

**JOYFUL BODIES, JOYFUL MINDS: GENDER EUPHORIA AMONG TRANSGENDER  
ADULTS LIVING IN CANADA**

by © Sam Tacit a thesis submitted to the

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## Abstract

Gender euphoria is a relatively recent term to describe positive experiences of transgender identity. There is very limited literature on this term and its implications, despite the impact it can have on positively affecting one's self-esteem and pride. In this thesis I seek to understand how transgender adults living in Canada define and experience gender euphoria. 26 participants responded to an online survey that included a series of questions regarding their experiences with gender euphoria, and their definitions for the term. Their responses suggest that gender euphoria encompasses many emotional, psychological, and interpersonal factors. The participants described gender euphoria as a complex and emotion-driven experience, often brought about by both internal changes to one's self-perception and the external validation of others.

*Keywords:* Gender Dysphoria, Gender Euphoria, Transgender, Gender Identity, Phenomenology

## Summary

Gender euphoria is a term that has gained traction among transgender communities in recent years to describe happiness and joy in one's gender identity (ex. feeling like a man, a woman, both, neither, something else, etc.) and gender expression (ex. the clothing, cosmetics, and body language one uses to express their gender identity). However, there is still less research on gender euphoria compared to negative experiences associated with transgender individuals and our communities. In this thesis I seek to understand how 26 transgender adults living across Canada define and experience gender euphoria, as well as its effects on their self-image and their relationships to their bodies. By using an online survey to gather responses, I have determined that participants define gender euphoria as an overall positive emotional experience, and that it generally positively impacts their self-image and relationships to their bodies.

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### Chapter 1: Introduction to Gender Euphoria

#### 1.1 Gender Euphoria: Beginnings

The lived experiences of transgender individuals are as multi-faceted and as varied as our names, pronouns, gender expressions, and medical and legal transitions, or lack thereof. However, the most prevalent narrative surrounding transgender individuals is one dominated by pain. Our lives are shaped by the physical trauma of gender affirmation surgeries and adjusting to the changes that hormone replacement therapy cause. We are defined by our devastation and confusion, our uncertainty and fear, and the pathologization we face due to many of us experiencing gender dysphoria. The realities of a higher percentage of homelessness, substance abuse, addiction, trauma, and mental health issues compared to the general population are woven into the fabric of transgender social scripts. Despite the vast variation in lived experiences and privileged positions such as being affluent, middle-class, and white, transness is often synonymous, even within our communities, with hardship.

And yet, despite the medical framing of gender dysphoria, which defines transgender as a medical condition to be “cured” (Newhook et al., 2018), this suffering we face is not the be all and end all of transgender lived experiences. A sense of pride in oneself, joy in one’s presentation, and self-love of one’s body are elusive narratives that often exist only with the individuals who experience them. There has been little focus from academics, policy makers, medical practitioners, and even our own communities on the uplifting and hopeful aspects of our inner truths.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO GENDER EUPHORIA

Gender euphoria has been described as “the enjoyment of one’s gender identity, expression, or affiliation” (Squires and Brouwer, 2002, p. 307). It has become an important talking point among transgender and LGBT+ communities (Matsuno and Budge, 2017). A variety of expressions of gender euphoria are arising from these discussions, such as creating art surrounding experiences with this phenomenon for trans and LGBT+ communities (Newman, 2018), and news articles published on the subject (LOTL, 2019). However, until recently, the concept of gender euphoria was under-examined, not only in academic conversations, but also among transgender individuals, where greater discussions of the term as the joyful alternative to focusing on stigmatizing gender dysphoria are now taking place (Newhook et al., 2018; Stryker and Whittle, 2006). And yet, more thorough definitions and critical conversations about how gender euphoria impacts the mental image and self-esteem of transgender individuals are not as readily present within the literature.

While acknowledging that gender euphoria can begin a conversation about transgender wellness, I also argue that a more active engagement with this concept enables a deeper and richer exploration of transgender individuals’ lived experiences, notably how and when this euphoria is understood, and why. Such work will provide a fuller understanding of transgender individuals’ lived experiences and can inform more nuanced definitions of the term, as well as its social and political relevance to transgender communities. This contribution to transgender theory – which is concerned with questioning the binary structures by which sex, gender and sexuality are defined in a Canadian cultural context (Carroll, 2012) – is imperative in broadening understandings of how transgender individuals experience gender euphoria in order to find comfort, love, and joy from our bodies and in our lives.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO GENDER EUPHORIA

My research analyzes the ways that transgender adults in Canada define, experience, and perform gender euphoria. I am interested in answering the following research questions:

How do transgender individuals define gender euphoria and how do they experience it?

How does gender euphoria affect transgender individuals' self-image and their relationships to their bodies?

Transgender embodied experiences, often shaped through pathologized medical understandings, are fraught with difficulties such as dysphoria and depersonalization (Stryker and Whittle, 2006, p. 173). I wanted to determine if (and how) transgender individuals conceptualize gender dysphoria in relation to gender euphoria, and what that might mean to these individuals.

It is my endeavour to bring focus to our unique joys and triumphs as transgender people; that is, rather than focusing on the all-too-common gender *dysphoria*, I am interested in exploring the concept of gender *euphoria* and in understanding how transgender adults in Canada both define and experience it. Gender dysphoria can cause distress, depression, anxiety, mental health issues, and a hatred both of one's body and of how others perceive one's gendered reality (or lack thereof). It is an experience often defined through its medicalization. Gender euphoria, by contrast, occurs when one feels and expresses joy, happiness, contentment, and pride in one's gender identity (Squires and Brouwer, 2002). Like dysphoria, however, gender euphoria is affected by a series of emotions, psychological processes, and interpersonal relationships (Squires and Brouwer, 2002). Because gender dysphoria is often defined through medicalization, transgender narratives tend to be pathologized. By focusing on gender euphoria, I hope to explore facets of transgender lived experiences that exist outside of this paradigm and center other aspects of our lives.

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Due to the political thrust and academic urgency of this thesis, I situate my work within the realm of feminist scholarship and research. This is to account for the robust body of literature that exists regarding transgender lived experiences from a variety of paradigms, including medical, psychological, endocrinal, social, and legal narratives. However, these paradigms do not often account for the lived experience of gender euphoria. As such, I am drawing on feminist scholarship – notably intersectional feminist scholarship, which I discuss in detail below – as well as phenomenology and, of course, transgender studies to inform my theoretical lenses and methodological approaches to gender euphoria. By accounting for the varied ways in which transgender individuals’ lives can be shaped by the systemic forces at play, as well as accounting for the emotional, social, and logistical aspects of communicating one’s lived experiences, I will respect the authority participants have over their own narratives, while analyzing their responses and positing my own conclusions on the matter.

As a self-identified transgender individual, I am aware of the disproportionate rates of suicidality, substance abuse, alcoholism, homelessness, sexual assault, and violence that our communities face, compared to the general population (Haas et al., 2011; Bauer and Scheim, 2014; Goldblum et al., 2012). Being an “insider” to my research as someone who has experienced and struggled to define gender euphoria allows me to approach this topic with sensitivity and thoughtfulness, as well as to create research questions that allow for flexibility and nuance in the participants’ answers. I am adding to a growing corpus of work that centres transgender subjectivities and transgender knowledge and locate gender euphoria as an important and specifically transgender epistemologies and ways of knowing. As a researcher, however, this requires me to think critically about my positionality, and to mitigate my own biases toward this research. Rather than attempting to force a certain outcome, I acknowledge that my questions

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should allow for participants to explore and consider definitions of gender euphoria, their experiences with this term, and how the term relates to any experiences with gender dysphoria they may have experienced. Therefore, as a researcher with “insider” knowledge, I feel it is my obligation to conduct research that brings to light certain gendered experiences that might not otherwise be captured through the employment of feminist theory, transgender studies, and phenomenological theoretical frameworks (Ramazanoğlu and Holland, 2002).

My transgender identity also shapes my research interests more broadly with regards to transgender understandings of resilience, strength, joy, and pride in our identities, despite systemic oppression and violence. As such, I am interested in the narratives transgender individuals and communities construct about our identities, and thus my qualitative focus on a small number of participants to develop rich discussions and data about gender euphoria are central to generating the types of discussions I wish to have with these communities.

An exploration of gender euphoria – of a joyful, uplifting, proud experience related to being transgender – is necessary to enrich academic and communal notions of transgender narratives and lived experiences. Definitions of gender euphoria from transgender individuals who have experienced this phenomenon can articulate, from a perspective of subjective truth, what gender euphoria means, how it can be defined, and how experiencing it affects self-esteem and self-image. By adding to the literature in creating a more nuanced discussion of transgender lived experiences, I hope to encourage among transgender individuals and academics alike a conversation about transgender lived experiences that includes a lens of wellness and positivity.

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### 1.2 A Note on Terminology

Prior to publishing the survey, the ICEHR ethics approval process required me to change my perspective and challenged my conception of gender euphoria and its possible relationship to gender dysphoria. In an earlier draft of my ethics proposal, I had stated that some of my questions would focus on gender dysphoria, and how participants understand gender dysphoria in relation to gender euphoria. However, the committee suggested that, since my research questions – and therefore the main objective of my survey – were not concerned with gender dysphoria, I was making the supposition that there is always a relationship between these phenomena. The committee suggested I either restructure my research questions, or that I remove references to gender dysphoria and discuss the topic only in examining participants' responses, should they mention the term in their responses. This forced me to re-evaluate how I had written in such a way as to imply that I thought gender euphoria and gender dysphoria are somehow linked, or inherent to many, if not all, transgender individuals' lived experiences.

Those questions unintentionally implied that participants had to have experienced gender dysphoria, which may or may not have been the case. I understood the concerns the committee raised and retooled my questions to make no overt mention of gender dysphoria. This was not only to streamline the focus of my thesis, but also because I did not wish to imply that participants had to view gender dysphoria as always being in relation to gender euphoria. Thus, I was more cognizant moving forward of my own biases, how my writing style might imply certain statements I do not necessarily believe or am not interested in exploring in this thesis, and to better define my parameters and data collection methods when it came time to construct my questions and publish my survey.

### 1.3 Defining Gender Dysphoria

When discussing the dominant cultural, social, and medical narratives surrounding transgender populations, gender dysphoria is usually a focal point of discussion. Gender dysphoria has many definitions, but for the purposes of this thesis, I operate from a definition put forward by the American Psychological Association (2015): “a marked incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender”. This incongruence is often a source of anxiety, depression, self-hatred, self-image issues, and feelings of hopelessness and despair. Gender dysphoria is a strong focus of medical research and has also historically been called transvestitism and transsexualism (Krafft-Ebbing, 1894; Benjamin, 1966). Gender dysphoria has been discussed as an auto-erotic abnormality, a response to traumatic childhood abuse, and a sign of ‘perversion’, like how homosexuality was defined (Krafft-Ebbing, 1894; Benjamin, 1966). This terminology has largely gone out of fashion, as is clear from a general shift in language in many medical journals toward the use of the term transgender in more recent research on gender dysphoria (Rosqvist et al., 2013; DSM-5, 2013).

Despite this linguistic shift, many transgender individuals are still subject to psychological and physical examination and are often tasked with ‘proving’ to medical professionals that they experience gender dysphoria to receive medical assistance to alleviate these symptoms. In popular culture media and on social media, sensationalized narratives regarding transgender individuals struggling with gender dysphoria are often a major focus when transgender characters are included (LOTL, 2019). Similarly, transgender individuals struggle to legally change their names in many countries and face legal systems that may not acknowledge their gender identities (James et al., 2016). Thus, it can be argued that transgender experiences are often centered around or focused on gender dysphoria and its impact on our day-to-day lives.

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While gender dysphoria is prominently discussed among transgender communities, as it shapes many individuals' relationships with their gender identities, not all transgender individuals experience gender dysphoria, and some may only experience it from time to time. It is a tangled phenomenon that varies from individual to individual (American Psychological Association, 2015). As such, gender dysphoria may not actually be crucial to certain transgender individuals' narratives and lived experiences. However, even if it is crucial, the psychologically and emotionally taxing experience of navigating gender dysphoria is but one facet of what makes up an individual's lived experiences in totality.

Therefore, I want to bring attention to and focus on how gender euphoria affects transgender individuals. By centering gender euphoria in this thesis, I asked participants to share aspects of their lived experiences with me that focus on positive aspects of transgender experiences. I wanted to center discussions of how being transgender has brought some people joy, self-love, happiness, and pride in who they are, and how gender euphoria is a pleasant emotional and psychological experience. While both gender dysphoria and gender euphoria are complex and factor into the lives of transgender individuals on a case-by-case basis, both are phenomena that deserve attention for their impact on the lived experiences of a population with rich histories, subcultures, and narratives.

Another consideration is the use of academic research and how it factors into my thesis. Western histories of transgender communities have been deeply medicalized and pathologized, and often enforce total disclosure of one's pain as proof of transness (Krafft-Ebbing, 1894; Namaste, 2009; Baril, 2018). As a result, much of the terminology currently used to define and articulate transgender lived experiences has been filtered through this theoretical lens. By discussing gender euphoria in this thesis, I examined an aspect of transgender experience that

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does not appear to be quite as robustly studied and discussed in academic circles. I am determined to reject the medicalized and potentially dehumanizing study of transgender populations that can and does occur.

By rejecting this framework, I understand that I am still acknowledging and interacting with its existence. This is a dilemma that I as a researcher must navigate, as it impacts the language I use, and how I use it, to best convey my analysis (Newhook et al., 2018). Language can both empower and strengthen academic discussions but is also constrained by time and its history of when, where, and by whom the terminology was created, and for what purpose. One must also consider why certain terms were coined, by whom, and to serve what purpose. I therefore employ the terms I use with care, given their fraught histories. I have chosen to keep the use of medicalized terminology to a minimum. The theoretical lenses of transgender studies and intersectional feminisms will be the bedrock upon which this thesis rests instead.

### Chapter 2: Theory and Method(ology)

#### 2.1 Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks that informed this thesis are transgender studies and intersectional feminism. These theoretical frameworks allowed me to situate my work within specific academic disciplines that informed my analysis. I have also chosen these theoretical frameworks due to the systemically oppressed nature of transgender identities. I use them as a form of resistance against binary gender norms and narratives that are about transgender lived experiences that refuse the possibility of joy or self-love. By creating a study through which transgender individuals can discuss their experiences with gender euphoria, my inclusion of the subjective inner lives and experiences of a marginalized group (Scott, 1986) helps facilitate a broader and more nuanced examination of what transgender lived experiences can encapsulate.

