. Some comments have already been displayed above, here is one more:

> 'Fuck the patriarchy' here. **I only shave when I want to look nice at an event**, and even then, I only shave my underarms, **because it's the only thing that'll be on display**.
>
> 'Cause fuck the patriarchy. (2 upvotes)

Figure 37. r/NonBinary, 2023

While other commenters are much more radical in their stance and claim to not shave or trim their hair in support of the statement introduced by OP, some of the comments are more like this one and at least one other explains that while they support the sentiment, they like smooth skin. OP introduces the idea that supporting this statement means not shaving and the commenters do not explicitly challenge this assumption. They play by the rules linguistically even though their practices flout the premise of OP's statement. The comment above also subtly introduces the idea that looking nice means having smooth armpits and that only smooth armpits are acceptable when on display. This indicates that societal expectations are deeply ingrained in the commenter's actions and world view.

The expectations are not equal for all, however, as some commenters reveal that more body hair is, or should be, regarded as good, depending on one's gender identity.

I'm afab. I still present quite fem. I HATE HATE HATE BODY HAIR. **I know that I'd like to have underarm hair and that make me feel gender and such**, but I CANNOT STAND THE FEELING. I shave EVERYTHING daily (4 upvotes)

I have PCOS so I actually had quite a bit of facial hair from age 14 and I was repeatedly told how disgusting I was to the point that I spent the next decade and a half regularly waxing it off at home (yes it is painful to do that but I was also brainwashed into thinking that it would be appalling for me to shave because 'women can't do that', which though awful at the time at least means I get quite a lot of euphoria from shaving now). Unfortunately I was also talked into a course of electrolysis on my face which was thankfully interrupted by covid and never finished but which I do worry will mean **I'll never be able to have a proper beard no matter how long I'm on T** (not that I especially want one but not having the option makes me sad sometimes) (partial comment - 6 upvotes)

Figure 38. r/NonBinary, 2023

These posts are intriguing as one cannot be sure whether the first commenter is referring to feeling non-binary gender and it is unclear how armpit hair will help with that feeling. The second commenter laments the loss of hair through electrolysis and would like to have the option of growing a beard, but that was rendered impossible due to the procedure, despite the effects of exogenous testosterone. The second comment displays different sets of expectations: "women can't do that," the commenter writes of shaving one's face. Now that the commenter identifies as non-binary, that idea about shaving no longer applies and the feeling that accompanies shaving now is (gender) euphoria.

This text's producers (OP and the commenters) display a range of different positions regarding body hair. There are references to different sets of expectations: smooth skin, a soft beard, armpit hair. There is no unifying set of expectations that unite the producers of this text and this might be true for other non-binary people. Societal standards still apply, ideas of body hair as unhygienic or unsightly still underpin many of the commenters' world view. There is explicit mention of body hair expectations for women: "That's why the modern ideology of a hairless body is so feminine and considered attractive. Of course, body hair removal has been seen all over history in different fashions" (r/NonBinary, 2023).

There are several commenters whose stance on body hair challenges the societal norms while other commenters express compliance with norms due to feelings of fear or discomfort.

4.2.2 "What Body do We Want?"

This text is explicitly about the non-binary body. The original post is short and it has a total of 177 upvotes and 168 comments. This post's flair is "discussion."

> **What body do we want?**
> I know I certainly don't want the other genders body, but I don't want mine either, so WHAT THE HELL DO I WANT?

Figure 39. r/NonBinary, 2023

Here the OP invites other CofP members to have a discussion but uses the language of uncertainty about their own stance on the body to do this. OP knows they do not want to have "the other gender['s] body" or their own body, but OP does not know what body they want. OP uses capitalisation to emphasise the question that ends the post. Here the title performs as the open question to other CofP participants since it is directed at them, rather than directed at OP. It is implied that the "we" in the question is non-binary people. Other features of this text will be explored in the interpretation and explanation section.

Description of the Comments Section

This text takes us semantically into a range of different places. The language of the body here centres around specific body parts that are regarded as gendered, if only because they are secondary sex characteristics: breasts, the width of hips, thighs, body fat distribution, and genitals. Euphemisms make an appearance again: "peen," "vag," "down there."

The language of changeability and malleability is used throughout this comments section and it is introduced in the top comment:

> I want a body that can **shapeshift** based on what I feel like that day. (235 upvotes)

Figure 40. r/NonBinary, 2023

The word "shapeshift" comes up seventeen times in the comments section, the top comment is echoed throughout the rest of the comments. The idea of changing one's body according to one's feelings is also present in the top comment and it also echoes throughout the comments section:

> I wish I could **swap** to how I feel on the day, and I wish it could be easy and just also recently realising I am enby. (1 upvote)

Figure 41. r/NonBinary, 2023

Related to the idea of shapeshifting, there are concepts of modularity, of being able to detach body parts, and of swapping body parts.

> **Modular** and **reconfigurable** on a whim, personally. (18 upvotes)
>
> I would like a mr potato head body, with all the 'accessories' (9 upvotes)
>
> I want a mx potato head body, with **swappable** breasts, genitalia, limbs, etc (1 upvote)
>
> I need science to hurry up and make **detachable** boobs. Like some days I like having them but other days I want to rip them off my body!!! (3 upvotes)

Figure 42. r/NonBinary, 2023

There are discussions of surgery and in particular the topic of nullification surgery is introduced. This type of surgery's goal is to "leave the area as a smooth unbroken transition from abdomen to the groin" (Davis, 2024). Several commenters express an interest in this and reference desiring a "Ken doll" or "Barbie doll" genital area, this is a conversation between two commenters:

> **Commenter 1:** i want to be **smoothed like a barbie doll** personally (8 upvotes)
>
> **Commenter 2:** "This sounds great, but **how does one do this without losing sexual pleasure?** /serious (1 upvote)
>
> **Commenter 1:** fair observation, i'm asexual so it wouldn't phase me much LOL. using the restroom would be an issue tho
>
> maybe smooth except for a cloaca hole?
>
> **Commenter 2:** "Fair enough" (1 upvote)

Figure 43. r/NonBinary, 2023

Other commenters introduce the language of having no body at all: "noncorporeal," writes one commenter. Here, ideas of the self as energy, particles and "space goo" are discussed. These comments are not necessarily in response to one another:

> **None. I want to be noncorporeal**. I want to **float**. **I want to be a vibe** rather than something that suffers while watching the mirror It's kinda hard to get there alive, so for now I'm just waiting for a binder (62 upvotes)
>
> I want my particles to express their energetic wave state (3 upvotes)
>
> **No Body!** (tbh I wouldn't mind **being a formless mass of sapient energy**) (3 upvotes)

Figure 44. r/NonBinary, 2023

Some of the comments include detailed descriptions of the body the commenter wants. Many of these comments are focused on secondary sex characteristics and communicate that the commenter has given the question some thought:

> For me as a transfemme by goal is **small breasts, a slightly more feminine androgynous body, with my testicles gone,** I'm **happy to keep my penis but no more erections**. (15 upvotes)

Figure 45. r/NonBinary, 2023

Another interesting feature of this text is that it brings in some commenters who challenge OP and other commenters:

> just wanna throw it out there that some of these responses include skinny/thin, and that like while you can want what you want for yourself, **we as a community need to confront our internalized bias against fat nonbinary people and work to stop seeing thinness as a necessity for androgyny.** (44 upvotes)
>
> **"the other genders body" is a very binary way of thinking lol**. anyway i'm generally fine with my body, it's more that I have problems with how I am perceived by others" (2 upvotes)

Figure 46. r/NonBinary, 2023

Other commenters seem a lot more amenable to the first challenging comment than the second. Often this has to do with timing. As time goes on and the comments section fills up with comments, fewer and fewer people will upvote comments.