The theoretical frameworks I employ include those of Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (2006), Viviane Namaste (2009), and Jack/Judith Halberstam (2016). These frameworks describe the boundaries and focus of transgender studies, as well as both its strengths in generating knowledge and its limitations. By employing these frameworks, my analysis is informed by the definitions of ‘transgender’ as a term, transgender bodies and unique forms of marginalization and systemic oppression that apply to these bodies, and the social transformation that transgender studies can enact to better the lives of these individuals.

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To begin, I draw on a number of definitions of “transgender.” These include “[a]n umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. The term transgender is not indicative of gender expression, sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy, or how one is perceived in daily life” (Trans Student Educational Resources, 2019), as well as, “... [a] term used to describe the full range of people whose gender identity and/or gender role do not conform to what is typically associated with their sex assigned at birth” (American Psychological Association, 2015, p. 7). These definitions demonstrate that transgender individuals have the capacity for fluidity of gender expression and self-identification beyond that which is assigned to them at birth. The term “transgender” itself also contains great fluidity, as it can function both as an umbrella term encapsulating many other terms like genderfluid and gender non-conforming (Rainbow Ontario Health, 2018) that might apply to various individuals’ lived experiences, as well as being a discrete term in its own right (Stryker and Whittle, 2006). These definitions allow me to explore gender identities beyond male and female and are not necessarily focused on bodily changes via hormone replacement therapy and gender affirmation surgery. This allows me as a researcher to focus with greater clarity on the point of interest for this study, which are the affective and phenomenological aspects of transgender identities, with a focus on gender euphoria.

There were a variety of labels participants used to describe their gender identities, or lack thereof. Some were familiar – “trans man,” “trans woman,” “genderqueer,” and “nonbinary,” for example – while others were less commonly discussed in academic, activist, and intracommunity discussions, such as neurogender (a gender identity that is informed by one’s neurodiversity), gender nihilist (viewing gender as not real, and thus being free to express oneself without restraint), and gender retired (implying a conscious removal from, or opting out of the concept of

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gender altogether). Another gender identity of interest was Māhu: a gender identity that is culturally and linguistically important to indigenous Hawai’ian and other Pacific Islander nations (Roughgarden, 2004, pp. 337-339). This demonstrates the wide variety of ways in which transgender individuals can identify, and the versatility and fluidity of transgender as an umbrella term. However, gender identities like Māhu, for example, must be treated with care, and one must not assume that this culturally significant identity can be fitted into white, Western understandings of gender. Still, the vastness of the labels used indicates that these participants experience and self-identify the concept of gender in ways that in turn shape their lived experiences that they then share with me.

Stryker and Whittle (2006) define transgender studies as anything that “...disrupts, denaturalizes, rearticulates, and makes visible normative linkages ... between the biological specificity of the sexually differentiated body, and the social roles and statuses that a particular form of body is expected to occupy...” (p. 3). The theoretical boundaries for transgender studies in this definition, then, focus on disruptions and challenges to conventional Western binary cultural frameworks of gender, sex, sexuality, and gender roles. The onus is therefore not on transgender individuals to meet a certain set of expectations as worthy subjects of study under this theoretical framework, nor is it placed upon transgender individuals and how they identify. Rather, Stryker and Whittle are concerned with larger social structures that reify the institution of a binary, heterosexual, masculinist gender system of power, and how to disrupt them. This theoretical framework applies to my study in that I do not have a set list of criteria that participants must fulfill to be considered transgender in a “correct” manner. Further, my focus on gender euphoria both denaturalizes and rearticulates transgender lived experiences as being more multifaceted than it might previously – through the lens of gender dysphoria – have been

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understood. It does this by decentralizing suffering as the main sites of transgender narratives, which have long been pathologized in Western medical communities as a psychological “problem” in need of “fixing.” By coercing transgender communities into hiding their identities, or by subscribing to restrictive narratives in order to receive hormone treatment or surgical affirmation of their identities, systems of power reinforce the pathologization of transgender individuals. By contrast, my theoretical lens in the vein of Stryker and Whittle’s work focuses on uplifting and acknowledging the narratives the participants bring to me in their responses to my survey.

My research does not focus on how bodies in modern Western societies are assigned this notion of a biological reality. That is not to say that the human body is not a biological entity; rather my work challenges the systemic binary notion that certain chromosomes, primary and secondary sex characteristics, facial hair, height, body type, fat distribution, or voice pitch are signifiers of two discrete and mutually exclusive genders that are determined by birth, and are immutable and unchanging. I did not question my participants on the nature of any or all gender affirmation surgery or hormone replacement therapy they may or may not have undergone, nor do I ask if this is something they wish to pursue. Rather, I inquired into the emotional, psychological, and logistical ways in which my participants experienced gender euphoria, and how that has affected their lived experiences. In so doing I challenged long-held narratives surrounding transgender populations via medical, psychological, legal, and academic circles, who have had histories of pathologizing these communities (Newhook et al., 2018; Stryker and Whittle, 2006). This interrogates the narrative assumption that transgender individuals are attention-seeking, intent on infiltrating single-gender spaces, have ‘abnormal’ sexual interests or histories of being victimized by sexual assault, or that transgender individuals must be ‘cured’ of

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this ‘affliction,’ and that they are both ashamed of their identities, and show a desire to be cisgender and heterosexual, and thus become ‘normal’ (Benjamin, 1966). These narratives exist in tandem with one another to other transgender populations, and to reinforce the white, Western gender binary via a supposedly biologically gendered ‘truth’ and through the lifelong teachings of cisheteronormativity. However, these narratives may not accurately reflect upon all or even many lived realities of transgender individuals, and in fact can cause greater stigma which leads to physical, emotional, sexual, psychological, and financial harm to this marginalized population (Haas et al., 2011). By shifting the focus of transgender existence away from the supposedly concrete biological realities of maleness and femaleness, which has historically been a complex yet central aspect to our narratives both within the communities and by outside parties, I focused on a different aspect of transgender lived experiences that can occasionally be overlooked in academia. This also disrupts narratives that tend to reduce the variety of transgender lived experiences to that of suffering or hardship.

Another author whose work informed my theoretical lens is Viviane Namaste. Namaste (2009) describes gendered experiences as central to the human experience and humanity at large. To be a gendered being, argues Namaste, is to be human (p. 222); however, because transgender people express and identify with gendered experiences (or, perhaps, non-gendered or differently-gendered) that were not assigned to these individuals at birth, the existence of transgender individuals threatens this human experience, at least according to Western gender binaries. Binary gender assignation is seen as fixed, immutable, and biologically determined, according to Western thought. The historical categories of ‘male’ and ‘female,’ and their respective functions and gendered roles, are constructed around labour and a masculinist history, thus making any

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gender fluidity or gender identities that exist beyond this binary seem to be impossible, despite evidence to the contrary found across cultures and time (Halberstam, 2012).

By challenging this gendered/human experience, transgender studies and theoretical frameworks encourage different and more complex definitions of ‘human’. Further, by expanding definitions of gender euphoria: that is, the *joyful experience* of humanity beyond ‘male’ and ‘female’ as categories supposedly dictated by biology, I explore a unique facet of being human as it pertains to some individuals. This joy and happiness, this celebration of rejecting one’s gender assignment, speaks to a human experience that cannot be encapsulated by a binary gender system, nor by genders that are assigned at birth as immutable categories with impassable boundaries.

Jack/Judith Halberstam (2012) also provides insight into the boundaries of gender, and how those boundaries are permeable and changeable. He discusses a variety of “female masculinities” and carries out an examination of the social category of “women” in various cultural and geographical locations in order to explore how they present, embody, or identify with forms of masculinities for labour, sexual, and decolonial purposes. These women who take on more masculine roles or identities in their respective cultures exemplify how Western gendered systems do not always apply and further, are not particularly useful when describing gendered experiences both for those who exist within its culture as gendered “others”, as well as those in other cultures. For example, Halberstam describes how Russian, Indian, and East European women may be raised and dressed as ‘boys’ to take on traditionally male labour, and how studying them in comparison to one another would prove beneficial, whereas evaluating them according to Western notions of gender and sexuality might yield less rich results in exploring different gendered systems (pp. 345-347). By focusing on nations, cultures, and

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gendered systems that are not necessarily informed by or similar to Western approaches to gender, Halberstam discusses how transgender studies and politics globally must be examined within their own cultural contexts. Any comparisons drawn must minimize or mitigate the lens of Western eyes as the only or primary theoretical framework within which to explore these female masculinities. Similarly, my study is informed by my lived experiences as a white, Western, affluent young adult. My participants' experiences with gender euphoria could come from different cultural gendered systems of power, racial marginalization, or different living and schooling conditions and experiences. I therefore needed to be open to conceptualizations of gender and gender euphoria that are different from my own when analyzing the data, and how these differing views and experiences might expand, stretch, push, or break the boundaries of what I, the researcher, might consider possible aspects of gender euphoria.

This scholarship formed the theoretical framework by which I analyzed the data garnered from this study. One framework that I chose not to incorporate was Donna Haraway's (1984) figuration of "cyborg feminism." Haraway's "cyborg feminism" calls into question not only gender as a cultural and intergenerational story to organize reproduction and labour distribution, but also the boundaries of 'humanness' as well. The figure of the cyborg – an entity of both organic and machine parts – investigates the boundaries between humans and nonhuman organisms, humans, and machines, and between the physical world and immaterial things. The expansion of the boundaries and definitions of human, by necessity, requires a conversation about gender – even if transgender studies are not explicitly mentioned. While cyborg feminism can explore the boundaries of humanity and of gendered experiences, its broad encapsulation of nonhuman organisms, machines, and the immaterial world is less relevant to my study than a more centered focus on transgender studies itself. This interrogation of the boundaries of the

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human body and its relationships to machines in particular can apply to transgender bodies seeking surgical and hormonal assistance, and how the body can be shaped and altered in appearance through the introduction of non-organic material, such as breast implants (Haraway, 1991; Bergman, 2006). However, given that not all transgender bodies undergo surgical transformation, as well as a movement away from medicalizing and pathologizing narratives (Stryker and Whittle, 2006), cyborg feminisms are not as relevant as a theoretical framework for this thesis.

The second theoretical frame that I am using to inform my thesis is intersectional feminism. The term “intersectionality” was originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw to demarcate the unique challenges and forms of oppression Black women face as both Black individuals and as women, and how these systemic forms of oppression work in tandem with one another (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Her work was meant to illustrate how the dominant social forces that shape, discipline, and label bodies are interlocking or interwoven social institutions that specifically impact the lives of Black women in a manner that white-centered feminist lenses or male-centered anti-racist paradigms could not properly capture. In so doing, Crenshaw argued that Black women’s lives, bodies, sexualities, labour, and lived experiences were undervalued or devalued, which other Black women scholars were also discussing in their works during this time, and continue to do (hooks, 1982, p. 52; Collins, 2004, p. 124). Crenshaw’s work, and the use of the term “intersectionality”, has since flourished and has become a staple in many feminist scholars’ works and is practically ubiquitous (Bredström, 2006; Evans and Lépinard, 2019). Intersectionality has seen great theoretical expansion to capture many forms of systemic oppression that function in tandem to shape societal and individual lives in Western society (Evans and Lépinard, 2019, pp. 5-8).

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“Intersectionality”, as it has grown, adapted, and changed to suit the academic and social justice needs of feminist scholars and activists, has developed many working definitions. The definition that I am using for the sake of this thesis comes from Collins and Bilge (2016), and is as follows:

Intersectionality investigates how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life. As an analytic tool, intersectionality views categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, class, nation, ability, ethnicity, and age – among others – as interrelated and mutually shaping one another. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. (p. 14)

By using intersectionality as an analytic tool to interrogate the systemic institutions that create these categories, I explored how transgender adults living in Canada described their lived experiences and the forms of power and oppression they navigate as individuals and as members of a marginalized group. It was essential to me to have an intersectional theoretical lens when approaching the responses I received, as I wanted to take into account the importance of interrelated categories and their combined and compounding impact on the lives of transgender individuals. The nuances of these lived experiences as they were described to me was something I sought to properly convey in my analysis without misrepresenting the importance participants leant to their race, class, geographic location, etc.

The use of a *feminist* theoretical lens that is intersectional is also an important consideration. Many schools of feminist thought, and feminist academic disciplines exist to encompass the vast experiences that women have (Stryker and Whittle, 2006). Feminism – or

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perhaps, more accurately, feminisms – in North American society have historically focused on the lived experiences of white, cisgender, and middle-class women; a category of women who are shaped by their gender assignation, their relative affluence, and their whiteness as compounding forces that shaped their lived experiences and notions of womanhood (Butler, 1990). Feminism is often, in the most simplified terms, defined as “advocacy of equality of the sexes and the establishment of the political, social, and economic rights of the female sex” (Oxford Dictionary Online, 2020). This definition posits that feminism is centered around women’s political, economic, and social interests; but how is the term “women” defined here? How should the term “women” be understood? Womanhood in modern Western societies is typically defined by one’s assigned gender at birth: one is assigned female at birth, and thus is assumed to be female psychologically, socially, legally, and biologically. The presence of a vulva and a uterus are the modern Western hallmarks of cisgender womanhood. However, the very construction of the two mutually exclusive and complimentary sexes and genders is one that is both socially and, when needed, physically constructed (Chase, 1998). One’s gender presentation, body language, and even physical body are shaped and reshaped to become a “good” gendered subject; one who assumes their gendered role and strives for the nebulous idealized version of one’s assigned sex (Butler, 1990; Stewart, 2017; Koenig, 2002). Transgender bodies, therefore, challenge these notions of biological predetermination and binary assumptions of white Western constructions of gender. In so doing, transgender lives and bodies have also been interrogated by feminists as threatening the concept of womanhood (Raymond, 1979; Greer, 1999; Jeffreys, 2014).

At the same time, some feminists have embraced transgender individuals, and our hardships, into broader narratives of gendered oppression (Stryker and Whittle, 2006; Chen et

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al., 2016; Daniels and munson, 2016; Enke 2012). Feminist and transgender communities therefore have had, and continue to have, a complex, entangled relationship to one another. Transgender communities can find both acceptance of our identities and platforms from which to discuss our oppression and hardships, and yet face intolerance and even violence for existing as ourselves in feminist spaces (Williams, 2014).

Thus, even as intersectional feminism can serve as a useful theoretical lens through which to examine the lived experiences of transgender individuals and communities, our relationship to and with feminism as transgender individuals has always been fraught with the potential of violence, rejection, and harassment. It is with great care, then, that I employed a feminist lens which can be used to *challenge* transphobia and benefit our narratives by capturing the richness of our lived experiences. Feminism, when used in conjunction with intersectionality as an analytic tool, can be used to center the oppression not just of “women” (a category of great flexibility and permeability), but to center the oppression of all transgender individuals, who also experience marginalization as a result of our gender identity. And, by centering this oppression because of systemic abuse and disenfranchisement, transgender communities can benefit from identifying the source of our oppression, and demanding change (Stryker and Whittle, 2006). Feminism and transgender studies are disciplines whose intertwined histories have not always been happy or prosperous, nor is every form of feminism immediately and obviously compatible with pro-transgender activism or academic study. Radical feminists, and the trans-exclusionary rhetoric espoused by many within these spaces, comes to mind as a prominent example (Smythe, 2018). Yet, just as readily, both self-identified transgender feminists and cisgender feminist allies assert that transgender individuals can, and do, benefit from engaging with feminism (Namaste, 2009; Stryker and Whittle, 2006; Ahmed, 2004; Bilge, 2013).