Interpretation and Explanation

The gender and sex binary are in the backdrop of this text from the outset: "I don't want the other gender['s] body" (r/NonBinary, 2023). As we saw above, one commenter challenged what they called "non-binary thinking." Even though the binary is present, the mere existence of this post brings a challenge to it by implying that the people in this CofP must have an idea as to what kind of body they want due to their identity and that the kind of body they want surely does not conform to what one of the commenters calls their "default gender." Many commenters play along and give detailed descriptions of swappable body parts, being simply energy, and some bring in the more realistic possibility of nullification surgery.

OP's voice is heard throughout the text in short and simple messages of agreement: "This" (which means "This is it! I agree,"), "Yessss," "I agree," "I second this." Beyond that, OP's voice is absent.

The most interesting references to the world outside of the CofP can be seen in a few different ways. Some of the commenters express their desire for their bodies to cause confusion in others. This reveals how important perception is—some commenters seem to reflect more on what kind of body others would react to, rather than the kind of body they

want. Being recognised as non-binary reveals itself as a significant underlying idea within this text and others in this thesis.

I want one where they look at me and go "Hey man" Then they look at me longer then they're like "Oh I mean gal..?" Then they look at me again and have no clue (20 upvotes)

Figure 47. r/NonBinary, 2023

There are some comments that introduce reminders of the material reality of the body and explain why the commenters' wishes of swappable body parts are difficult to achieve, see the first comment by Commenter 3:

Commenter 1: It'd be so cool if non-binary folk could actually do that, **imagine if there was an app that allowed you to find a person to swap bodies with** (21 upvotes)

Commenter 1 replies to their own comment: Or even cis or trans folks where you can get transfer unwanted body parts. Like, someone has too large breasts or doesn't want breasts and someone does want breasts, just direct deposit the boobs. Another person doesn't want to have a uterus, but another person does - bam, transferred. Have unwanted chest hair as a trans woman, let's transfer that to a trans man who wants chest hair! sigh why haven't we made this a thing? (6 upvotes)

Commenter 2: It could be called gBay like eBay except for gender (6 upvotes)

Commenter 1: Yes! Although **I'd like it to be like a simple swap shop** cos fuck having to pay more than we already do with our sanity haha (3 upvotes)

Commenter 3: Mostly? Rejection of tissues and graft vs host etc. Unfortunately :((2 upvotes)

Commenter 1: Well, **if we could just not have that [science-y] stuff be a concern**, that would be great. (2 upvotes)

Commenter 3: I'll tell science to butt out! (2 upvotes)

Figure 48. r/NonBinary, 2023

These exchanges bring in other texts, as it were. This text is in the realm of imagination in some ways, since the people in the subreddit are asked what they want, not necessarily what is possible. There are also a few commenters who express acceptance of their bodies, even though this acceptance is often qualified.

i feel ok like i am. It is what it is. it's something that's so hard to change **i would rather focus on what can change - fashion, hair, voice.** (14 upvotes)

Personally, **I'm fine with my body as is**. **However**, **i would love it if I could remove the biological sex toy between my legs** every now and then thanks you. (4 upvotes)

Figure 49. r/NonBinary, 2023

The most salient elements that this text is connected to are the gender and sex binary and the materiality of the body. While commenters linguistically construct their ideas of their desired bodies, some of their comments—e.g. their preoccupation with how others perceive

them—reveal their awareness that their desires are difficult to accomplish. Nullification surgery is presented as a viable option for body modification for those who do not want either male or female genitals and would prefer to have nothing in that area.

Meanwhile, the gender and sex binary reasserts itself in the linguistic choices of many commenters, starting with OP. There are references to other specific body parts and bodily processes, these are often female body parts (breasts, uterus) and female bodily processes (periods). There are also discussions of surgeries to remove the body parts involved in these processes. The implication is that the removal of these body parts and the inability of the body to perform these processes would render a body genderless.

4.2.3 "Does Anyone Else See Getting Tattoos (Body Mods in General) as Part of Their Gender Expression?"

This post has 254 upvotes and 88 comments. The post itself is quite short and it includes the title (above). Here is the post as it was written by OP:

> **does anyone else see getting tattoos (body mods in general) as part of their gender expression?**
> Just a thing I've been thinking about a little recently. I have 7 tattoos now and getting them helps me feel better in my body/gender (or lack thereof)

Figure 50. r/NonBinary, 2023

The post poses a direct question in the title and offers a simple explanation as to why OP thinks that body modification is a part of gender expression. The explanation is vague: "getting [tattoos] helps me feel better in my body/gender (or lack thereof)." OP seems to equate the body and gender. This sentence also serves to affirm OP's lack of gender and indicate to other members of the community that OP is one of them.

Description of the Comments Section

OP's conflation of "body" and "gender" continues throughout the comments section. Within this conversation about body modification, the body is referred to in different, but related, ways (emphasis added):

> 100% I'm so excited to **customize my flesh vessel** (16 upvotes)
>
> Somewhat! I think, for me, my tattoos are a reminder that **my body is not a rental space** and that I'm allowed to make changes, "**renovate**", and "**decorate**" as I see fit (genderqueer, 24, they/them) (16 upvotes)
>
> Absolutely my tattoos are a part of my gender expression. It's a way of **owning the skin suit I'm stuck with** and I love them. (2 upvotes)
>
> yesssss my abundant floral tattoos are the only reason I can leave the house comfortably in this **ill fitting flesh prison** lol (1 upvote)

Figure 51. r/NonBinary, 2023

The language used to refer to the body reveals an underlying idea that the body and the self are two separate entities. This idea of mind-body dualism, whose lineage can be traced to ancient philosophers, is most closely associated philosopher René Descartes and it finds expression in popular culture in many forms. It is not unusual to find mind-body dualism in gender subreddits, but it is important to highlight that it is in the background of many conversations and to some extent, it is an assumption that many of the participants in this CofP hold, because of the way they talk about the body. Another way this idea finds expression is in the metaphor of the body as a building. Two of the commenters above use language that exemplifies this: "prison," "not a rental space." Other commenters rely on the concept of home:

> Absolutely. Every time I add a new tattoo, **I feel more and more at home in my skin and with my identity**. It makes my bank account sad, and it's taken a while for my parents to really get on board with it, but each time I can feel myself "settling" a little more. (4 upvotes)
> Absolutely, since I started getting piercings, I've used them as another way to express my gender. **Altering your body to make you feel at home is the best!** (3 upvotes)
>
> 100% they are apart of my gender expression. All of my piercings (especially my face ones!) and **my tattoos make me feel more at home in my body** and without them I wouldn't feel like myself. Plus they add an androgynous element to my look that I personally love (3 upvotes)

Figure 52. r/NonBinary, 2023

One of the features that comes through the most in this text, but is also present in the other texts in this thesis, is that OP and the commenters are engaged in a type of interactive game. OP's post is a call and the comments are responses that play the game, albeit in different ways. Together, OP and the commenters produce the text. The reason that this conversational game comes through so clearly in this text is OP's post. The title is a direct

and closed question, which invites a yes/no response. Most of the comments in this comments section are fairly short and many start with an affirmative or negative expression; affirmations are more common than negatives.

> Yes! My piercings (Top comment: 76 upvotes)
>
> yes and my bank account hates me for it (Second: 57 upvotes)

Figure 53. r/NonBinary, 2023

Most of the comments section is decidedly positive about OP's proposition that body modification can be a part of gender expression, but some commenters are not convinced:

> I would say it's about **expression**. If gender is what you need to express, then yes, but it isn't bound to gender innately. (…) I do have a **trans symbol tattoo**, and that is heavily **steeped in gender expression**, but my next one will say nothing about gender. (28 upvotes)
>
> Not really, no. Just a **fun decoration** :) (6 upvotes)
>
> Personally no (I'm not the best with needles), but if I was to then I'd consider it being **nb-themed** in some way. (5 upvotes)
>
> I don't think that's part of gender expression, **just self-expression** which is equally valid and important, but I think not quite the same thing. We are more than our gender (or lack there of) (3 upvotes)
>
> So it's not a part of gender expression, just more of an **identity expression**. (partial comment – 1 upvote)

Figure 54. r/NonBinary, 2023

In any case, the replies are similar in structure in response to the question posed by OP. OP has introduced the idea that body modification can be a part of non-binary identity and this idea is supported by many but not by everyone. One interesting comment does link the two and goes beyond that to link the procedures that people undergo in medical transition to body modification, to this commenter, gender identity and body modification go hand in hand because medical transition and body modification are one and the same:

> Yes! And, conversely, **I see my medical transition as a body mod**. There isn't really a clear line separating the two for me personally. (2 upvotes)

Figure 55. r/NonBinary, 2023

The language of affirmation is also present throughout the comments. In the context of gender identity, affirmation implies that something affirms one's gender identity.

my tattoos and piercings feel so **affirming**! (10 upvotes)

Definitely. Very gender **affirming**! (3 upvotes)

Yep! **Getting tattoos** has been such a **gender affirming experience** for me. Especially because T is probably going to make me bald at some point 😄 (3 upvotes)

Figure 56. r/NonBinary, 2023

Interpretation and Explanation

Some of the assumptions and underlying ideas in this text have been explored; body-mind dualism underlies much of the discussion among the commenters. This idea goes unchallenged in the comments section, which is exemplified by many of the commenters' use of language when referring to the body. In this way, the text reflects an assumption that echoes outside of it—the people in this community did not come up with this idea, mind-body dualism and its language is found in many popular expressions, which the people in this CofP repeat. The expression "feeling at home in one's body" implies that a being (the self) is inside a body. For the people in this CofP, this idea goes somewhat beyond popular expressions since they are having a conversation about body modification to bring about this feeling of *being at home in one's body.* For some, however, body modification is not about gender expression, but rather "identity expression." The line between the two is undefined and the commenters do not offer much detailed explanation of what they mean.

This text is influenced by the discourses on body modifications outside of the community as well as the commenters' own reservations. Some of them report being afraid of needles, which is a reason they will not get tattoos or other body modifications involving needles. Other commenters reference people in their lives not being happy with them getting body modifications and others mention being too young.

There is very little room for more discussion and this is, partly, due to the tone set by OP, whose voice is only explicit in a few short replies to the commenters. Overall, however, the style and tone of the original post set the parameters for the conversation. This is not a text concerned with the meaning of things, but with a simple question which was posed in the title. Many of the commenters agree and some do not, but there is no discussion about what gender expression means or where the boundary between gender expression and identity expression lies. There are some hints in the comments, some of which are above: "I do have a trans symbol tattoo, and that is heavily steeped in gender expression"; "[I] think

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tattoos and piercings are both gender affirming and nonbinary looking! just depends on the combo of tattoos/[piercings] and what they are!" (r/NonBinary, 2023). The first commenter gives us an idea of what can be a tattoo related to gender expression, whereas the second commenter explains that tattoos and piercings are gender affirming but it depends on what they are. The commenter does not delve into the specifics. This could be because it is another assumption that other people in the subreddit know what counts as a tattoo for gender expression and one for identity expression. However, the disagreement in the comments section points to a lack of specificity. This particular conversation is not settled within the community and that is most likely a desired space for the people who participate, since there is a tendency within the community to validate and affirm different positions on some subjects—we must remember that all of these texts are produced within the confines of the community rules, which allows for debate and disagreement on some levels but not others.

4.2.4 "How Would You Describe Your Relationship with Your Body as a Non-Binary Person?"

The post that opens this text has 22 upvotes and 42 comments. Its language is mostly that of invitation and curiosity:

How would you describe your relationship with your body as a non-binary person?

Curious to see others thoughts surrounding body image.

My feelings around my physical body have been all over the place lately and I'd love to hear everyone's unique perspective

Depends how I woke up feeling that day. If I'm feeling a lil more masc I hate having boobs. If I'm feeling more femme I'm hating how masc I look. It's a bit of a vicious cycle sometimes.

Figure 57. How would you describe your relationship with your body as a non-binary person? r/NonBinary, 2023

OP poses an open question, uses "curious" and invites other people's perspectives into this conversation. OP also shares their feelings about the question and introduces the idea of gender related to how one feels on different days, implying at least some fluidity. Yet this fluidity is also tied to negative feelings, notice the final sentence of the post. OP's voice is not really present in the comments section, if OP is participating, it might be as a reader or up/down voter, but there are no replies from OP in the comments.

Description of the Comments Section

The top comment introduces one of the most salient topics in the comments section: medical interventions in the form of hormones and surgery.

95% of the time I'm happy with how I look but I am looking into microdosing T and getting breast reduction surgery. (Top Comment: 21 upvotes)

A significant number of comments reference the language of medicalisation in relation to gender identity and the body. Here are a few excerpts from different comments:

I want what I have and what I don't have. **I want to transition medically and I don't**. (5 upvotes) But yeah, **hormones are no ETA for me, so I kind of dropped it but would definitely get some E if I could**, to look more like what I wanna look on certain days when that feeling emerges. (3 upvotes) **I'm on E** and I love or hate my body depending on the day or hour of the day. **I'm thinking of getting FFS and SRS** but I'm afraid of the cycle getting worse or just being the same but different. (3 upvotes) **I know for sure that once I'm able, I'm gonna get top surgery**, but anything past that is up in the air! (1 upvote) My dream body is very androgynous but since that won't prolly ever happen I'm tryna live with what I have. **I'm definitely gonna get top surgery some day tho**. (1 upvote)

Another linguistic feature we have already seen in other texts throughout this thesis is the language of swapping and switching body parts:

If there was a way to **switch back and forth** between a male body and a female body, depending on the circumstance, I am pretty sure that would be my version of paradise. (4 upvotes) Wishing that I could have **removable body parts to swap in and out**, and that I could just fully customize myself depending on how I feel that day (partial comment: 1 upvote)

Similarly, the word "vessel" is present throughout many comments in this text, mixed in with the language of acceptance:

I started going to my local nude beach and have learned to accept my body 🚮 **it's just a vessel** (3 upvotes)

My body is the vessel of my brain and psyche and heart and soul. This body hikes and runs and fucks and comforts and moves and teaches. This body recently completed a PhD and helped run an 5-day event for over 100 people. This body is also about to produce and nourish a second child. If other people assume I'm a WoMaN because of what this vessel looks like, that's their problem. (18 upvotes)

I feel really disconnected from my body. It's been going on even before I came out as NB, because of my reoccurring depersonalization **at some point I accepted my physical body as just a simple vessel where my mind is kind of trapped for good and that's it**, I take it (it's not like i can change much about it) although my boobs and fcked up ovaries give me huge gender dysphoria, I'd happily get rid of em when im rich (1 upvote)

Figure 61. r/NonBinary, 2023

Some of these comments also exhibit another linguistic feature of this comments section, which is the references to outside discourses about the body and what types of bodies are acceptable depending on someone's gender. The relevant portions of the comments have been selected for brevity:

Very complicated, **I feel like most of my discomfort comes from how others view my body**…(8 upvotes)

The stigma and the deeply gendered associations are so fucked…(3 upvotes)

[I]t's frustrating that people often make assumptions of me based on my body. I'm not able to view it as just a vessel. I do feel like my body and brain are highly interconnected. So I'm not able to ignore it… (2 upvotes)

Figure 62. r/NonBinary, 2023

These commenters bring in other perspectives explicitly and they clearly stand in opposition to those perspectives as they seek to assert themselves as not belonging to either the male or female category. Other commenters bring in elements of the discourse of gendered expectations, but with specific reference to the expectations placed on women:

overall pretty negative. always had body dysmorphia, was never able to tell (and still can't) if any of that is dysphoria. I'm afab and it's like...**I don't hate my body for being a female one, it's just** *not a good enough* **female one.** (1 upvote)