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Intersectional feminism is therefore a theoretical lens that I used to examine my participants' responses while keeping in mind the interrelated and interlocking ways in which social institutions work both in tandem with and compound one another to inform the lived experiences of transgender adults living in Canada. As well, I acknowledge that feminism has been, and continues to be, both a welcoming space and affirming academic tradition for transgender communities, as well as a source of violence and transphobic rhetoric that actively harms our interests.

By using Stryker and Whittle's (2006) definition of transgender studies as a theoretical lens which "disrupts, denaturalizes, [and] rearticulates" the body as a biologically and socially binary gendered entity, and by using Collins and Bilge's (2016) definition of intersectional feminism to highlight the oppression transgender individuals face via the interrelated social institutions that work to keep us disenfranchised, I thus determined the academic framework by which I would analyze the responses to my online survey.

### 2.2 Methodology and Research Design

The theoretical lenses of transgender studies and intersectional feminism inform this thesis' positionality, and the use of my chosen methodologies determines the academic rationale which informs my analysis. Phenomenology, particularly narrative phenomenology, can be a useful methodological tool for understanding how gender euphoria fits into, exists outside of, or otherwise affects the narratives of transgender individuals. I encouraged participants to describe a range of experiences and emotions that collectively informed their notions of gender euphoria. I define phenomenology as the intersection between embodied lived experiences, language as a tool of defining these experiences, and the grounding of knowledge in lived situations (Wojnar

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and Swanson, 2007; Berggren, 2014). Phenomenology can also be considered an interpretive form of analysis, or as a narrative in which one's inner experiences can be understood through storytelling, as the events that occur in one's life are fundamental to shaping oneself (Gough, 2017). This lattermost approach to phenomenology as a narrative structure is the most applicable to my study, as I asked transgender individuals to share with me their experiences with gender euphoria; that is, their stories. By encouraging my participants to openly discuss their emotions and their feelings regarding certain events or memories that they recount for my survey, and by affirming those emotions as significant to their lived experiences and to the nature of my thesis, and by using phenomenology to situate these lived experiences, I also gain insight into the subjective truths and consciousnesses of my respondents and how their personal experiences might affect their definitions of gender euphoria.

Given that I encouraged participants to share aspects of their lived experiences and personal anecdotes regarding gender euphoria, I also examined their responses using narrative analysis. Narrative approaches to research acknowledge the importance of the stories being told, the way they are told, and how they “reflect and reinforce social identities” (Wong and Breheny 2018, p. 246). In other words, narrative approaches both work to create and recreate collective knowledge and interpersonal relationships via the act of storytelling. By using narrative phenomenology as my methodological approach to my participants' responses, I examined how, if any, collective narratives surrounding gender euphoria were constructed. Common narratives surrounding transgender lived experiences shaped by cisheteronormative Western ideals often include gender dysphoria as a medical condition in which the “victim” is miserable, as well as broad statements about transgender individuals feeling they are “trapped in the wrong body” (Bettcher 2014). When used by researchers, these imposed narratives can be limiting in

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exploring the subjective, individual, and unique ways in which transgender individuals can experience positive and uplifting experiences as part of this narrative. Therefore, I analyzed the language and content of the narratives told by the participants, and how they structured and expressed their experiences with gender euphoria.

The methodological approach I chose informed my method of data collection, as I wanted to have open-ended questions that would elicit thoughtful responses from my participants. As such, I constructed my online survey to encourage participants to broadly discuss aspects of gender euphoria, such as how they would define the term and what their experiences with it were like. The focus here was, of course, the phenomenological rationale, as I wanted to develop questions that focused on the construction of personal narratives, emotional responses, psychological processes, and interpersonal relationships and their impact on how and when transgender individuals can experience gender euphoria. I wanted to center my thesis on uplifting and conveying the voices of transgender adults living in Canada who had experiences of gender euphoria, and for whom it is an important aspect of their transgender journeys.

I also used phenomenology to examine my participants' responses, to consider how they think about, feel, experience, and articulate their definitions of and experiences with gender euphoria. I analyzed the emotional and psychological aspects of participants who described gender euphoria, as well as the specific language and wording that they used. This focus on their subjective lived experiences, and the language they used to describe it, was the vehicle by which I reached my analytic conclusions regarding how transgender adults living in Canada experience and define gender euphoria. Thus, the theoretical lenses I use to approach transgender identities and the complex aspects of my participants' lives, and the methodological rationale I employ to

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analyze their responses, informed the research questions I constructed, and how the responses I received worked to answer them.

### 2.3 Methods

My study consisted of two parts: an open-ended semi-structured online survey, and an analysis of those survey responses. While unstructured in-person interviews would, perhaps, be the most common approach for this type of work (Yost and Chmielewski 2012), I chose the online format for several reasons. First and foremost, an online survey allowed me to reach a wider range of participants from across Canada, thus allowing me to work with a broader group of transgender individuals. Secondly, in comparison with other forms of online surveying, such as video-chat interviews, online surveys require less data, which would ensure that my study was accessible. This online survey format of written responses also allowed participants the opportunity and time to carefully consider and articulate their answers.

I conducted online surveys with transgender adults living in Canada. I believe that limiting my participant pool to in-person interviews in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, could have limited the number of participants. In addition, this narrow geographic focus would have limited my ability to reach out to other transgender adults living outside of St. John's. Further, individuals who lived outside the city but were still willing to travel to participate might have been limited by economic hardship, travel time, and accessibility limitations. Finally, because St. John's is a relatively small community, in-person interviews might have made it challenging to maintain confidentiality.

Thus, I decided to approach my study in the form of an online survey. This allowed me to approach a wider range of potential participants across Canada. However, I acknowledge that

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this format excludes those who are not literate, those who do not understand English, and those with visual impairments; as such, this can lead to a forced silencing of these individuals on my part as a researcher (Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2010). Given that this study is not longitudinal, these surveys provided a ‘snapshot’ of some individuals’ lived experiences with gender euphoria, and allowed me to examine the data collected, while limiting the information I received to a manageable amount. I avoided the pitfalls of using open-ended qualitative questions, which must, in order to be rigorous, follow these criteria: “(1) explore a worthy topic; (2) demonstrate rigor; be (3) sincere, (4) credible, and (5) ethical; (6) resonate with an audience; (7) make a significant contribution; and (8) achieve meaningful coherence” (LaDonna et al., 2018, p. 348). The topic I explored is certainly worthy, as it is not as thoroughly investigated as are other, usually more damage-centered aspects of transgender lived experiences. I have ensured that my work is coming from a place of sincerity to learn more about the joyful aspects of my communities and to illustrate our love for ourselves and our bodies. I have ensured that it is both credible and ethical by receiving ICEHR approval and being respectful of the questions I ask my participants. And, I hope, this thesis will resonate with my audience, make a significant contribution to academic interest in gender euphoria, and demonstrate rigour as a piece of academic writing. By following these important criteria, I thus achieved meaningful coherence in portraying, analyzing, and discussing the responses of my participants and their lived experiences with gender euphoria.

The survey was hosted online through Memorial’s Qualtrics software. Using a third-party survey site allowed me to construct surveys without risks to privacy or confidentiality to myself or the participants (I have included the full survey in Appendix F). This enabled a safe space for participants to not only share their definitions and experiences with gender euphoria, but to feel

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validated in those gender identities. As well, my open-ended format placed the narration of lived experiences within the purview of the participant with minimal direction from the researcher, and in this way, contributed to resisting the historic pathologizing co-option of transgender lived experiences, particular by non-transgender medical professionals (Krafft-Ebbing 1894, Benjamin 1966). Finally, in my approach I sought to encourage participants to include their own subjective truths with gender euphoria and their phenomenological responses to this term (Reinharz and Davidman p. 18).

I launched my survey on October 22, 2019 and closed it on November 11, 2019. I recruited participants by using my personal Facebook page to post the required ICEHR-approved recruitment script (see Appendix B), as well as a link to the survey to garner attention from prospective respondents. I asked Facebook friends to share the link across their social media platforms to others who might qualify and be interested in participating. I also shared the link directly with LGBTQ+ organizations in Canada, such as city pride organizations or non-government organizations, by emailing them the same recruitment script. I assured these organizations that, should any of their members seek to participate, that they should clarify that membership with their organizations was not contingent upon participating in this survey, should any of their members be uninterested in participating.

I had originally planned to conduct open-ended surveys with 10 transgender adults living in Canada. I felt that 10 would allow me to analyze the data more deeply, given the qualitative nature of this study. However, within less than three weeks, I had already received 26 responses from self-identified transgender, nonbinary, and other participants. This response rate suggests that gender euphoria is of clear interest to transgender communities in Canada. Given this response rate, I chose to close the survey early. I decided to include all 26 responses, as all the

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participants provided excellent data, and were generally insightful, nuanced, and relevant to the topic at hand without being overly long or theoretically dense. All participants indicated they were legal adults living in Canada, and all had experienced or heard of gender euphoria in some way. They hailed from across the country: 11 stated they were currently living in Ontario, 7 in Newfoundland and Labrador, 3 in Nova Scotia, 3 in British Columbia, 1 in Alberta, and 1 in Quebec.

I used emergent coding to codify and analyze participant responses (Grayson-Sneed et al. 2017 p. 748, Saldaña 2015 p. 8). Emergent coding, which can be defined as “a design that emerges is one that is not finalized at the outset” (Suter 2012 p. 343), allowed for flexibility when analyzing the narratives the participants constructed about themselves. This also avoided categorization issues and allowed me to develop definitions of gender euphoria as they emerged from the responses themselves. My initial coding patterns were characterized by analyzing the data provided by participants for: similarities, differences, and major themes. I used this coding to determine the following themes: how participants characterized or discussed gender euphoria, what their assumptions about gender euphoria are, and how they constructed their own narratives. I also compared participants’ definitions or assumptions about transgender as a term and examined how their lived experiences compared to the definitions I was using as a starting point.

As the researcher, I also considered my own responses to the data, such as my operating assumptions, my positionality in relation to gender euphoria, the challenges I encountered, and my personal emotions and feelings as they emerged in relation to the research process (Patel 2014). Drawing on the work of Suter (2012) who suggests the importance of situating oneself as a researcher with a subjective worldview and taking into consideration the worldviews of one’s

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participants, I coded the participants' responses by taking into consideration the phenomenological and lived, subjective realities of participants. I also used pattern coding, "[the] explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation" (Miles and Huberman 1994 p. 69) to address any continuities among participants' answers, focused coding, defined as "search[ing] for the most frequent or significant initial code" (Saldaña 2015 p. 155) to determine if certain aspects of their answers were frequent, and theoretical coding, which "functions like an umbrella that covers and accounts for all other codes and categories formulated thus far in grounded theory analysis" (Saldaña 2015 p. 163) to determine a core theme that may have unified the research. I then wove these codes, categories, themes, and concepts together to determine how transgender adults living in Canada who experience gender euphoria define, experience, and conceptualize gender euphoria (Glaser and Holton 2004). I developed codes that focused on the specific language and terminology participants used to describe their experiences, as well as the emotional, social, and psychological impact experiencing gender euphoria induced. I also examined how participants presented their specific narratives to me as a researcher, and discussed what they included in their answers, and what they omitted, avoided, or deemed unnecessary. I examine the specifics of this coding process in the next chapters of this thesis.

I used emergent coding because I was uncertain as to the nature of responses I might receive and did not want to create or rely upon pre-existing codified categories into which my participants' responses might not have fit or make sense. In addition, I wanted to address my participants' lived experiences in a manner that took into account the emotions, thought processes, and language they used to express their experiences with gender euphoria, and thus felt that emergent coding would afford me with the flexibility and nuance to address the

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responses once I had received them, instead of creating a coding system that might prove to be reductive or restrictive of my participants' responses.

As a process of data analysis, emergent coding has strengths and weaknesses that must be considered. Emergent coding allows the researcher to organically interact with and shape their analysis around the data given, which can lead to nuanced and carefully thought-out findings. However, as a rule coding is also somewhat presumptuous, as the researcher is the one who must create the categories whereby the codes are developed and the themes that emerge are discussed. I draw upon Saldaña's (2015) approach to qualitative coding, in which the researcher must be cognizant of the coding process before, during, and after both as an ongoing interrogation of the data provided, and a conscious choice to minimize, highlight, include, or exclude certain aspects of the data which might affect the results. As such, I must be cognizant as a researcher employing this method of data collection and analysis to keep my own biases in check, and attempt to discover and communicate the major themes, language, emotion, and meaning of my participants when discussing their lived experiences with gender euphoria.

When coding, I decided to focus on aggregate aspects of my participants' responses in order to address cohesive ideas, words, themes, motifs, and experiences as they arose. However, this creates tension; phenomenological methodologies and narrative analysis emphasize the importance of individual, subjective lived experience (Chen et al. 2016; Wong et al. 2018). By searching for commonality across narratives, I risk portraying the lived experiences of my participants as homogenous and losing the nuance that makes everyone's story unique. To combat these contradictions, I decided to mention dissenting voices of participants whose experiences did not match those of the majority. In so doing, I demonstrated the plethora of differences that exist. As well, I shared as much nuance between each individual participants'

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responses by analyzing a variety of quotes to demonstrate not only the major themes that arose out of participant responses, but to show the specific language, narratives, and feelings articulated by each individual and how that contributes to the portrayal of their stories. I also wanted to focus on individual participants if they had a particularly interesting or articulate way of describing some aspect of their experiences with gender euphoria. By accounting for individual and aggregate data, I sought to provide an in-depth analysis of how my participants conceptualize and live with gender euphoria.

I assigned a number to each participant when discussing and analyzing their responses. I assigned numbers in order of when I received their completed surveys. These numbers allowed me to discuss the similarities, differences, themes, motifs, language, emotion, and narratives presented by each participant with greater clarity.

### Chapter 3: Definitions and Experiences with Gender Euphoria

#### 3.1 Chapter Introduction

My first research question was, “how do transgender individuals define gender euphoria and how do they experience it?”. In this chapter I explore how my participants have experienced gender euphoria in their lives, as well as how they might define the term. I began by broadly examining their experiences as they pertained to answering this research question, and then explored more specific subthemes, such as specific terms they use to describe gender euphoria, and the variety of definitions that participants provided. I also asked them what other definitions of the term they may have come across when researching this term online, and how they felt about the definition of gender euphoria that I provided.