My body image was way worse when I wasn't out yet. **I wanted to fit in so bad and have a VERY STEREOTYPICALLY "attractive female body"**, but luckily those feelings have disappeared since coming out. (1 upvote)

Figure 63. r/NonBinary, 2023

It is clear that the expectations of the world outside of the community have an impact on the people's self-perception and some are able to disregard those expectations via their gender identity: "those feelings have disappeared since coming out." Two agender commenters explain how they deal with outside perspectives:

I love [my body], and because I'm agender I don't have to worry about whether it is gender[ed] enough. (…) I guess **I was pretty confident in my body already but being non binary helped me accept the last few things that I was self conscious about.** (2 upvotes)

I'm agender. Gender and sex are two different things. I have transitioned to make my body match my brains. I should be mostly male. I use words "male" and "masculine" since that's how others see things. In my eye it's just my body and it's mostly androgynous. **But for me what matters is to know who I am and what kind of body I should have.** Labels are also for communicating with others. (partial comment: 1 upvote)

Figure 64. r/NonBinary, 2023

Interpretation and Explanation

The references to other texts and discourses have been presented. The most salient references are to outside discourses of the body. The commenters' perspectives are in constant dialogue with gendered expectations of what male and female bodies look and *should* look like and they see their gender identity and gender expression as defying those norms. However, there is no coherent vision of what a non-binary body looks like.

One of the most prevalent assumptions in this text is that satisfaction with one's body is achieved by undergoing procedures such as taking exogenous hormones (testosterone and oestrogen) or by having surgery: top surgery (aka a double mastectomy), facial feminisation surgery, sex reassignment surgery, and breast reduction surgery are all mentioned in the comments section. This assumption is by no means universal but if it is challenged, it is done so implicitly. Commenters may present reasons for not undergoing medical procedures: "I fear making an irreversible change should I happen to regret it later" (1 upvote). However, there is no explicit challenge to the assumption.

4.2.5 "Non-Binary Bodies Can Look Like Anything. How do We Communicate this to the Outside World?"

This post has 167 upvotes and 40 comments and its flair is "discussion." Here I have to acknowledge my own voice. I went into this text with expectations that were unmet. I expected a discussion where people would answer the question posed by the title as in the other texts I have analysed up to this point. However, this does not happen, rendering the discussion unusual. The voice of OP is prominent throughout the text. Apart from the original post, OP has made a significant edit to the post and 18 of the comments in the comments section were authored by OP. This is partly why the analysis will be different from what has been presented before. However, it is pertinent to mention that many of the themes and ideas that have come up in other texts also resurface here, albeit in slightly different ways. It is also worth noting that all the comments quoted below are quoted only partially, since many of the comments are too long to quote in full.

Description of the Text

The title of the post asks a fairly simple open question but the body of the post is long and OP introduces many different ideas and concepts, most of them are related to OP's personal experiences as a non-binary person with a body that reads like a woman's body to the outside world. Below is the post in full, the text below the star emojis is the original post. All the text above the emojis is the edit that OP made to the text after reading some comments that misunderstood the meaning of the original post.

---

non-binary bodies can look like anything. how do we communicate this to the outside world?

IMPORTANT EDIT!!: so… i do obvs want this message to reach cis people. but i also want it to be more commonplace, acceptable, & embraced knowledge among non-binary & trans people, as well!!
this desire has definitely been shaped by my experience as a non-binary person who's been sexually-harassed, SA'd, hate crimed, & developed atypical anorexia bc of **my body** & my identity, & **how it reads/doesn't read to the outside world.** & i know those, unfortunately, aren't unique experiences.
obvs we can't control the things like hate crimes, but **i do also truly believe we owe it to ourselves** - as a community at such a high risk for suicide, SH, substance abuse, eating disorders, etc - **to make this community a safer & more inclusive & expansive place when it comes to the diversity of presentations**, **transitions & lack of transitions**, & body types at any stage of life & any stage of transition/lack of transition. **so, when i say i wanna find ways for us to communicate that a non-binary body can look like anything, i do mean that in our own community, too.**
lmk if this is confusing!! i'm a really bad writer, but i do really thank y'all for reading & responding, ily!!!

Figure 65. Non-Binary Bodies Can Look Like Anything. How do We Communicate this to the Outside World? r/NonBinary, 2023

The vocabulary in many of the comments in this text is explicit, there are discussions of sexual assault and detailed descriptions of such events. As can be observed in the original post and OP's edit, the style is casual and plenty standard grammar and spelling conventions are not observed. It is particularly interesting that OP uses "SA" (sexual assault) and "hate crime" as verbs: "SA'd"; "even violently hate crimed over this" (r/NonBinary, 2023). OP's style is expressive, with plenty of exclamation marks and emojis in both this post and their comments.

This post is lengthy and so are the comments. In some ways they mirror each other; OP has shared a lot of information and so do the commenters. OP then goes into the comments and replies to almost all comments, mostly reiterating the points made in the original post.

This post very explicitly engages with discourses of the body that are outside of this CofP. However, it does so through the experience of OP and some of the people in the comments.

Interpretation and Explanation

This text undermines the idea that non-binary people need to medicalise in order to validate their identity. OP explicitly makes this point in several comments:

that's true, i definitely worded that incorrectly, **especially as someone that's been told by other trans & non-binary people to alter my body or face the consequences**. when i point out that there shouldn't be consequences for just having a body, **i get immediately shut down & accused of being lazy & unable to accept that my body will always read as female to other people unless i make drastic changes**, some of which i may not even want. (10 upvotes)

so, i've tried posting about my own experience (…) & **it pisses people off that my body doesn't work by their rules & that i don't have the transition goals that they have.** then the conversation can't go anywhere, bc all people see is an idiot with the wrong body that'll either come around to full binary transition or die (that's an actual thing that people have messaged me: **that either i'll realize i'm FTM & act accordingly (whatever that means)**, or I'll kms. kinda dark!) (2 upvotes)

Figure 66. r/NonBinary, 2023

The top comment challenges one of the original post's assumptions by referencing disagreement within the CofP:

> *"we know non-binary bodies can be any weight, any figure, anything."*
> **"We" don't actually know, and it's a common theme on this sub:**
> > **"Do I look nonbinary enough?" / "Do I pass as nonbinary?"**
> > "Can I look masculine and be nonbinary?"
> > "Can I look feminine and be nonbinary?"
> *"so how do we functionally communicate the diversity of non-binary bodies to the rest of the world?"*
> **Be yourself and be visible** (if you feel safe and comfortable doing so). (Top Comment: 66 upvotes)

Figure 67. r/NonBinary, 2023

This topic is also picked up throughout the comments section. What emerges is that there is a tension between those who see medicalisation and body modification as an inherent part of expressing gender identity and those who do not. It is interesting that the top commenter advises OP to "be visible" when that is exactly what OP find so difficult.

Other commenters give their perspectives, bringing forward ideas of body acceptance, of not caring what other people think, of not seeking validation, and of non-binary bodies in fact looking like anything. What is more difficult to address is the question posed by OP, especially because the edit to the original post changed the parameters of the conversation. Initially, some commenters assumed that OP worried about not being accepted by those who are not within the trans and non-binary community:

> We dont. This isnt something people like that need convinced of. (…)
>
> **We dont need (and in fact cant) to put together to perfect argument to let them know that you can be nonbinary no matter what you look like.**
>
> They either gotta start respecting people regardless of their gender etc... or they will continue being bigoted. Unfortunately **theres no argument or performance we can do to make them change their mind.** (7 upvotes)

Figure 68. r/NonBinary, 2023

To this comment, OP responds that they did not mean only "transphobic bigots" but people within the community who cannot accept that OP does not want to undergo bodily changes. The comment below is from OP in reply to a different comment where they reiterate their position on altering the body in order to garner acceptance as non-binary:

> **People see not transitioning or not being able to achieve androgyny as breaking the rules**, & they see the dysphoria & misgendering that may come from that as facing the consequences. For example, I had one person DM me to say that I need to acknowledge that weight-lifting & body-building is probably the only way for me to achieve a masculine or androgynous appearance, & that I need to "accept the consequences" & "take accountability" for not doing those things when I get misgendered or feel dysphoric, even though I don't particularly wanna be all that muscular anyway. (3 upvotes)

Figure 69. r/NonBinary, 2023

The commenters do not seem to have straightforward answers for OP. The question is difficult. OP wants to be able to communicate their gender identity to the world but without signalling that gender identity through what is usually considered means of gender expression: bodily adornments and, in some cases, permanent body modifications. Here is an example of OP's explanation of their predicament:

> **there's no way that i'm making a difference or showing an example of what a non-binary person can look like bc i 100% read as a cishet woman**. people read it as communicating the diversity of women's bodies, which is also important, but my body makes it so i can't physically or even conversationally express what i really am, bc nobody will ever believe me & that's just really frustrating. (2 upvotes)

Figure 70. r/NonBinary, 2023

OP's motivation for wanting to communicate that non-binary bodies can look like anything is ostensibly that they want to change the world a little bit for future generations of non-binary people. When detailing a harm they experienced, OP writes:

> i am also by no means the only person who's had that experience, **but i'd like to create a world where i'm one of the last, in the grand scheme of things.** (2 upvotes)

Figure 71. r/NonBinary, 2023

In the original post, OP explains that the adverse experiences they have had are due to their body and identity and that this is linked to *being read* as a woman. OP and some of the commenters employ terms that are explicitly linguistic to explain what they mean; the body shows up as a text or as something that communicates something without the need for action. OP mentions their body "speaking over" them and signalling things that OP does not want. OP also introduces another reason why it is so important to be able to communicate one's gender identity to the world. It appears that OP sees this as a necessary tool in order to avoid inappropriate comments about one's body:

> i just think this could all be avoided if i/we, as a community, could find a way to beat it to the punch**. if we find a way to tell everyone non-binary people can have any body, then hopefully people will have fewer invasive comments about our bodies.**
> **the problems that i've faced in this body are a direct result of me not being able to communicate that i'm not a woman**, people saying & doing things that make me dysphoric (& also that women shouldn't have to go through anyway, most of the time), me trying to explain what the issue is, & my explanation not mattering bc it's a woman's body so there's no way a non-woman is stuck inside it, bc a non-woman couldn't possibly have a body that feminine. (2 upvotes)

Figure 72. r/NonBinary, 2023

It is difficult to read OP's comments and not wonder whether one of the assumptions being made here is that OP's experience of sexual assault, harassment and eating disorders are exclusively female experiences and if OP could communicate that they are not a woman, then OP would not have had these experiences. It is possible that OP is reacting to the cultural framing of sexual assault, harassment and eating disorders (anorexia in particular) as "women's issues."

The other commenters' voices are heard in a diminished capacity because OP's voice is so strong. Some commenters' views on what some call "infighting" in non-binary communities are interesting since they upend the structures and assumptions prevalent in other texts in this CofP:

> As a freshly-hatched baby enby **I am already sick of all the infighting that occurs in these communities**. I think that at least some of it comes from a need for self-validation and attacking others as a result, and as someone currently dealing with imposter syndrome I suppose I get that, but that still doesn't make it ok. (3 upvotes)
>
> Society will never love people like us. So take time to care for yourself. **And your female sex doesn't inhibit your gender. There is no REQUISITE to make your SEX and GENDER congruous.** In many

ways I ENJOY that my sex and gender are incongrous. It is a powerful thing to channel this much masculine energy in this much of a socially constructed "feminine" body. (3 upvotes)

Do what makes YOU feel good, not what makes you FIT IN to the culture of nonbinary (and YES there IS a culture because ALL SOCIETIES AND SOCIAL GROUPS HAVE CULTURE). Sometimes queer culture eats its own members in an effort to maintain group cohesion. But like we always say. You don't owe anyone androgyny. (3 upvotes)

Figure 73. r/NonBinary, 2023

In the second comment, the commenter challenges the idea of wanting to resolve the incongruity between one's biological sex and one's gender identity as the default for non-binary people—this idea, which underpins the language of customisation of the body, posits that the outside (the body) needs to match an inner sense of gender. The third commenter explicitly references non-binary culture, they have placed themselves outside of the CofP to look at it critically and examine the ways in which the culture that non-binary people have created can be experienced as restrictive. The discourse in this text is challenging first and foremost the assumptions of non-binary culture, even more so than it does the feminine/masculine binary.

4.2.6 "What Does Body Dysmorphia Feel Like to You?"

This post has 20 upvotes and 21 comments and its flair is "discussion" and "nsfw" (not safe for work). This second label is applied to sensitive content. The reasons for applying this label are part of the production of this text and are explained by OP in the first few lines of the post:

TW What does body dysmorphia feel like to you?
**Trigger warning- because i want ppl to have the choice in potentially feeling uncomfortable with body sensations that could arise from talking about experiences with body dysmorphia.

I was fortunate enough to grow up with parents who didnt force feed me gender ways (clothes, toys, behaviours...). However, of [course] I still live in a very binary society and world. I never really thought too much about how I feel in my body and what the represents for me. But i do have more and more friends who have come out or are pretty gender flexible.

This past summer i had a big of a breakdown, realizing that i see myself more as a man (born afab) . Im not trans but ive been more and more out as NB (any pronouns). For me, ive always felt odd about others treatment and reaction to my outward presentation**.** Ive always felt quite uncomfortable if my chest was too visible, or if some of my skin was showing, ive always felt extremely vulnerable in dresses and avoid wearing fem clothes (even though i love the look and would want to try it out but always feel very nauseous, its just not me).

For me, body dysmorphia makes me want to hide. I feel nauseous and like theres slime on my skin with a slight electric current. I start to cry in certain instances. But i never realized this is what was happening before I reacted this way [in front] of someone who is NB too.

I guess im posting this to start a discussion in a safe space and to see if anyone could relate.

Thank you for taking the time to read 😄 🎬 ★

Figure 74. *TW* What does Body Dysmorphia Feel like to You? r/NonBinary, 2023

OP uses the title of the post to ask an open question that invites discussion. The NSFW label is applied to the post because of OP's concern that the description of body dysmorphia in the post might trigger uncomfortable bodily sensations for readers. OP's post has a narrative arc, beginning with their upbringing and taking the reader until the present moment to a description of body dysmorphia and the realisation that the uncomfortable bodily sensations they experienced were related to dysmorphia as a result of displaying visible signs (crying) in front of another non-binary person.

OP's style is friendly and upbeat, despite the subject matter. OP also shows up in the comments section with supportive replies to commenters who share their experiences of body dysmorphia. One of the most important sentences in OP's post is "to see if anyone could relate" as this is an invitation for commenters to see themselves in OP's narrative and explain how their experiences might be similar to or differ from OP's.

Description of the Comments Section

In the comments section, we are quickly introduced to the idea that dysmorphia and dysphoria "go hand in hand" by the top commenter:

Body dysmorphia and gender dysphoria go hand in hand for me most of the time. I definitely identify with a lot of what you're saying - I'm AFAB and grew up wearing whatever clothes (tended to be from the "boys" section). I really want top surgery and I also hate my narrow waist with wide hips… and as I've gained more weight, I feel so sick thinking how my hips feel even wider in contrast to my waist, and how my chest tissue has gotten even bigger. I often stand in front of the mirror and make the motion of scissors across my chest imagining it was cut to be flat. **Binding, trans tape, and big sweatshirts are my jam**. **Square boxy loose clothes that hide my shape.**

I totally agree with the slimy weird feeling, **like my skin isn't my own skin anymore and my body isn't my own body.** It's sad because I think my body is beautiful but it just doesn't feel like mine. I seriously wish I could get together with a wonderful AMAB human who wants boobs and an hourglass shape and we could swap body parts to help each other out. What a lovely world that would be.