#### 3.2 Etymology and Analysis

An important aspect of analyzing the responses my participants gave me is understanding their use of language and terminology when describing their lived experiences. As such, keeping the etymology of certain words in mind leads to a deeper engagement with the responses, and thus can inform my analysis in a nuanced manner. I discuss the specific words and phrases of my participants as they become relevant to answering my research questions, but I felt it was crucial to discuss the etymology of certain words first, so that the reader might keep them in mind moving forward.

I wanted to investigate the etymology of “gender”, as transgender lived experiences are the forefront of this thesis. The term “gender” seems to originate from the ancient Greek word

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*genos* and was translated from the French *genre* circa the 1300s. The term as it was used in the fourteenth century meant “kind, sort, class, sex, quality of being male or female,” (Oxford English Dictionary Online 2020). Gender, it seems, began as a term that indicated the grouping of people by kind, class, or as those who share certain traits. This does not immediately suggest our modern views of gender: as two complementary, mutually exclusive, and biologically immutable genders. Gender once may have had greater fluidity and flexibility when describing groups, classes, and kinds of people. However, gender was not always used in the manner we use it in modern Western, English-speaking vernacular. Indeed, the term “sex” was more commonly used to indicate one’s maleness or femaleness than gender for much of Western history (Oxford English Dictionary Online 2020). Sex originates from the Latin *sexus*, which means “a sex, state of being either male or female, gender, genitals”. It should also be noted that it was considered a social category in the fourteenth century and was used to reference plants in 1546; presumably to distinguish the sexual dimorphism of many plant species. Sex, as a descriptive category, was not always positioned as a rigid binary in Western history. In fact, the single-sexed model – in which the masculinized body was thought to be the normative body from which the female body was derived, and perhaps its inverted counterpart – was the pervading social construct (Laqueur 1990 p. 20 & 42, Fausto-Sterling 2000 pp. 121-123). Indeed, the scientific categorization of sex hormones was not studied until the early 1900s and thought to have been first named as such by Dr. Ernest H. Starling in 1905 (Oudshoorn 1994 pp. 16-17). As the body became categorized through biological, chemical, endocrinological, and reproductive means, and the two-sex model – the notion that men and women were diametrically opposed biological entities – was gaining greater significance. By separating the body into its chemical and endocrinological parts, one can create myriad measures to which the body is held; one’s very flesh becomes a sight of disorder

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when not within acceptable limits of sex. One's hormonal levels, body hair, genitals, and secondary sex characteristics can be "treated" accordingly through medical intervention to maintain the perfect distinction between the two sexes (Chase 1998). The sexing of bodies, it would seem, has been and continues to be a troubling and difficult task for Western scientists, academics, and great thinkers; the body can always be improved upon to best represent and express sex. The means by which bodies are categorized are influenced by cultural framings of the body and assigning it aesthetics (femininity or masculinity), purpose (reproduction), and function (men as penetrative sex partners and women as passive receptors).

Sex and gender are often conflated as one and the same, or as the biological and the psychological working together to inform one's gendered reality (Stryker and Whittle, 2006). This is evident in the use of the term "transsexual", which fell largely out of favour in recent decades due to its perceived medicalized and pathologized histories, and "transgender" has since taken its place among transgender communities to represent the psychological and emotional aspects of our communities, as well as the medical and legal challenges we face (Benjamin, 1966). This goes together with transgender activist movements across North America to de-medicalize our lived experiences, and to encourage a more holistic focus on our selves beyond the biological and sexual realities of our bodies (Meyerowitz, 2009). Pulling apart these terms and examining the relative freedom of the term "gender" compared to "sex" will help make my analysis richer. I am interested in gender and how transgender individuals describe and experience gender (or not) and its impact on their experiences with gender euphoria. The fluidity of the term is something I will discuss in the analysis of participants' responses, and how they use the word "gender" in describing their lived experiences.

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The other terms whose etymologies provide great insight into how these words are used by participants to capture their lived experiences are, of course, euphoria and dysphoria. The term dysphoria originates from ancient Greek, and means “hard to bear, anguish, discomfort” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2020). Notions of pain, who experiences pain, and how certain bodies can express their pain shape our lives (Ahmed, 2004). Pain is often something that, in the West, is treated as something which must be borne with quiet dignity. Pain that is overtly displayed or discussed is often punished, especially when performed by marginalized bodies, whose capacity for pain is often brought into question (Ahmed, 2004). Dysphoria is also specifically a pain that is “hard to be borne”, suggesting that it causes struggle and hardship when experienced. Anguish is also a relevant word, as the term comes from the Latin *angustia*, meaning “tightness, oppression, torment”, and was used in Old French to mean “extreme physical pain” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2020). Anguish can thus be defined by a feeling of confinement, and of a literal and emotional sense of being choked, which can cause anxiety, distress, and rage. This is in alignment with how many transgender individuals have described and continue to describe gender dysphoria (Benjamin, 1966; Koenig, 2002; Stryker and Whittle, 2006; Meyerowitz, 2009). Gender dysphoria is often described as a suffocating experience, especially when suffered in silence without the support of one’s friends and family, or without the means by which to express one’s gender identity. The pain of dysphoria can often lead to suicide attempts and depression for transgender populations (Bauer and Scheim, 2014; Bettcher, 2014), making it a pain that is literally hard to bear, and that often causes anguish.

By contrast, euphoria originates from the ancient Greek *euphoros*, which literally means “well-being, perfect ease and comfort of healthy persons”. It also became known as a feeling of good health and comfort (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2020). Euphoria is therefore not a

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burden or a constriction, but rather something that is borne with ease. Euphoria is to be empowered to bear or endure with ease and implies good health and comfort. Gender euphoria, when it is discussed in relation to transgender experience, is often described as a phenomenon that brings joy (Squires and Brouwer, 2002). It also could make individuals feel comfortable with their bodies, their gender expressions, and their senses of self (LOTL, 2019). Euphoria also implies wellness of body and mind, of recovery from illness and harm. The etymology of “dysphoria” and “euphoria” amplify how important these terms are to transgender communities and to discussing our lived experiences with these phenomena. They are necessary in articulating our relationships to our bodies, minds, spirits, communities, families, friends, societies, cultures, religions, and our senses of self. They encapsulate the pain and the comfort we can experience and knowing their etymology can stand the reader in better stead when moving on to the analysis of my participants’ responses.

### 3.3 Gender Euphoria, Defined

In order to determine how my participants experienced gender euphoria, I needed to know how they described this phenomenon. I also needed to know what definitions of the term they used or had come across, and how it informed their understanding of gender euphoria.

Prior to asking my participants about their own feelings on the matter and how gender euphoria might be defined, I first presented them with a definition of gender euphoria I had come across in my literature review, as I felt it was the best definition of gender euphoria that I could find during my initial research. The definition of gender euphoria is from the works of Squires and Brouwer (2002), who define gender euphoria as “the enjoyment of one’s gender identity, expression, or affiliation” (p. 307). This definition is useful, as it sets out parameters on gender

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euphoria that mesh well with my theoretical and methodological approaches to gender euphoria – that is, as a phenomenological and identity-centered subjective lived experience that is generally considered and experienced as a positive phenomenon. This definition was also simple to understand as well as short, which I felt was salient when presenting it to my participants and asking for their thoughts on the matter. I did not want to use a definition that was lengthy, filled with jargon, or otherwise inaccessible to the general population, as that might have confused or frustrated my participants.

I asked participants if they agreed or disagreed with this definition, and why they did or did not agree with it. I wanted to determine if an academic and peer-reviewed source that explicitly mentions gender euphoria – which was a challenge in its own right – might have some similarities with how transgender adults living in Canada might define or experience the term in their day-to-day lives.

I also asked my respondents to disclose if they had actively sought out definitions of gender euphoria online. I asked specifically about online resources, as I wanted to understand what online discussions of gender euphoria might be taking place. Interestingly, the majority of respondents (15 out of 26) said that they had not actively sought out definitions of gender euphoria, but rather happened across them in discussions being held by transgender individuals in online forums. Participant 20, who indicated they had “not really” actively sought out definitions, stated, “the subject just comes up with peers.” This suggests to me that gender euphoria is a subject that tends to be discussed among transgender individuals, and is often talked about in a casual manner wherein the subject might arise organically from the discussion, but may not be the main focus for many transgender individual’s conversations with one another.

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Participant 1, 3, and 21 also indicated coming across a variety of definitions, including ones that stated that gender euphoria was oppositional to dysphoria, or that one informs the other. For example, Participant 1 stated “I had explained the pants-trying-on situation at a trans support meeting, indicating it as dysphoria. That's when folks piped up and explained that I was feeling euphoric, not dysphoric.” They also stated, “[h]onestly, a word-based definition didn't matter because I knew what gender euphoria -felt- like. Buuut [sic] a definition would probably be helpful to explain how it feels to other people.” By “other people”, Participant 1 was indicating other transgender individuals. This sentiment was expressed by other participants as well, who felt that discussing and building definitions and understandings of gender euphoria was an important community building task, as it can lead to transgender individuals better understanding their feelings about and relationships to their minds and bodies. Participant 1 seemed to focus more on the emotional and affective aspect of gender euphoria than how it might be defined. Perhaps there are transgender individuals for whom the definition of the term is not as critical as the experience of gender euphoria itself. That being said, they also acknowledged that a clear definition could be useful to community building.

Another interesting definition comes from Participant 21, who stated that they had heard gender euphoria as being “the opposite of dysphoria”. However, they do not clarify how or in what manner these terms are oppositional to one another. It is difficult to speculate how they might conceive of euphoria and dysphoria as being opposites due to the lack of information they provide. But as a researcher, I can say that the etymology of the terms might provide some insight. Given that dysphoria is defined by anguish and being a difficult burden to bear, and that euphoria is defined by ease of bearing burdens and comfort, the terms do seem to indicate

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opposite states. Perhaps this is what Participant 21 meant; that where dysphoria implies confinement and hardship, euphoria indicates ease and comfort.

Participant 3 also had a fascinating comment about gender euphoria: “My understanding about gender euphoria comes from my understanding of gender dysphoria. When I am feeling dysphoria, I could crawl out of my skin. But when I am feeling euphoria I finally feel like my skin is attached”. Here, Participant 3 makes a clear connection between dysphoria and euphoria, using embodied experience as a link. This focus on the skin and on one’s embodiment is illuminating, as our bodies are often defined by the boundaries of our skin (Ahmed, 2004). Skin has also been conceptually paramount to transgender experiences and writing, as the skin is both a physical and social barrier that is permeable, shapeable, and changeable (Prosser, 2001, p. 55). Yet, the skin is not expected to show signs of age or supposed “imperfections”; skin that has seen hardship, age, and self-harm, as well as skin that has been altered – such as through gender affirmation surgery – is not acceptable. Participant 3’s desire to “crawl out of my skin” indicates an intense discomfort with her body and her embodiment; her sense of self becomes alienated, which can cause distress (Prosser, 2001; Koenig, 2002). The idea that Participant 3’s skin feels “attached” when she experiences gender euphoria might imply that euphoria creates harmony or synchronicity between her sense of self and how she views her body, which might be at odds during periods of dysphoria. This desire for attachment to one’s skin is diametrically opposed to wanting to crawl out of one’s skin, suggesting that she experiences gender euphoria as a state of bodily and psychic unity. Gender euphoria might therefore offer some relief, pleasure, or joy when one is comfortable within one’s body and embodiment.

One interesting exception to those who had not actively sought out definitions online was Participant 16, who stated that, “I have recently been doing a research project that involves

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venturing into trans tumblr communities and have encountered a WIDE variety of definitions of euphoria...”. Tumblr is a blogging website and has a prominent LGBT+ community, according to Participant 16. Unfortunately, this participant did not expand on the nature of their study, nor give me any ideas as to what specific definitions of the term might exist. This might be because the study is incomplete or has not taken place yet, but I would enjoy following up. Given that this is not possible however, one can only speculate as to the data this individual has or will collect from this online community’s discussions of gender euphoria.

On participant who did provide a concrete online definition, however, was Participant 24. She provided a link to a Wikia article on gender euphoria, stating “The wiki definition of gender dysphoria is a much more aligned definition to what I think gender euphoria is”. The Wikia definition is as follows:

Gender Euphoria is a psychological condition which consists of comfort or even joy when thinking about one's true Gender identity, often accompanied by a strong desire to change one's sex to better match their identity or to be called the correct gendered language. Euphoria can be focused upon bodily attributes, treatment from others. It is possible for nonbinary people to feel gender euphoria too, for much the same reasons as binary transgender people. Euphoria is actually the opposite to 'Dysphoria', or the absence of pleasure. It is thus pleasure, and is not directly attached to gender identity.

(Wikia “Gender Euphoria”, 2020)

This definition reveals an interesting perspective on gender euphoria; it contains aspects of gender euphoria that seem to match with what my participants stated about their experiences, such as considering gender euphoria a feeling of comfort and joy. This also matches to the

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etymology of the term, in which euphoria makes a burden easy to bear, or makes one comfortable. Gender euphoria is also implied to come both from one's alignment of body and inner self – thus referencing Participant 3's experience of her skin. It also acknowledges the external validation of others; an important topic that is discussed later in this chapter.

Equally relevant is the *way* that dysphoria is defined here. The Wikia definition posits dysphoria as the “absence of pleasure”, and euphoria as the presence of pleasure. This is noteworthy, as gender dysphoria is often portrayed by many transgender individuals as the *presence of pain*. Returning to the etymological origins of the term, dysphoria means pain that is difficult to be borne, or anguish. This is an interesting parallel to how some participants define gender euphoria as merely an absence of pain, rather than the presence of pleasure. Dysphoria, according to this Wikia page, is merely the absence of pleasure, implying perhaps a euphoria-centric approach to these terms.

One consideration that must be addressed, however, is that Wikia is a collaborative website that allows anyone with access to edit certain pages. Perhaps this page was created or edited by an individual who has never experienced gender dysphoria, or who put forward their own definition of the term, despite how it may not match up with how many transgender individuals would otherwise define the term. Also of note is the last sentence of this definition: “It [gender euphoria] is thus pleasure, and is not directly attached to gender identity”. This is a curious sentence, given that gender euphoria according to this definition is a comfort or joy that is *derived* from one's “true” gender identity. There is an explicit connection made between this particular type of joy and one's gender, and yet this is revoked in the last sentence. It is not clear why this sentence is a part of this definition, as it seems to contradict the rest of the statement. Perhaps the author (or authors) of this definition meant that the pleasure of gender euphoria can

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transcend joy in one's gender identity and become a more generalized feeling of joy. Perhaps they feel that gender euphoria is only partially linked to one's gender identity, and is also based on one's circumstances, such as receiving good news. Still, this is only speculation; this definition is an excellent example of how transgender communities can discuss and construct meaning for these terms together to better articulate our lived experiences.