Thanks for sharing your story and opening the discussion 😊 (5 upvotes)

Figure 75. r/NonBinary, 2023

The top commenter echoes some of OP's language: hiding in clothes, the slimy feeling on one's skin. The rest of the commenters will, however, echo the top commenter's pairing of dysmorphia and dysphoria, sometimes to the point where the terms appear to be used interchangeably:

> Hi! Thanks for sharing! I want to start with saying I identify **external and internal dymorphia [dysmorphia] differently.**
>
> **Internal [Dysmorphia]** - I'm gender fluid and have the Innie hardware factory installed. Most of the time, I am very content with this. But sometimes I feel a serious lack.
>
> I have read many descriptions of folks who have had an amputation and the feeling of the limb still being there but not there. I feel like that sometimes. I am missing something I never had.
>
> **Sometimes, I get bad days where the feel and shape of my body are so wrong. I want to escape my body. I feel like it's all the wrong size and shape and feel, and I want to crawl out of my own skin. I feel like I am itchy under the skin.**
>
> **External Dysphoria is a lot of misgendering, or people staring at my chest.** I want to **hide.** I often wear a hoodie, bind, wear my mask, and do anything to be not seen. **I even have a Dysphoria hoodie.** It helps me pretend I'm invisible when I wear it. (4 upvotes)

Figure 76. r/NonBinary, 2023

This commenter introduces the idea of internal and external dysmorphia and thus references outside cultural practices and expectations. Notice the last paragraph, however, where they no longer write about external dysmorphia, but dysphoria, thus conflating the two concepts. Elsewhere, these concepts remain as separate experiences even though they are mentioned in in the same comment:

> **Dysmorphia**?.. every time I look in the mirror I can never make out what I look like. Every time I look at a photo, depending on the moment I look at it I look different. In the same day I can look at the same photo and have some reactions be how pretty I am, and other reactions be how ugly I am and some neural. Occasionally I will look in the mirror and be startled because I don't expect to see that face even though technically is mine. It sucks.
>
> **Dysphoria** for me is my repulsion with myself for having an AMAB body and face. (1 upvote)

Figure 77. r/NonBinary, 2023

Some commenters address the question and introduce other terms, such as disgust, shame, an inability to concentrate and some echo OP in referencing hiding:

> I guess I feel body dysmorphia **when people try to make me dress traditionally female.** Which is why I am trying to answer you. This is what it feels like for me. (2 upvotes – partial comment)

> My body [dysmorphia] feels like **disgust, shame, self hate** for what I see in the mirror because I know that's not really what I should look like. I cry and can't even stand to have people touch me (2 upvotes – partial comment)
>
> It just. **Makes me unable to concentrate** on anything else when it gets bad. It ruins experiences bc i cant focus on anything but The Problem- whatever it may be. (2 upvotes – partial comment)
>
> Your description is much more in depth than mine, (**a panic attack that makes me want to hide** in a little box.) (1 upvote)

Figure 78. r/NonBinary, 2023

These experiences are diverse and bring together language from different semantic fields. Some commenters explain what helps their body dysmorphia and, while there are some common features, the solutions are almost as diverse as the experiences. The top commenter referenced clothing and wearable items: "Binding, trans tape, and big sweatshirts are my jam" (r/NonBinary, 2023). Another commenter explains the opposite:

> For me it's largely the opposite. I (enby amab) am tall and broad shouldered, so looser or **baggy clothes tend to make me feel like a circus tent. They tend to trigger my dysmorphia**, I think in part **because I used to wear them to hide**. (…)**So the solution for me tends to be form-fitting and revealing clothes**. Crop tops are my jam. Skirts, leggings, and athletic apparel are good too… (6 upvotes)

Figure 79. r/NonBinary, 2023

Clothing is a unifying feature, but the type of clothing that helps alleviate dysmorphia is different.

Interpretation and Explanation

The chief assumption of this text is a common understanding of both body dysmorphia and (gender) dysphoria. Even though some commenters explain what they mean by these two terms, there is overlap and even confusion. One commenter starts their comment with: "This is my experience with dysphoria" (r/NonBinary, 2023) even though OP did not mention dysphoria in the original post. There is also an assumption that body dysmorphia is connected to being non-binary, an assumption that a commenter challenges:

> I do want to point out the **dysmorphia is something anyone can struggle with, and isn't directly tied to being trans or nonbinary.** (Just saying that because I know lots of people learn about these things online, and try to draw conclusions about themselves from it.) (1 upvote)

Figure 80. r/NonBinary, 2023

This assumption is introduced by OP, they only realised they were experiencing dysmorphia when they displayed certain behaviours in front of a non-binary friend. Most of

the commenters do not challenge this assumption. One commenter introduces anxiety into the conversation, since they found it difficult to identify whether their feelings were due to dysmorphia or something else:

> **It was difficult for me to figure out that the bad ick I was feeling was gender body dysmorphia for a lot of reasons.** (…) Because **I felt intense, shifting anxiety like all the time**, a feeling I furiously suppressed at all costs, **I couldn't even unpack what the anxiety was coming from**, in all the different directions it was coming from, until my mid twenties. (…) In short, I have come to conclude that: boobs should be detachable, no one look at my very feminine hips, muscles good, body hair good (sometimes), short hair good, jewelry great but only if it doesn't make me look more femme. But femme Fridays are tolerable! But only if I'm mostly masc the rest of the week. (1 upvote)

Figure 81. r/NonBinary, 2023

This commenter brings into the discourse the idea of "gender body dysmorphia," which is also left undefined, but they also introduce the possibility that distress can come from different places. Like commenters before, this commenter arrives at solutions based on body presentation. This is another assumption underlying the discourse in this text: alleviating dysmorphia (and dysphoria) can include changing one's body presentation, whether that is through clothing, accessories, or body modifications which may involve medical intervention.

> I am working really hard to accept my body and determine what changes, if any, I want to make. Because my dysphoria is not always present. And **I want to be careful about making a permanent change** when sometimes I'm okay with that part of my body. (2 upvotes)
>
> **I try to identify what, if anything, i can to to change said physical feature to alleviate the dysmorphia**. And then if i actually want to/itd be worth it. **So where [it] overlapped w dysphoria, i was able to change a lot. Lingering dysphoria that could be fixed with surgery... isnt worth the cost and effort at the moment but i know that if it gets really bad how id proceed.** (2 upvotes – partial comment)

Figure 82. r/NonBinary, 2023

The discourse in this text reinforces the idea that body dysmorphia is linked to being non-binary, since only one commenter challenges it. However, what emerges from the discussion is something seemingly contradictory: despite the language of diagnoses, it is not clear what the people in this CofP mean when they write about dysmorphia (or even dysphoria). Many of them *own* these labels (my dysphoria, my body dysmorphia) but it is unclear whether these labels strictly refer to the psychiatric diagnoses they represent. The distress of many of the people in this CofP is real, however, and it is often linked to misunderstanding from the outside world and, in some cases, to other life circumstances or

internal turmoil. By using these labels, the people in this CofP both put themselves discursively into the world of psychiatric diagnoses and pull these terms out of that world and into the discourse of identity and more general human distress.

5. Discussion

The objectives of this thesis include compiling a specialised corpus about the word "body," analysing the data in that corpus using AntConc, and employing the interdisciplinary approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to shed light on whose world view is being presented in the discourse of the body produced by the people in r/NonBinary, what the predominant ideology about the body is in this community, and how that ideology is being presented through language. The overarching objective is to provide an exploration of the ways in which non-binary people use language to describe their relationship to their bodies and their embodied experiences. The body is understood as discursive as well as material (Bucholtz and Hall, 2016) and this thesis explores how non-binary people negotiate that relationship through language—how they create the non-binary body linguistically and how they communicate these ideas to each other.