In addition to learning about the definitions participants may have come across online, I wanted to know how participants reacted to a definition of gender euphoria that I provided. From there, I wanted to learn about their own definitions of the term and compare their responses. I asked participants to tell me what they thought of the definition of gender euphoria by Squires and Brouwer (2002), which defined the term as “the enjoyment of one's gender identity, expression, or affiliation” (p. 307). I wanted to know if participants saw any strengths or weaknesses with this definition, and how it aligned or misaligned with their understanding of the term. Generally speaking, most participants stated that they either fully or mostly agreed with this definition. Participant 6 responded, “I LOVE the idea of gender euphoria and its [sic] extremely useful, I think, for those trans people who don't experience dysphoria”. This participant seems enthusiastic about how the term is defined here, as it can account for transgender lived experiences that exist outside of the dominant cultural, social, medical, and legal frameworks that position transgender lived experiences as centering around, or being heavily influenced by, gender dysphoria. In the statement “I love the idea of gender euphoria,” Participant 6 also suggests that the concept might be a new to him or may not be something that he has given much thought. Perhaps gender euphoria is a topic he was not overly familiar with, but nonetheless considered to be useful. It is also telling that this participant's response indicates that he views gender dysphoria and gender euphoria as oppositional or perhaps mutually

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exclusive phenomena, as he indicates his belief that gender euphoria is useful to transgender individuals who do not experience gender dysphoria. This is an intriguing remark, as it demonstrates how some transgender individuals might not view these two phenomena as something that an individual can feel simultaneously. This oppositional binary relationship is one that, when gender euphoria is discussed, is often constructed or construed by transgender individuals and academics (Manrell, 2020). While this may be the case for many transgender individuals, however, the nature of these phenomena mean that this may not always be the case.

Other participants also included caveats or additions to how they would expand upon this definition to better encapsulate their lived experiences. For example, Participant 10 stated that they agreed with the definition, but that they *also* experienced gender dysphoria. They understood gender euphoria as follows: “I see it for me as the lack of gender dysphoria or the ability to not be impeded by my dysphoria”. The use of the term “impeded” is interesting, as is this participant’s discussion of the relationship between gender dysphoria and gender euphoria. The word “impediment” comes from the Latin *impedimentum* meaning “shackle to the feet” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2020). The term “impediment” indicates an interference with, or obstruction to, progress. One is physically or emotionally slowed down by a shackle, a device which limits one’s range of motion, speed, and ease of walking. The use of the word “impede” in Participant 10’s description of gender dysphoria as something that interferes with day-to-day life. And, considering the roots of dysphoria mean anguish or to be confined and throttled, it seems that Participant 10 considers dysphoria to be something restrictive to his quality of life. This suggests that gender dysphoria is, for this participant at least, a force that might make aspects of life more challenging. Gender euphoria, by contrast, might constitute a lack of gender dysphoria, as well as the presence of positive emotional states.

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Other participants also stated that they felt this definition was useful or current because, in the words of Participant 8, “it seems as if it would [be] applicable to most, if not all, trans identifying people” and Participant 4, “I have come to know gender euphoria as this definition and felt the joy associated with it”. The definition provided by Squires and Brouwer (2002) is therefore generally considered by participants to resonate with their lived experiences with gender euphoria.

However, as with Participant 24 who offered a Wikia definition, some participants felt that the Squires and Brouwer definition did not fully encapsulate gender euphoria or did not account for the nuances that might apply to some individuals’ lived experiences. As such, these participants described how the term could be improved to account for these apparent oversights. Gender euphoria is something that various participants describe as not always being triggered by the same stimuli or internal thought processes from day to day. It was a phenomenon that many described as something they experienced periodically. For example, Participant 1 referred to gender euphoria as follows: “In my experience, gender euphoria is something you experience in brief, intense moments”; Participant 2, meanwhile, described the phenomenon as, “Some things bring euphoria some days and some days they don’t”. Gender euphoria therefore seems to be an elaborate phenomenon that cannot reliably be triggered or experienced, but rather is a process that varies from person to person and depends on the circumstances by which the individual might experience it.

Many of my participants felt that the affirmation of others was an integral part of bringing about gender euphoria. For Participant 1 the Squires and Brouwer (2002) definition did not go far enough. As they noted, “how do you put into words such a personal, intense, emotional experience?”. This response, combined with the definitions and lived experiences my

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participants themselves offered above, suggests that gender euphoria is a complex series of emotions, physical responses, many of which are dependent upon mood, presentation, safety to express oneself, and the validation of one's social support systems. I discuss these further when examining the definitions participants themselves gave for the term. Gender euphoria thus seems to be a phenomenological experience that no singular definition can adequately encapsulate, just as there are a variety of definitions on gender dysphoria, many of which vary in usefulness depending upon the paradigms from which one approaches the term, and how different people would describe their experiences with this phenomenon.

The intensity of the emotion and affect associated with gender euphoria, coupled with the episodic nature by which it is described, suggests that gender euphoria may be a difficult or complicated phenomenon to sustain for long periods of time, and that this may not necessarily be desirable due to the exhaustive nature of maintaining intense emotions for long periods of time (James et al., 2016). The transient and mercurial nature of how the participants experienced gender euphoria suggests to me a plethora of emotions and psychological processes at play that might be influenced by a variety of factors, such as an individual's mood, environment, social networks, and mental health. From a narrative analysis standpoint, this would explain why gender euphoria is described as an event rather than a constant in the lives of the participants. Gender euphoria is brought about by internal or external validation and leads to moments of intense positive emotions, which are framed as positive and desirable. The events leading up to the moment of gender euphoria and the gender euphoria itself then inform the participants' individual narratives (Naidoo, 2014; Saldaña, 2015). This in turn influences their own definitions of gender euphoria, and how they view the term. The definitions of gender euphoria provided by my participants therefore suggest that the term encapsulates a variety of tangled emotions and

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lived experiences that will always have to accommodate for the myriad ways in which individuals experience gender euphoria differently.

### 3.4 Lived Experiences with Gender Euphoria

Participants' lived experiences of, and their relationships to, gender euphoria are intertwined with the language, themes, and focus they communicated in their responses. For example, many participants expressed that gender euphoria was a strong emotional experience; one that was brought about and might have stayed with them for a time but would eventually fade. The lived experiences that participants chose to share tended to focus on the first time they had ever experienced gender euphoria, moments of validation and affirmation, and how they felt and thought about these experiences in the context of their broader personal narratives as transgender individuals living in Canada.

### 3.5 Definitions and Experiences: Analysis

Many responses generally overlapped in how participants defined gender euphoria. Most understood gender euphoria as a sensation that caused "giddiness", "joy", and other such pleasurable emotions. Participants experienced these emotions as generally positive, and as desirable or enjoyable for brief moments in time. They described gender euphoria as an event that typically took place upon triggering by some internal stimuli or external validation and would last for a certain length of time before dissipating. For example, Participants, 2, 4, and 10 suggested that when others used their name and pronouns that best reflect their gender identities, this might trigger gender euphoria. As 10 said, "I experience euphoria at being gendered correctly" and 4 stated, "when people us [sic] the correct pronouns or assume my gender is different that [sic] what was assigned at birth". The use of one's name and pronouns in all

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aspects of life without facing violence are key talking points in the lives of many transgender individuals and are thus a source of activism for many transgender communities, but transgender bodies are often questioned as to their “authenticity”. As Stryker and Whittle point out, “The transsexual person faces the problem of interpretation” (Stryker and Whittle, 2006, p. 198). The use of a transgender individual’s correct name and pronouns demonstrates external acknowledgement of their identity which can be vital to that individual’s mental and physical health. This may explain why so many participants mentioned correct name and pronouns use as a trigger for gender euphoria.

Internal validation is also important; that is, recognizing one’s own gender identity on one’s own terms. Thus, for example, several participants (1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 15, and 21) commented on the importance of clothing and cosmetics as being part of their personal comfort with their bodies, which in turn could lead to gender euphoria. For example, Participant 2 discussed the importance of cosmetics: “The biggest for me was putting on lipstick and mascara for the first time. It allowed me to view my face in a feminine manner for the first time, despite some of my masculine features”. Lipstick and mascara are cosmetic products that, in modern Western cultures, are associated almost exclusively with women and with the feminine; that is, they are tools to accentuate, convey, and invoke femaleness and femininity (Huxley and Halliwell, 2014). By donning makeup, Participant 2 invokes the aesthetics of Western feminine gender expression to convey her gender identity to others. Cosmetics, therefore, function for Participant 2 as a signal to others as to her gender identity. In addition, however, they also serve to demonstrate to *herself* how she performs, lives, and experiences cosmetics to invoke her own femininity.

Participants also mentioned cutting or growing out their hair, buying high heels, or wearing nail polish as being essential facets in expressing their gender identities and inducing

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feelings of gender euphoria. Participant 24 mentions “Makeup, nail polish and more feminine clothing” as being a source of gender euphoria, as well as “when my hair reached my shoulders”, she described feeling more confident and comfortable in her body. Participant 16 stated, “when I adhere to gender normative standards of femininity it improves my confidence and mood”. These participants also express markers of femininity to signal to others in a deliberate fashion that they are aligning their physical appearances with the trappings of modern Western femininity. While Participant 24 gives a clear indicator of how she altered her gender expression to align with her self-perception of her gender identity, Participant 16 unfortunately does not give similar examples. She merely states that she adheres to “gender normative standards of femininity”. This could indicate any number of things, from her wardrobe, to the use of cosmetics, to her body language and how she navigates public spaces. What is clear, however, is that by invoking these “normative” beauty standards of femininity, she is more able to invoke gender euphoria: she even states that presenting herself femininely “improves my confidence and mood”. Gender euphoria can therefore arise from internal validation and is often aided by one’s gender expression when it aligns with and conveys one’s gender identity to others.

Another participant whose gender euphoria was influenced by or came from internal processes was Participant 15. They stated, “Sometimes when I’m doing a drag show, the embodiment of masculinity that I don’t [sic] have access to outside of drag can be euphoric”. Participant 15 specifically mentions drag as a source of empowerment and gender euphoria, due to being able to access and express “the embodiment of masculinity” that they desire even outside of their drag performances. Drag is an artform and performance that has long been implemented by LGBT+ communities as a source of entertainment, self-expression, artistry, and political action (Koenig, 2002). It also allows transgender individuals the ability to perform

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gender expression that best aligns with their gender identities in relatively safe venues without the fear of violence. Participant 15's statement implies that they derive gender euphoria from drag performances not necessarily due to the reception of their performances, but by being able to engage in a form of gender expression that aligns with their internal self-perception of their gender identity. Thus, the act of doing drag can be a source of gender euphoria for this participant, and potentially for other transgender individuals as well. It would appear that the internal processes of inducing gender euphoria via one's gender expression may be due to making oneself *visible* (West and Zimmerman, 1987). By altering one's gender expression, one can visibly align one's outward appearance with one's inner self-perception, thus being visible to others, but first and foremost, to oneself.

However, gender euphoria was neither a constant, nor a permanent fixture of the respondents' lived experiences, nor did the stated stimuli always trigger a sense of gender euphoria. As Participant 14 writes, "For instance, when around individuals who have a strong masculine energy I often feel very feminine by comparison. So, if I am interacting with them on a day where I feel very "girly" that can trigger euphoria". She also states: "the same situations can also make me feel nothing ... So for example, if someone gives me a feminine coded compliment on a day where I am feeling genderless I will likely feel nothing". Gender euphoria seems like it can be induced by unexpected stimuli; and, in the same vein, something that induced gender euphoria one moment may not lead into another episode in the next.

When conveying their lived experiences, many participants described the first time they had ever experienced gender euphoria as an important moment in better understanding themselves and in experiencing intense emotional, physical, and sexual revelations. Participants 1, 2, 8, 17, 24, and 26 all discuss the first time they experienced gender euphoria as being a

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significant event in their lives and their lived experiences. Many mentioned that changing their gender expression was often the catalyst for their first experience with gender euphoria. For example, Participant 1 mentioned the first time they wore a men's shirt while binding, or wearing canvas jogger pants and how they "... minimized my hips, so it looked like I had a much more masculine waistline... And I started to cry". Participants 8, 17, and 26 also mention chest binding as leading to feelings of euphoria. Participant 8 mentions crying while trying on shirts "because my clothes were finally fitting in a way that made me feel good about myself". References to crying suggest that these individuals had intense emotional responses to their first experiences with gender euphoria. The focus on the first-time feeling gender euphoria is significant as it indicates that gender euphoria is a part of the self-constructed narratives these individuals tell about themselves (Bamberg, 2012). It conveys a realization about the sense of self aligning with one's body partially or wholly where before such alignment might have been elusive or unobtainable. Seeing oneself physically in the mirror reflecting one's inner perception of that embodiment therefore is critical to bringing about gender euphoria for some transgender individuals, who often feel like strangers within their own bodies and for whom this alienation is often the key narrative by which they are taught to understand their transgender realities (Ahmed, 2004; Daniels and munson, 2016; Newhook et al., 2018).

Participant 17 also mentions cutting their hair and buying men's shirts, but most interestingly when discussing binding, they also say that binding allowed them to "climb... a tree while enjoying the feeling of my shirt against my bare skin for the first time since elementary school". This statement implies two things of note: one, that Participant 17 often wears many layers of clothing, and two, that they were not able to engage in the act of tree climbing since they were a child. The first part of this statement could imply a variety of reasons as to why

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Participant 17 might wear many layers of clothing, such as to alter their silhouette, for cultural and/or religious purposes, or perhaps because of the climate in which they live. They do not mention if they wear bras, which are also an apparatus of gender expression and controlling the movement and shape of the breasts (Bergman, 2006, pp. 52-53). By not mentioning if they have ever worn, or if they choose to wear bras, Participant 17 controls how we understand their reshaping of their body using clothing using a binding method as a relevant aspect of their gender presentation. The context of the sentence suggests that wearing a t-shirt directly against the skin is something positive that Participant 17 has missed, along with tree climbing. Indeed, this second part of the statement describes an activity that is often associated with childhood (Young, 2005, p. 32). The act of tree climbing is a task that requires great coordination and strength, and a certain lack of concern for how one's body might be policed or corrected according to gender norms. One's focus must be on the act of climbing so as to not fall and become injured; as such, concern about how others might read and punish one's body language becomes secondary. This act seems to be freeing for Participant 17, not just in terms of wearing fewer layers of clothing, but in performing an act that recaptures their childhood prior to the onset of puberty. By reconnecting with an aspect of childhood – which is often portrayed as a period of innocence and freedom from the world's troubles – Participant 17 constructs their narrative of re-enacting tree climbing as a reclamation of that freedom. This is described by Edleman's concept of the Child as a symbol that can be subverted, critiqued, and questioned as a state to which we are never allowed to fully return (Edelman, 2004). Gender euphoria arose for this participant not just in how they altered their gender expression, but in the way that gender expression allows their body to move and perform physical acts previously unavailable to them.