In this thesis, r/NonBinary is conceptualised as a Community of Practice (CofP), since it meets the criteria to be considered one as was explored in chapter one. There is mutual engagement, a joint negotiated enterprise laid out in the community's rules, and it has a shared repertoire of negotiable resources, some of which are common to other communities on Reddit.

The results confirmed some of the findings of other works referenced in the literature review, since the presence of the gender and sex binary is prominent in the discourse of the people in r/NonBinary. Corwin (2017) explored identity construction in *genderqueer* individuals—this identity category can be understood as existing within the non-binary identity category—and concluded that identity construction both relies on and challenges the binary. Horowit-Hendler (2018 & 2020), whose study participants were mostly non-binary, also highlighted that individuals draw from the gender binary to construct and express their identities, and Barbee and Schrock (2019), whose study focuses on non-binary people, found that individuals have a high degree of knowledge of the binary, which allows them to choose gendered codes of presentation in order to *pass* and be perceived as non-binary. Being perceived as non-binary is also something that emerged in the results of this analysis and it will be discussed in more detail below. Sometimes the binary emerges explicitly, but it is

often implicit in how the people in this CofP communicate. The binary and the basic assumptions of its discourse of the body are a source of frustration for the people in this CofP, but that frustration coexists with linguistic and material decisions to collaborate with the assumptions of the binary and to draw from the binary as the individual constructs a non-binary idea of the body. For example, one commenter asserts: "If I'm feeling more masc I hate having boobs" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 57), here is an implicit reference to the opposition between masculinity and "having boobs," i.e. a reference to female secondary sex characteristics. Another writes, "I know I certainly don't want the other gender['s] body" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 39), which explicitly references that there are two types of bodies. Some people in this CofP also reference material decisions of gender presentation and there are implicit binary assumptions and expectations that they live up to: "I only shave when I want to look nice at an event" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 37); "I haven't shaved in like 2 years (…) I'm still (…) a bit too scared to wear tank tops in public" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 36); "I'll never be able to have a proper beard, no matter how long I'm on T" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 38). Implicit in these statements are feminine (smooth skin; hairless armpits) and masculine (having facial hair) gender presentation expectations. It is evident from these examples that non-binary people are "held accountable to binary misconceptions of transgender during their interactions with others and even within their own dialogues" (Darwin, 2017, p. 14).

Another way in which the binary asserts itself in the discourse of non-binary people is through their preoccupation with being perceived as non-binary and the frustration experienced when this does not happen. Darwin (2017) and Barbee and Schrock (2019) pointed out in their respective studies that being perceived as non-binary is not always achieved. The people in the corpus used for this thesis confirm this: "I feel like I will be perceived as a girl with armpit hair" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 36); "the problems that i've faced in this body are a direct result of me not being able to communicate that i'm not a woman" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 72). Others point to an issue with the way they are perceived by others, but only imply that maybe something is getting lost in what they are trying to communicate through their bodies: "I feel most of my discomfort comes from how others view my body" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 62); "i can't dress the way i want without my body speaking over me" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 65). In these references to the discursive and material world outside of the CofP, the people who participate in this community have to confront a different set of assumptions and continue to assert their

presence and identity despite the misunderstandings and inability to fully convey what they mean through their presentation. Implicit in these examples is also the inability or perhaps unwillingness of the world outside of the community to understand and to enter into the discursive space of the people in this community. Some people in this CofP communicate their desire to challenge the outside world with their presentation: "I want [a body] where they look at me and go "Hey man" Then they look at me longer then they're like "Oh I mean gal..?" Then they look at me again and have no clue" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 47).

My corpus analysis identified a number of specific semantic areas related to the body for this CofP—specifically, the corpus revealed language related to body hair, body dysmorphia, body and gender dysphoria, body modification, medicalisation, body acceptance, masculine/feminine bodies, the concept of "no body," and language related to androgyny. Dysphoria is discussed in Cordoba (2020 and 2022), Ashton (2013) and Horowit-Hendler (2020). Cordoba (2020 and 2022), Ashton (2013) and Boxall (2023) found in their data medical concepts and language with references to the use of medical interventions to alleviate dysphoria and aid the desired gender presentation. Medicalisation is present in these works as related to dysphoria and, like Cordoba (2022, p. 134) and at least one of the participants in Boxall (2023, p. 53), this thesis examines dysphoria as a linguistic tool which may contain different meanings rather than viewing it primarily as a medical diagnosis. Cordoba also found discussions of body modifications and androgyny in the data used for his study. However, these concepts were explored through the lens of gender identity construction in the works I have cited here. Furthermore, Garmpi (2021) and Jones (2023) also focus on gender identity construction. This thesis explores these areas as part of the construction of a discourse of the body that is specifically non-binary, thereby foregrounding what non-binary people have to say about their bodies when they are not part of a study that focuses solely on their identity. Analysing body-related language still sheds some light on how non-binary identity is constructed, but this is done more tacitly. Some of the studies in the literature review referenced the idea that there is no one way to be non-binary (Darwin, 2017; Ashton, 2023; Cordoba 2020 & 2022;) and this idea is echoed in my results as I found a multitude of voices disagreeing with each other over what a non-binary body is and, by extension, on what non-binary itself is: "Depends on how I woke up feeling that day. If I'm feeling a lil more masc I hate having boobs…" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 57), what the non-binary body ought to look like: "it's a common theme on this sub. 'Do I look nonbinary enough?'/'Do I pass as nonbinary?'" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 67); whether it can look like

anything or whether it ought to conform to ideas of androgyny: "You don't owe anyone androgyny" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 73), implicit in these discussions is that non-binary evades definition (Darwin, 2017, p. 15). Just as there is no one way to be non-binary, there is no one non-binary body discourse.

The analysis conducted using CDA revealed other emerging semantic areas such as the conception of the body as modular. The language of customisation, modularity, swapping of body parts and shapeshifting—"Modular and reconfigurable on a whim, personally." (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 42; "I want a body that can shapeshift based on what I feel like that day" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 40); "I'm so excited to customize my flesh vessel" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 51)—is all interrelated and it points to a desire for fluidity and for an escape from the material reality of the body. The body is also linguistically constructed as a place: "this ill-fitting flesh prison" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 51); "my body is not a rental space" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 51). Related to body customisation is body modification, which features prominently in this corpus. One of the texts I analysed linked body modification to gender expression and many within the text agree: "Yep! Getting tattoos has been such a gender affirming experience for me" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 56). Body modification can be take different forms, some people view medical transition as body modification: "I see my medical transition as a body mod" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 55). Others adhere to more traditional understandings of body modification: "my tattoos and piercings feel so [gender] affirming!" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 56). While some people want their bodies to be seen through body modifications that alter their presentation, others express a desire for formlessness, to the question "What body do we want?" some commenters reply: "I want to be noncorporeal"; "No body! (tbh I wouldn't mind being a formless mass of sapient energy)" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 44). CDA analysis also revealed that one of the underlying assumptions that holds power within the discursive practices of this CofP is the idea of mind-body dualism, of being *something* that exists *within* a body: "My body is the vessel of my brain and psyche and heart and soul" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 61).

Dysphoria and body dysmorphia exist within a similar discursive space, in some texts they appear to be used interchangeably: "Internal dymorphia [dysmorphia] (…) External dysphoria…) (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 76). Sometimes they are referenced as going "hand in hand" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 75), while others make distinctions between the two: Dysmorphia?...every time I look in the mirror I can never make out what I look like (…)

Dysphoria for me is my repulsion with myself for having an AMAB body and face." Fig. 77). Alongside dysphoria and dysmorphia exists the language of interventions, whether they are medical or aesthetic in other ways: "I know for sure (…) I'm gonna get top surgery" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 58); "Binding, trans tape and big sweat shirts are my jam" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 75). The language of medical interventions is woven through different texts in this corpus, it is not only found in discussions of dysmorphia and dysphoria, but also in the discussions of body hair and body image: "being on T doesnt help lol. Sadly it took away my head hair and put it everywhere else" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 30); "I'm on E and I love or hate my body depending on the day or hour of the day. I'm thinking of getting FFS and SRS" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 59). These discussions echo some of the language used by one of the participants of Boxall's 2023 thesis. Despite the drawbacks of the language of dysphoria, one of the participants "uses this language to refer to their body and the feelings associated with it, as doing so makes this very personal, almost phantasmal pain socially intelligible and able to be grasped by others" (Boxall, 2023, p. 53).