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Participants 2 and 24 also mention their first times experiencing gender euphoria and the importance of altering their gender expression to better represent their senses of self. They both describe means of altering their gender expression in order to focus more on traditionally feminine clothing and cosmetics. For example, Participant 2 states “The biggest for me was putting on lipstick and mascara for the first time”. She also mentions wearing a dress and being referred to with she/her pronouns by her friends as instances that induced gender euphoria. She adds that, “I smile a lot when I try to present as a woman”, belying her joy at her presentation of her gender identity, and how gender euphoria impacts her mood. While her smiling in the context of this response implies that she feels happier when “presenting as a woman”, one must also consider the gendered repercussions of smiling. Women are often expected to portray happiness, whether it is genuinely felt and experienced or not. It is part of how women’s bodies are policed and trained to function; to be concerned with comportment and functioning in the “right” and “feminine” way; thus women’s bodies are sites where power – physical, athletic, sexual, and personal power – is wrested away to create compliant subjects (O’Farrell, 2007). Thus, smiling may indicate pleasure, but it may also be performative to prevent violence and punishment (Young, 2005, p. 39).

Similarly, by experimenting with makeup, Participant 2 to was better able to present herself in a way that conveyed to others her gender identity, as well as most likely deriving joy from the act of wearing makeup itself (McCabe et al., 2017). However, Participant 2 also mentioned feeling nervous whenever she presents herself in this way, writing “there are a lot of challenges with being transgender in Alberta, and I primarily worried about my career prospects. My gender identity feels like something I need to hide”. While she does not give specific reasons as to why, one can surmise that much of this nervousness may stem from the violence levelled at

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transgender populations, particularly that of racialized transgender individuals and transgender women (Stryker and Whittle, 2006). This fear of violence may shape much of how Participant 2 feels she can conduct herself in public spaces, knowing that her existence and her gender expression are indicators of her lack of conformity to cisheteronormative societal standards. Still, this nervousness does not seem to outweigh her desire to present herself publicly in a way that best represents her inner sense of self.

Participant 24 also discusses her first time appearing at work having changed her gender expression to best fit with her sense of self: “I came to work as myself. Makeup, nail polish and more feminine clothing. I knew I had arrived”. This sense of arrival, and of showing up as one’s self are interesting. It implies that Participant 24 had not previously been showing up to work “as [her]self”, perhaps suggesting that she felt she had to pretend to not only convey a gender expression that did not align with her sense of self, but act as if she was someone different entirely to maintain the façade. Perhaps she felt that she had been on a journey and had reached her destination in her sense of self regarding her gender identity, or at least an important milestone in that journey. The phrase “I knew I had arrived” also corresponds with popular usage of this phrase to indicate success. In this case, however, that sense of success is not necessarily related to external acknowledgement (i.e., accolades, etc), but rather, to her own, inner sense of arrival. Gender euphoria seems to have, at least in part, been an indicator for this individual her feelings of contentment with their presentation. The use of feminine clothing, nail polish, and makeup all function as signals to others about how she wishes to be perceived and how her gender identity has been revealed to those around her (Stryker and Whittle, 2006).

This first arrival to work as “herself” is also compelling from a narrative analysis standpoint. Participant 24 draws our focus to this event, highlighting its importance in her

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personal narrative. This arrival is not described beyond its implied significance to her emotionally. She mentions informing her managers beforehand but does not describe how her co-workers responded to her change. Seeing as she controls her own narrative in this survey, she is entirely in charge of her written response to my questions. As such, her choice to omit how her work received her change speaks volumes to how she chooses to shape her narrative, just as all the participants choose to shape theirs. It is possible her co-workers were hostile or supportive, but Participant 24 does not elaborate and, indeed, the fact that she does not elaborate suggests that their responses were not necessarily relevant to her experience. Her focus seems to be on how her physical changes induced gender euphoria, rather than the interpersonal validation or affirmation she may or may not have received from others.

Many other participants discussed gender euphoria being brought about both by internal *and* external sources of validation and affirmation. In fact, the majority of participants mentioned the importance of having others affirm their gender identities as sources of gender euphoria, or the importance of internal validation of their own identities. Generally speaking, participants who mentioned external affirmation from others tended to focus on the use of their names and pronouns, and the importance of that affirmation coming from their friends, families, romantic partners, and communities. In terms of internal validation, one's gender expression and seeing oneself in the mirror aligning with one's inner sense of self were considered to be decisive factors in experiencing gender euphoria.

For more than half of all participants, experiences with gender euphoria were often contingent upon, or associated with, the external validation of their gender identity by others. This is significant, as it suggests that gender euphoria may have interpersonal implications for transgender individuals. Gender euphoria may be, at least in part, dependent upon the acceptance

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and compassion shown toward the transgender individual in question or might be a factor in bolstering already-existing gender euphoria. This validation often came in the form of participants mentioning others using their correct names and pronouns – that is, the names and pronouns that they have chosen for themselves, or that best align with their internal senses of self and reflect their gender identities (or lack thereof) the best. The use of a transgender individuals' chosen names and pronouns are essential to their mental health and perception of acceptance by their loved ones (Chen et al., 2016; Davidson, 2007; Skagerberg et al., 2013). The use of one's chosen names and pronouns reflect a conscious form of acceptance of the transgender individual in question, and thus often feature in transgender narratives as a deeply hurtful rejection when ignored or resisted by loved ones (Stryker and Whittle, 2006). It is not merely a rejection of one's chosen signifiers of the self, but of the individual, as one's gender identity is a key aspect of many people's sense of self. As such, the subsequent gender euphoria when one's identity is affirmed by others is understandable.

Participants 10, 13, and 14 for example all mention the importance of being gendered correctly. In the words of Participant 14: "I have felt euphoria when wearing certain clothing, been called certain pet names, or pronouns". Participant 10 said, "I experience euphoria at being gendered correctly". It would seem that being referred to correctly according to one's gendered (or lack thereof) reality is to be properly acknowledged and to be made to feel visible and respected by others.

Some participants mentioned feeling euphoric when asked what their pronouns were, especially when presenting androgynously, as genderless, or in a manner that confused strangers to the point where they had to ask these individuals what their pronouns were (Participants 13, 14, 15, 19, and 21). Thus, Participant 15 experienced euphoria "when I dress so androgynously

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that someone has to ask me my pronouns, or wait to hear my voice to assume my pronouns [to experience gender euphoria]”, while Participant 19 stated “I experience gender euphoria when I look in the mirror and see a person who appears genderless or ambiguously gendered.”

Taking enjoyment out of exploring and muddling gendered expectations and forms of expression are important aspects to some transgender individuals’ personal narratives, as the freedom from binary gendered expectations can allow them to explore different gendered (or genderless) realities and to live as their authentic selves (Stewart, 2017; Koenig, 2002; Asadi, 2015). In the words of Participant 21, they experienced gender euphoria “when a young kid asked me if i [sic] was a boy or a girl”.

While it seemed that having their names and pronouns respected by strangers or acquaintances was affirming, some participants specifically mentioned their friends and family recognizing their gender identities when discussing experiences with gender euphoria. Participants 2 and 10 specifically mentioned friends and romantic partners respecting their gender identities. Participant 2 mentions that when her friends refer to her with she/her pronouns, it is likely to induce gender euphoria, writing “When I get euphoria I get a tingly happy feeling in my stomach, mostly because I'm scared but also because it makes me feel right”. Participant 10, meanwhile, mentions that his partner is “wonderfully affirming” of his identity. Both link this with gender euphoria, with Participant 10 stating “I experience euphoria at being gendered correctly...”. The importance of being accepted by loved ones as a transgender individual is difficult to overstate (Newhook et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2016). Rejection is often not only emotional. Many transgender individuals are often forced to leave their homes and experience precarious housing or homelessness, as well as verbal, physical, psychological, and economic abuses at the hands of their friends and family, particularly when they are minors or dependants

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(Bauer and Scheim, 2014; Clark et al., 2018; Daniels and munson, 2016). The fear of violence is woven into the fabric of transgender narratives, as is the fear of rejection. As such, navigating our own communities and public spaces can be dangerous and emotionally taxing experiences. Thus, Participants 2 and 10 mentioning the acceptance of friends and romantic partners as being something that can induce gender euphoria is understandable.

In addition to external validation by others, participants also indicated that they experienced gender euphoria via internal processes. They discussed how, when presenting in a manner that best reflected their gender identity, or when looking in a mirror, they experienced gender euphoria. Participant 8, for example, mentioned wearing a binder for the first time and feeling emotionally overwhelmed. They said that they “spent at least 2 hours that night trying on all of my shirts and crying because my clothes were finally fitting in a way that made me feel good about myself”. Here, tears link not with grief, but rather, as Participant 8 observes, “feel[ing] good about myself.” Like Participant 24 referenced earlier, it’s as if Participant 8 “has arrived.” For Participant 8, the act of trying on their clothing with a binder indicates a personal relationship with their gender euphoria and physical appearance that was not contingent upon the validation of others, but an internal sense of affirmation and bodily reshaping that will be explored later in the next chapter. Participant 19, meanwhile, experiences gender euphoria when “I look in the mirror and see a person who appears genderless or ambiguously gendered”. Participants 16, 18, and 26 also discuss gender euphoria as something that occurs for them when they express their gender identities (or lack thereof) through their clothing, hair, cosmetics, and body language.

The alignment of one’s self-perception and one’s bodily reality are often facets of transgender narratives expressed through the lens of gender dysphoria. Indeed, a common and

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often-repeated narrative among mainstream popular culture is the notion that transgender individuals are “trapped in the wrong body” (Bettcher, 2014; Meyerowitz, 2009). The implication of being in the “wrong” body is a binary one; that there are men born into women’s bodies and vice versa, and through gender affirmation surgery and hormone replacement therapy, to say nothing of vocal training and changing one’s wardrobe and body language, this “wrongness” can be righted by reshaping the body into the “opposite” gender to match one’s self-perception of themselves. Transgender individuals are also called upon to “prove” their transness; to perform their inner realities in hyper-masculine or feminine mannerisms to justify the altering of their physical bodies, legal identities, and social standings; gender becomes a heightened performance (Butler, 1990; Gallo, 2016; James et al., 2016). This narrative, while not the only narrative by which transgender individuals are judged does have pervasive and powerful implications for the ease by which transgender communities can access resources, challenge stigma, and live their fullest and most authentic lives. It is an experience presumed to be shaped by hardship, by discomfort and alienation from one’s own body. The body becomes a site of contention, of social anxieties, of sexual titillation (Haraway, 1991; Goldblum et al., 2012). Thus, an internal sense of joy and comfort with one’s body as a transgender individual exists in defiance of this broader narrative; it allows transgender individuals to articulate experiences beyond the pain our bodies can cause and the hardship we face.

### 3.6 Chapter Conclusions

The first research question I sought to address in this thesis was “how do transgender individuals define gender euphoria and how do they experience it?”. I analyzed the ways in which participants provided their own definitions, what definitions they may have come across online, and how they responded to the Squires and Brouwer (2002) definition I provided as an

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academic example. I then examined the lived experiences of my participants and the instances of gender euphoria they shared with me. I concluded that there were both internal and external factors that led to experiences with gender euphoria. This manifested in the form of validation from others, such as in the form of using a transgender individuals' names and pronouns, and through internal processes, such as looking in the mirror and having gender euphoria induced by one's physical appearance.

Participants described gender euphoria in positive terms as a phenomenon that could be intense feelings of joy, happiness, and comfort in one's own body. While many generally agreed with the Squires and Brouwer definition, some felt it did not capture their lived experiences fully, such as by not accounting for the emotional impact gender euphoria can have on an individual. In terms of online definitions, the majority stated that they had not actively sought out anything on gender euphoria, but that when it did come up, it was in conversations with other transgender individuals. One participant provided an online definition for gender euphoria from a Wikia page. It would appear that definitions of gender euphoria contain slight variations and nuances, but generally focus on the comfort and joy associated with emotion when it is experienced.

I also asked participants about their lived experiences with gender euphoria. Generally speaking, participants focused on internal and external triggers that induced gender euphoria. For external triggers, they often experienced gender euphoria when asked by strangers and acquaintances what their pronouns were, or if they were "a boy or a girl" when dressing androgynously or genderlessly. Others who dressed in a feminine or in a masculine manner and were treated accordingly also experienced gender euphoria. In addition to strangers, however, some participants mentioned how their loved ones using their correct names and pronouns

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brought about gender euphoria. Given how important acceptance is for transgender individuals by their loved ones and communities can be, these instances of gender euphoria seemed to be particularly relevant, due to the focus participants gave them when discussing their lived experiences. In addition to external validation, gender euphoria could also be induced by internal processes, such as by dressing according to one's gender identity and looking in the mirror. This is illuminating, as one's internal sense of self not aligning with one's embodied reality is a source of pain for many transgender individuals, and often shapes community narratives, as well as broader societal narratives about transgender bodies. By finding joy and comfort in one's appearance, this social script regarding transness is scrutinized and challenged as the only, or at least most pervasive, way in which transgender individuals and communities can articulate our unique lived experiences.

Gender euphoria seems to be a complex phenomenon for which a single, all-encompassing definition may very well be impossible due to the wealth of different and differing lived experience that transgender individuals have. Nevertheless, transgender epistemologies and ways of knowing that are centered around joy, self-love, and pride in one's appearance and identity provide a unique perspective on how our communities can define our lived experiences.

### Chapter 4: Gender Euphoria, Self-Image, and the Body

#### 4.1 Chapter Introduction

The second research question I wanted to answer in this thesis was, “How does gender euphoria affect transgender individuals’ self-image and their relationships to their bodies?” In order to explore how these participants felt about themselves and their bodies in relation to gender euphoria, one must consider the language, narrative, and phenomenological aspects of their responses. I examined specific terms and phrases used by participants to describe how gender euphoria affected their self-image and how they presented this as part of their greater narratives. I also analyzed how gender euphoria affected my participants’ relationships to their bodies by looking closely at their physical and sexual experiences, as well as transcendent experiences, and considered what such experiences may imply for one’s self-perception.

#### 4.2 Self-Image and Gender Euphoria

Self-image can be defined as “the image or idea that one has of oneself, esp. in relation to others; one's conception of one's own abilities, character, appearance” (Oxford Online Dictionary, 2020). One’s self-image is a construction of how one perceives oneself. It is constantly being constructed, as one’s relationship to the self is ongoing and exists based on maintaining a consistent set of core traits (Laws and Rivera, 2012). When these core traits are challenged, or when cognitive dissonance arises to challenge one’s sense of self, it can lead to distress. The sense of self is informed by cultural, religious, communal, and *gendered* expectations. Social mores play a significant role in determining desirable traits that individuals are told to strive toward in order to be accepted and happy in life.

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However, transgender individuals' existence threatens the construction of cisheteronormativity in Western society, as our lives threaten the supposed biological predestination of gender, and of the gender binary itself (Stryker and Whittle, 2006). As such, transgender existence is often portrayed as an aberration; indeed, it was historically largely considered to be a mental illness or psychosexual disorder (Benjamin, 1966; Krafft-Ebbing, 1894). Transgender bodies are also often a source of hypersexualized titillation (Meyerowitz, 2009; Baril, 2018, p. 4) for the supposed "mystery" regarding the genitalia, and not knowing if a transgender individual had undergone "the surgery" or not. This focus on the genitalia reveals the importance of maintaining cisheteronormative sexual acts, and how transgender bodies are seen as taboo for the potential sexual encounters they represent. These medical and psychological paradigms regarding transgender individuals have largely fallen out of favour (American Psychological Association, 2017), but their impact on modern popular culture and mainstream understandings of transgender individuals is still felt. As such, transgender narratives are often positioned from a standpoint of misery and self-hatred. The notion that transgender existence can be a source of joy and comfort is less common compared to that of gender dysphoria. A widespread misconception of transgender individuals suggests that we are inherently miserable because we are not cisgender. Further, if our bodies are rendered indistinguishable from the prized cisgender, "normal" body, our misery will vanish. We are, in essence, expected to desire cisness (Newhook et al., 2018; Rosqvist et al., 2013; Stryker and Whittle, 2006). While this may be the ultimate goal for many transgender individuals, it is not the driving force of all transitions, and indeed, many transgender individuals do not feel the need to transition physically, socially, or legally at all (Stryker and Whittle, 2006; Newhook et al., 2018). Therefore, one must consider the multitude of transgender narratives that exist, and that

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privileging a single narrative creates barriers and challenges for others who seek to express, experience, and live their transgender lives to the fullest.

Therefore, transgender self-image that is positive challenges this construction of misery and self-hatred. Many participants described gender euphoria as having a positive impact on their self-image. Participants 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 13, 14, 19, and 20 are just some of the individuals who mentioned how gender euphoria positively impacted their self-image. They described feeling “comfortable,” “happy,” and “validated,” among other descriptors, within their bodies and when navigating public spaces. These words appear consistently throughout the survey responses. Experiencing gender euphoria seems to have contributed to better self-esteem and self-acceptance by many participants and has made them feel more confident about presenting in public spaces in ways that best represent their gender identities.

Interestingly, participants did not generally describe these emotions as episodic in the way that they described actual bouts of gender euphoria; in other words, these emotions do not seem to come and go with the sensation itself, but may have lasting impacts on how transgender individuals perceive themselves. These positive emotions are part of a broader mindset or emotional state that seems to exist independent of periods of gender euphoria. Participant 4, for example, suggested that gender euphoria made them feel “Confident, loved my self a little more, appreciated my own identity and helps eliminate self doubt. Empowered”. Empowerment is an important term here; often, transgender narratives centre on feelings of *powerlessness*: to change one’s body, appearance, or transness itself. Power relations at systemic and individual levels are multi-faceted and often dynamic and rely upon the respective positioning of all parties involved (O’Farrell, 2007). That they garner a sense of power from gender euphoria, and feel empowered

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in turn, demonstrates how gender euphoria can positively impact transgender individuals' self-image.

Participant 14 also shared a very detailed and descriptive way of describing the feeling of gender euphoria: "It makes you feel energized and light. Social interactions come more easily and bring you more joy. But you also simultaneously feel whole and grounded. You feel at home and connected to your body. It makes your sense of self feel strong, stable, and unflappable". This description is conceptually dense, as it covers a variety of topics and one's self-image. The first sentence mentions feeling "energized and light"; this lightness and energy make sense given that the term euphoria means easy to bear and comfortable; there is a sense of physical lightness due to being unburdened, and energy derived from a sense of comfort.

The feeling of wholeness and being grounded are also interesting, as this implies that Participant 14 has felt incomplete and ungrounded before, and that gender euphoria counteracts this sensation. Wholeness and being grounded suggest being fully present and at home in one's body and mind, furthered by the sentence "You feel at home and connected to your body". He also describes feeling "strong, stable, and unflappable". Stability sounds like it is related to a sense of being grounded, as does the term "strong" in this context. While it is possible that "strong" could be referring to one's physical strength, I posit that in this instance, it is used to indicate emotional strength derived from a sense of wholeness, being grounded, and at home with one's body. The use of "unflappable" is also interesting; this term implies adaptability and ease in the face of any and all challenges or unexpected circumstances. That gender euphoria allows Participant 14 to feel unflappable suggests that the phenomenon lends him a certain confidence in the face of potentially difficult or taxing situations. The sense of being "at home"

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in one's body also suggests a place of belonging and comfort; the physical body becomes a refuge from hardship, as opposed to another source of emotional distress (Namaste, 2009).

Lastly, he mentions that gender euphoria makes social interactions easier and “bring[s] you more joy”. This also goes along with the apparent confidence that gender euphoria can lend, particularly in social situations, as well as make those situations more enjoyable. All of this is to say that gender euphoria seems to affect Participant 14 in myriad ways. He feels physically and emotionally unburdened, whole, and grounded – at home – within his body, and more self-assured, especially when interacting with others. This suggests that gender euphoria, for him, has a positive impact on his self-image.

For the majority of participants, the experience of gender euphoria leads to joy, comfort in one's own skin, and an improvement of one's self-image. However, Participant 5's experiences offer a notable exception to this narrative. He writes:

Gender euphoria for me is usually an extreme high, followed by an extreme low. I experience joy at first, and then usually feel a multitude of emotions such as fear, anger, and resentment towards myself and the barriers I face in attempting to socially/ medically transition and the fact that I will never truly be a cis male.

For Participant 5, gender euphoria is a prelude to painful emotions, and potentially gender dysphoria, although he does not use that term specifically. He expresses fear, anger, and resentment, emotions that indicate how challenging being transgender can be due to the social, medical, and legal barriers that limit the quality of life for many. While he discusses his frustration at being unable to socially or medically transition, the most interesting part of this statement is “I will never truly be a cis male”. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter,

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there is a certain expectation that transgender individuals ultimately desire to be cisgender. While this may not be the case for every transgender individual, it would appear to be the case for Participant 5. At least some of the negative emotions he experiences as a result of gender euphoria seem to derive from the fact that he was not assigned male at birth, and that he did not have the opportunity to grow up and live his life as a cisgender man. In other words, grief and loss appear to be woven into his experience of gender euphoria. This demonstrates how, although many of the results I received in this survey were largely cohesive, there are individuals whose lived experiences differ drastically from the majority. While this individual may unfortunately experience painful emotions after a bout of gender euphoria, the fact remains that the majority seem to experience positive changes to their self-image having experienced gender euphoria. It would appear, then, that gender euphoria does generally positively affect transgender individuals' self-image.

### 4.3 My Body and Me: Gender Euphoria and the Physical

The second half of the second research question deals with how gender euphoria affects transgender individuals' relationships to their bodies. Transgender narratives tend to focus extensively on the physical body, and a desire to alter and reshape that body to fit one's desired gender presentation (Meyerowitz, 2009; Stryker and Whittle, 2006; Bauer and Scheim, 2014). This desire has been portrayed as everything from a perverse psychosexual disorder (Benjamin, 1966) to a life-saving necessity, and is still a contentious topic of discussion in popular culture and mainstream media (Newhook et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2016; DSM-5, 2013). An inability to alter one's physical appearance is often the central trait in definitions of gender dysphoria and is often assumed to be a universal part of transgender lived experiences. All transgender individuals are assumed to experience dysphoria, and require medical, hormonal, psychological, legal, and

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social intervention to help us successfully transition. Dysphoria can often make one feel alienated from one's body, or that one's body is "wrong" according to one's self-perception of how the body should *really* appear. This estrangement from one's own body is often the source of great emotional distress (Clark et al., 2018; Daniels and munson, 2016), and it is this pain and discomfort that shapes many transgender narratives. The physical bodies of transgender individuals are sites of power struggles and social anxieties made flesh (O'Farrell, 2007; Stryker and Whittle, 2006). These bodies are often hypersexualized, denigrated, and treated as problems or sites of damage; transgender bodies are not permitted to exist in public spaces peacefully, as public spaces are constructed to be cisgender and heterosexual (Ahmed, 2004). Further, constructing the transgender body as a disorderly body allows for medical intervention to "fix" these unruly gender subjects and thus assign some binary correction to them, albeit artificial and not "natural-born" male and female bodies.

To find joy in one's disorderly body and to defy the arbitrary rules of biological and social binaries interrogates and disrupts this narrative. What is to be done to disorderly bodies of unruly gender subjects when they do not seek to "correct" themselves? Thus, finding and experiencing gender euphoria in one's own body as a transgender individual is a powerful subversive act which challenges cisheteronormative conventions. It is also a powerful act of self-love, as well as defiance (O'Farrell, 2007). In order to explore how gender euphoria impacts my participants' relationships to their bodies, I focused on three main themes that arose from their responses: how gender euphoria generally impacted their feelings towards their own bodies, how it impacted their sex lives, and how the body is transcended and what this may mean for understanding gender euphoria itself.

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Many participants talked about how experiencing gender euphoria had positively impacted their relationships to their bodies. A word that frequently arose was “comfortable” when describing how they felt about their bodies when experiencing gender euphoria. The word “comfort” originates from the Latin *confortare*, which means “intensive, strong”, and later from the Old French *conforter*, meaning “to comfort, to solace; to help, strengthen” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2020). This etymology suggests that comfort is a source of strength and solace, which I see reflected in how my participants discuss their lived experiences with gender euphoria. The concept of comfort, and which bodies are allowed to be comfortable, is one that greatly impacts how individuals are taught to move through the world (Ahmed, 2004). And, being in possession of disorderly bodies, transgender individuals are often expected to make ourselves invisible, or to perform discomfort and anguish when we are visible; that is, to perform gender dysphoria. However, participants described feeling comfortable in their bodies when experiencing gender euphoria, which is in opposition to cisheteronormative control exerted over all bodies in Western society. Participants 1, 6, 13, 21, and 26 all discussed feeling more comfortable with their own bodies independent of outside factors, as well as the means by which they altered their physical appearances to better express their gender identities.

When asked about how gender euphoria affected their relationships to their bodies, many participants discussed how they altered their physical appearances or how gender euphoria itself made them think differently about their bodies. Participant 6 stated that gender euphoria “Made me feel validated, like I know who i [sic] am, because who I am makes me happy. People should be allowed to feel happy in their own bodies”. This statement implies that Participant 6, like Participant 14 feels “at home” in his own body and thinks that all transgender individuals should be able to feel this way. Participant 1 described their specific experiences with wearing canvas

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jogger pants, saying: “The pants minimized my hips, so it looked like I had a much more masculine waistline ... I finally felt like the me I saw in the mirror matched the version of me I saw in my head.” Like Participants 8 and 19, as referenced above, alignment between Participant 1’s self-perception and their physical appearance is a source of gender euphoria. By seeing oneself reflected back in the mirror and knowing that one’s physical appearance aligns with one’s self-perception, gender euphoria can be induced.

Other participants whose comments warrant discussion are Participants 11 and 26. Participant 11 stated that “[gender euphoria] gives me self confidence, it makes me feel like I deserve to take up space, that I deserve to exist. It makes me feel like I deserve to be seen and be heard, and not being a binary gender is okay.” Participant 26, meanwhile, reflects that “[gender euphoria] made me more comfortable existing and taking up space as a trans person, and more confident in my identity as trans and nonbinary”. The notion of “taking up space”, mentioned by both participants, is interesting, as it ties directly into public spaces and how they are policed to be cisgender and heterosexual (Ahmed, 2004). As mentioned previously, transgender bodies are not permitted to exist in public spaces, as their very nature challenges cisheteronormative notions of the body, biology, and corresponding binary gender identities. When they do exist, however, it is through the performance of discomfort and anguish, as making the disorderly body a source of pity and fear. As such, non-cisgender individuals are discouraged from taking up space, from occupying their bodies comfortably. The transgender body must always be vigilant and be prepared to perform dysphoria and grief in order to be worthy of being mourned (Ahmed, 2004). In essence, power is wrested from transgender communities and individuals due to the social anxieties associated with our bodies; however, enacting joy in our transgender bodies can be a form of claiming power of our own (O’Farrell, 2007). In addition to the importance of taking up

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space, Participants 11 and 26 also assert that identifying as nonbinary individuals is “okay”, because they deserve to exist; gender euphoria contributed to a greater sense not only of confidence to live as an individual outside of the binary, but of worthiness to live in that space, for which the Western gender binary has no point of reference.

Participant 21 also discusses how their relationship to their body is affected by gender euphoria. According to Participant 21, “moving towards becoming ... more androgynous, makes me feel amazing, and like my body fits me better. it was always mine, but i [sic] had to make some adjustments”. This notion of the body “fitting” better is interesting, as it implies that, before, Participant 21 felt that their body had perhaps not fit well or had not fit at all with their self-perception. These comments recall those of Participant 3 who, as discussed earlier, talked about her skin feeling “attached” to her body when she experienced gender euphoria. The idea of the skin being “attached,” of the body finally “fitting” also links to various participants’ comments about clothing. They suggest a previous discomfort with or alienation from one’s body; that the body is foreign, uncomfortable, or does not “sit” correctly (Koenig, 2002). Thus, it follows that Participant 21 would feel the need to make “adjustments” so that the body “fits” properly, such as by wearing a chest binder. Other participants also mention how their gender expression helps to give them their desired shape, silhouette, and appearance to convey to others the ways in which they identify. They reshape their bodies, albeit in temporary ways, to achieve their gender expression goals.

It should be noted that very few participants explicitly mentioned gender affirmation surgery or hormone replacement therapy as being important factors in how they related to and understood their bodies. Many participants had experienced gender euphoria and discussed these lived experiences and did not mention surgical or hormonal intervention one way or the other.

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Instead, the majority focused on cosmetic changes, such as haircuts and changing their wardrobes, as opposed to suggesting that medical or surgical intervention was necessary for them to experience gender euphoria. While some, such as Participant 5, explicitly mentioned the importance of medical assistance to their ability to experience gender euphoria, they were in the minority.