One of the intriguing features of the discourse is the language around *feeling gender:* "I know that I'd like to have underarm hair and that [will] make me feel gender and such" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 38); "I have 7 tattoos now and getting them helps me feel better in my body/gender" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 50). This is intriguing because we do not get a firm grasp of what this idea of feeling gender means, which leaves the door open for further research and interpretation.

It is important to note that the CDA analysis also found that some of the text producers challenged the assumptions in the text that they were collaboratively producing. These voices are often smaller than others, but they are part of a counter-discourse within the CofP. Some commenters challenged the link between androgyny and thinness: "we as a community need to (…) work to stop seeing thinness as a necessity for androgyny" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 46). Others challenge androgyny as a necessity for being non-binary: "You don't owe anyone androgyny" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 73.). Some challenged the binary thinking displayed by other text producers: "'the other gender['s] body' is a very binary way of thinking" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 46). Others challenge the language of interventions and medicalisation as a pre-requisite for non-binary having a non-binary body: "especially as someone that's been told by other trans & non-binary people to alter my body or face the consequences." (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 66). A further, albeit tacit, challenge to the language of intervention comes from a commenter who writes: "And your female sex

doesn't inhibit your gender. There is no REQUISITE to make your SEX and GENDER congruous." (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 73). This commenter also challenges the idea that non-binary people must resolve the incongruence between sex and gender identity, which is usually done by altering one's appearance via clothing, hairstyles, body modifications such as tattoos and piercings and, in other cases, via hormonal and surgical interventions.

Other counter-discourses come from the materiality of the body itself, which some commenters highlight. In a discussion about why swapping body parts with others at will is not possible, someone replies: "Mostly, rejection of tissues and graft vs host, etc." (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 48). A commenter explains that they want their genitals "smooth like a barbie doll" (r/NonBinary, 2023, Fig. 43) and another commenter replies: "how does one do this without losing sexual pleasure?/serious" (Fig. 43). The materiality of the body emerges here as a barrier to the discursive and material realisation of the non-binary body.

Another significant concept is that of communication itself; the people in this CofP display a keen awareness of how assumptions are made about their identity because of their bodies and they are actively finding different ways of communicating their identities. However, there is no consensus on how this might be done, because language, gender expression and the body have their limitations. Linguistically, the limitations exist in part due to the narratives that underpin identities such as non-binary and transgender, which though different, share some common narratives. Chief among these is medicalisation—in transgender studies the idea of transmedicalism is prominent, it is beyond the scope of this study to examine this idea in detail but it is important to note that it is related to the language of medicalisation and interventions we find in the discourse of the people in the CofP analysed in this study. Within the language of medicalisation, we find transition as a salient concept. Boxall (2023) makes the point that the language and narrative of transition create "expectations about what people will do with their bodies, and when, but also for what reasons" (p. 21). Another salient concept that has already been discussed is the language of dysphoria. There are limitations to (gender) dysphoria as a linguistic tool; it is evident from the NBBC examples cited above that the people in this CofP do not use the term "dysphoria" to refer only to a medical or psychiatric condition. On a more essential level, they use this word, relate it to "body dysmorphia," and combine these two concepts into language they can use to express feelings of embodied distress. This can be considered an attempt at bridging the issue of communicating parts of their experience to others.

6. Conclusions

While much research on non-binary discourse has focused on gender identity construction, which is relevant and necessary since identity construction is an ongoing process, this study has focused on exploring the discourse of the body produced by non-binary people by compiling a specialised corpus from the subreddit r/NonBinary, analysing the corpus using AntConc, using that analysis to select salient texts and subject those texts to Critical Discourse Analysis. The aims were to explore and foreground the world views that shape non-binary people's ideas about their bodies, whose world view is being presented in the discourse, what the predominant ideology about the body is, and how that ideology is being presented through language.

One of the underlying barriers to communicating non-binary experiences lies in the English language's gendered conception of the human experience—from personal pronouns to the use of some common nouns, the English language often betrays the assumption of a gender binary, which is not as much linguistic as it is social, since gendered language in English is most often used to refer to people based on their sex and thereby make assumptions about their gender. This is a field that has not been explored in this study and could provide researchers with interesting avenues for further analysis, for example, by conducting a comparative analysis of English and languages that are less gendered a researcher might explore how and whether the issues of communicating non-binary experiences lie in the language or whether there might be explanations to be found elsewhere.

This thesis is the start of a non-binary discourse of the body and more research could help elucidate and bring depth to the concepts that were briefly explored in this thesis. It is the hope of the author that this thesis places the non-binary discourse of the body alongside other discourses of the body which have been explored in other studies.

Even though there are many ideas and concepts that form part of the non-binary discourse of the body, due to the formal limitations in length and scope of a Master's degree thesis, this study has been able to identify only some key areas, all of which deserve further exploration within applied linguistics and other disciplines. Future studies could include: the compilation, description and analysis of a larger corpus, perhaps including other gender identity groups, such as transgender (both FtM and MtF), genderqueer, agender, and cisgender people; performing in-depth comparative analysis using the corpus in this study;

performing discursive comparative analysis by compiling specialised corpora from other CofPs or gender identity groups, performing an in-depth analysis of the key ideas that emerged in this study across other gender identity groups and other non-binary CofPs.

This study has presented linguistic and, to a lesser extent, social analysis; the latter is necessary since we must understand what the subject matter is in order to establish how it contributes to the discourse of the body and how it is expressed linguistically. This study could be useful to other scholars within linguistics, for example sociolinguistics, and other disciplines seeking to understand non-binary gender identity and its language better. It might also provide education professionals with an understanding of the experiences of this identity group, whose members might be found in the student body at educational institutions. To some extent, the study might also provide useful insights for mental health professionals seeking to understand experiences of body dysmorphia and gender dysphoria on a larger scale, since the discussions presented here occur among many people and exist beyond the scope of the respective diagnoses.

The author acknowledges that there is a degree of interdisciplinarity in this study and it is the hope of the author that this decision will add depth of understanding about non-binary identity as well as foregrounding the voices of the people in the CofP which has been the subject of this study.

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ANNEX 1: Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

AFAB: Assigned female at birth

AGAB: Assigned gender at birth

AMAB: Assigned male at birth

Binder: A chest/breast binder is a piece of clothing used to wrap around the chest area to flatten the breasts and give a flat appearance to the upper body.

Enby: Non-binary, also found something as "nb."

Fem (femme): Feminine, used when speaking about a feminine gender presentation.

FFS (when related to surgery): Facial feminisation surgery.

HRT: Hormone replacement therapy.

Masc: Masculine, used when speaking about a masculine gender presentation.

Non-binary: (also *genderqueer*) This is most often understood as an umbrella term for gender identities that exist outside of the gender binary. "Agender" can also be understood to belong to the non-binary category.

Nullification surgery: A surgical procedure which "includes a complete penectomy, orchiectomy, a reduction of the scrotal sac, and shortening of the urethra. The goal is to leave the area as a smooth unbroken transition from abdomen to the groin" (Davis, 2024).

Passing (within gender identity): the ability of someone to be regarded by others as a member of a particular gender identity group.

SRS: Sex reassignment surgery

Transmedicalism: This is the idea that being transgender necessitates an experience of gender dysphoria within the scope of a medical diagnosis and that identifying as transgender implies undergoing hormonal or surgical interventions in order to resolve said experience of gender dysphoria.