This seeming lack of interest in medical assistance is intriguing, given the highly medicalized and pathologized nature of transgender narratives (Newhook et al., 2018; Daniels and Munson, 2016; Chen et al., 2016). Perhaps due to this particular survey's focus on gender euphoria – a “condition” which may not be considered something that needs “treating” – participants did not see fit to mention if they had sought medical assistance, or if they planned to do so. Perhaps, too, it was because I consciously refrained from asking questions about medical or surgical interventions. Whatever the reason, participants generally focused on their emotional, psychological, and social experiences.

### 4.4 Gender Euphoria and Sex

A small minority of participants mentioned a sexual component to their experiences with gender euphoria. This was unexpected, as both the scholarly literature and non-academic sources I had explored regarding gender euphoria did not mention a sexual dimension. Therefore, this aspect of the phenomenon was of great interest, as it relates to the body and how the body experiences and expresses sexual pleasure. As noted previously, transgender bodies are often sources of titillation and sexual speculation (Meyerowitz, 2009; Stryker and Whittle, 2006) for cis-sexual and cis-gender audiences, but transgender people are seldom permitted to express and perform sexuality as a means of exerting their own power and sexual desires. Sexual violence

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against transgender communities is also alarmingly common (Daniels and munson, 2016; Goldblum et al., 2012) and is often a means of social control to further marginalize transgender bodies and create a fear of existing in public spaces. Indeed, transgender bodies and individuals have been, and occasionally still are, portrayed as perverse, and as a mockery of “real” men and women performing “real” heterosexual sex (Benjamin, 1966). Thus, by claiming sexual encounters not for the scrutiny of the cisheteronormative gaze, and experiencing gender euphoria as a result, experiencing sexual pleasure in a transgender body is a powerful and subversive act.

Two participants explicitly mentioned a sexual component to their experiences with gender euphoria. In the words of Participant 11,

... the first time I ever put on a chest binder I was so euphoric about it, I actually ended up being sexually turned on by the feeling of euphoria. That peak moment passed quickly, and I don't usually experience that when wearing a binder now, but it still gives me a very solid sense of gender euphoria and comfort daily.

This participant's comments are somewhat unclear as to what exactly triggered a sexual response and how this was linked to gender euphoria. Perhaps they experienced some form of autoeroticism, in which sexual excitement was induced by their thoughts and feelings regarding their appearance while wearing a binder (Stryker and Whittle, 2006; Benjamin, 1966), or perhaps the act of wearing the binder created a physically pleasing response, or some other factor or combination of factors were at play. By reshaping the silhouette of the body to better align with their internal sense of self, Participant 11 induced an experience of gender euphoria combined with sexual pleasure. This is intriguing as Participant 11 was not, it would seem, engaging in sexually stimulating acts, whether alone or with a partner, at the time. Through the simple act of

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wearing the chest binder, they experienced arousal. Their body became a site of pleasure, and a source of sexual empowerment. And again, the presence of the word “comfort” at the end of this statement indicates a certain ease with one’s body, that this transgender individual is more relaxed existing within their own skin (Ahmed, 2004). Interestingly, Participant 11 also stated that they no longer experience such an intense sexual response to wearing a binder. Perhaps the novelty of wearing a binder for the first time is what triggered this intense physical and emotional response. This sexual excitement being linked to gender euphoria is interesting and notable, as only one other participant explicitly links any sort of sexual or erotic dimension to gender euphoria.

The second participant whose experiences with gender euphoria have a sexual component is Participant 20, who stated: “most of my experiences [of gender euphoria] have been sexual so I’ll omit ‘em, but being in bed with people who see me as I am is pretty vulnerable and wonderful”. This statement is meaningful for several reasons. To begin with, Participant 20 mentions sexual experiences as being a factor in their experience with gender euphoria, but does not go into detail; indeed, they choose to “omit ‘em”. There could be any number of reasons for this: to protect their anonymity and the anonymity of their sexual partners, a discomfort with discussing sexual acts in detail, wanting to prevent their lived experiences from being scrutinized under an academic lens, etc. Thus, Participant 20 exerts control of their narrative and what I as a researcher am permitted to know about their lived experiences (Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2010). In addition, there could be any number of reasons why this setting might induce gender euphoria for this participant. Validation from one’s sexual partners for transgender individuals may help explain this bout of gender euphoria, even if gender euphoria is not always experienced as a direct result of sexual encounters with others (Platt and Bolland, 2017). It would appear that

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validation from others is an important aspect of experiencing gender euphoria, as explored in the previous chapter. Perhaps this sexual venue is when and where Participant 20 feels a sense of validation from others, and thus may experience gender euphoria. Regardless, this glimpse into one's sex life as being a factor in experiencing gender euphoria is unique.

The other reason this statement is interesting is the use of the word “vulnerable”. Participant 20 mentions that they can experience gender euphoria in sexual contexts, and that it feels “wonderful”, as well as “vulnerable”. The term “vulnerable” comes from the Latin *vulnerare*, meaning “wounding” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2020). To feel vulnerable is often associated in Western culture as something to be avoided, as one is more likely to sustain physical, mental, or emotional injury while in this state. And yet, vulnerability with loved ones is also prized, creating a confusing and hard-to-navigate narrative (Ahmed, 2004). As well, certain types of vulnerabilities, and the bodies who are allowed to express them, might be rewarded for their “emotional availability” or “bravery” in making themselves open to harm, while other bodies must become resilient and hard to prevent repeated injury via marginalization.

Transgender bodies are among those which are not permitted to be vulnerable: our bodies do not “do” gender correctly, despite systemic attempts at cisgender and heterosexual indoctrination (Butler, 1990). While our bodies are not permitted to *perform* vulnerability, our bodies are *rendered* vulnerable due to systemic oppression, erasure, stigma, and a lack of resources (Haas et al., 2011). Thus, by allowing themselves to be physically and emotionally vulnerable, transgender individuals allow interpersonal relationships to form despite the dangers associated with them. Perhaps Participant 11 also felt vulnerable with themselves and with their body, as Participant 20 seems to be; perhaps these experiences with sexual pleasure and gender euphoria are indicative of forming meaningful relationships with others and with ourselves.

Prior to conducting the research that forms the basis of this thesis, I had never considered a sexual component to gender euphoria. As such, these participants' comments are of particular interest. They demonstrate how one can experience sexual pleasure and gender euphoria because of experimentation with one's gender expression, as well as experience gender euphoria through sexual encounters with partners.

### 4.5 The Body and Beyond

In the course of my research I focused on the physical and sexual aspects of their responses and posited as to what this may indicate about gender euphoria and transgender lived experiences with the phenomenon. However, the comments of one participant suggest that I need also to consider that the body may not be the final boundary by which gender euphoria can be understood; indeed, it may be that gender euphoria allows one to *transcend* the body and one's sense of the physical altogether.

While the majority of responses were generally cohesive regarding how they related to their bodies, Participant 3 described gender euphoria in a particularly unique way. They wrote: “[w]hen I am presenting as my true self I feel like nothing else matters. I say it is out of body because for myself personally I do not feel limited to my physical body anymore”. In addition, Participant 3 mentions gender euphoria as being an out-of-body experience. This seems to suggest a sensation of transcendence from the physical confines of the body, describing the sensation as not being “limited” to their physical body while experiencing gender euphoria. This implies that gender euphoria can create a sense of living within, as well as beyond, one's physical embodiment (Hood et al., 2009, p. 333). In addition, this implication that the physical body is “limiting” warrants discussion. While the physical body is indeed technically limiting, as

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the borders of one's skin are often considered the distinguishing factor between the "self" and our surroundings, the use of the word here implies an unwelcome sense of confinement. One may recall that etymologically speaking, dysphoria as a term indicates confinement, choking, and anguish; a burden that is difficult to bear. This participant is the same one who, as explored earlier, mentioned that gender dysphoria made them want to crawl out of their skin, whereas gender euphoria made their skin feel attached to the body. Gender euphoria therefore has both a physical and a transcendental component for this individual. Participant 3 seems to have a unique relationship to their body; when dysphoric, their body is a source of discomfort and negative emotion; the body is something to be escaped. Yet, when experiencing gender euphoria, the body is both "lived in" and transcended; the skin is finally "attached", and yet left behind at the same time.

Participant 3's lived experiences and descriptions of gender euphoria as both freeing and a sense of comfort in one's body offers a unique perspective on gender euphoria. It could be that, for some transgender individuals, the body becomes irrelevant or secondary when experiencing gender euphoria, as they feel that they experience something beyond the realm of their physical bodies, or a sense of self not limited to the barrier of the skin. While these physical borders of the body exist, the emotional, mental, and psychological may not have such limitations. Gender euphoria may be, for some individuals anyhow, a means of moving beyond the body.

### 4.6 Chapter Conclusions

The second research question of this thesis was, "How does gender euphoria affect transgender individuals' self-image and their relationships to their bodies?". I concluded that

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experiencing gender euphoria generally has a positive impact on participants' self-image. While gender euphoria itself as a phenomenon was usually described as episodic and brought about by some trigger or stimulus, the feelings associated with experiencing it seemed to have a longer-lasting impact. Participants described gender euphoria as having a positive effect on their confidence in social situations and making most feel more at home and comfortable within their bodies and giving them the self-assurance needed to present according to their gender identities.

Moreover, experiencing gender euphoria also seems to positively affect how participants relate to their bodies. The majority described feeling more comfortable and at home in their own bodies when experiencing gender euphoria and liked their bodies more. When presenting according to their desired gender expression, it was often considered a freeing and confidence-boosting experience. Being euphoric about some aspect of one's gender helped participants to love and accept their bodies more. There was a notable exception in Participant 5, who experienced gender euphoria followed by intensely negative feelings regarding his body, but he was an outlier. Gender euphoria seems to be a component in many transgender individuals fostering more compassionate feelings toward their bodies.

In addition to more generalized relationships to the body, some participants described a sexual or spiritual component to gender euphoria, suggesting that this phenomenon extends within and beyond the body in ways that I, as a researcher, had not considered. Two participants described sexual experiences related to gender euphoria: one participant felt sexually aroused by wearing a chest binder for the first time, and another described feeling euphoric when having sexual encounters with sexual partners. This suggests that the transgender body can be a site of sexual pleasure and gender euphoria, both as a body simply existing and as a body engaged in sexual activity.

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Lastly, I examined how one participant described gender euphoria as an out-of-body experience, implying transcendent dimension to gender euphoria that had likewise been something of which I was not aware. This transcendence of the body suggests that gender euphoria may be able to move beyond the physical borders of the body, at least for some individuals.

Gender euphoria seems to positively impact many transgender individuals' self-image and their relationships to their bodies in myriad ways, some of which were as remarkable as they were unexpected.

### Chapter 5: Drawing Conclusions

#### 5.1 Strengths and Weaknesses

In order to explore gender euphoria, and how transgender adults living in Canada experience it, I formulated two research questions: “how do transgender individuals define gender euphoria and how do they experience it?”, and “how does gender euphoria affect transgender individuals’ self-image and their relationships to their bodies?”.

Gender euphoria is as diverse a phenomenon as the people who experience it in their day-to-day lives. Transgender individuals living in Canada defined gender euphoria generally as a feeling of comfort and joy when one’s body aligns with one’s self-perception. They generally experienced gender euphoria as positive emotions that came and went episodically, and were often triggered by some form of stimulus, such as someone using their correct name and pronouns. Being able to change one’s gender expression was also an important factor, as it allowed participants to convey to others what their gender identity might be. The sheer diversity of ways in which participants identified also indicated that their lived experiences were varied, and yet also many possessed similar feelings regarding when and how gender euphoria was induced.

The majority of my participants stated that gender euphoria positively impacted their self-image, as they were more content with their bodies or gender expressions. Gender euphoria allowed them to feel more confident about their appearances and to feel validated in their gender identities. In the same vein, they explained that gender euphoria was often induced by internal or external factors. Internal factors included looking in a mirror while dressed in clothing that

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reflects one's gender identity, or the realization of transness. External factors included loved ones and strangers using the correct name or pronouns.

Interestingly, gender euphoria did not seem to be largely contingent upon gender affirmation surgery or hormone replacement therapy but could be induced by other factors in one's life. Participants generally thought more positively about their bodies while experiencing gender euphoria, however. In addition, there were two unique dimensions to discussing the body that arose from this analysis: a sexual component and a transcendent component. Where some participants described experiencing gender euphoria in sexual encounters with others or during moments of extreme euphoria, others felt they transcended their bodies entirely. This suggests that gender euphoria may have dimensions to it that have not been thoroughly explored by academia just yet, and that gender euphoria contains multitudes of complexities that warrant consideration, discussion, and study. Of note, the online survey method of data collection meant that, where some participants were reticent to share their lived experiences with me, I was forced to speculate as to the nature of their responses. As a result, an in-person interview might be an important form of collecting information on gender euphoria in future studies.

### 5.2 Suggestions for Future Study

Gender euphoria is a phenomenon that seems to impact many aspects of a transgender individual's life. As such, further study into these aspects might prove to be beneficial in better understanding how gender euphoria is experienced, how it can be defined, and how it affects the narratives of transgender individuals and our communities. Moreover, future studies regarding the potentially sexual nature of gender euphoria may yield insightful results and could prove to be a factor deserving of greater research in the broader subject of transgender individuals and navigating romantic and sexual relationships. Another suggestion is to focus on the transcendent

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aspect of gender euphoria, and how this might be a unique experience described by one participant. More generally, further studies on how and why gender euphoria is experienced could illuminate aspects of transgender lived experiences that are currently less robust compared to gender dysphoria and other, more negative aspects of those lived experiences.

### 5.3 Bringing It All Together

Transgender individuals have often been defined by our pain. Our lives are presumed to be miserable and uncomfortable, as well as brutal and short. Unfortunately, there is truth to these statements; the marginalization transgender communities face shapes our histories and our futures. However, this is not the only thing that defines us: our communities experience vibrant, positive emotions like love, comfort, and joy. Unlike the experience of gender dysphoria, which is often thought to be the cornerstone of every transgender person's life, gender euphoria is comparatively little-discussed and under-studied. Gender euphoria deserves to be explored and discussed among our communities and within the halls of academia, as it too can be central to the lived experiences of many transgender individuals. It is often defined as a feeling of comfort and joy in one's physical appearance when in alignment with one's self-perception. It is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that can be induced by a variety of stimuli and impacts each transgender individual differently. It disrupts and interrogates damage-centered narratives regarding transgender lives, bodies, and experiences. Its very existence threatens the notion that transgender bodies are inherently sources of anguish and discomfort.

This thesis has served to highlight the importance of discussing transgender narratives beyond the painful and the uncomfortable. By exploring how transgender adults living in Canada experience and define gender euphoria, and the impact it has on their self-image and relationships to their bodies, one can understand transgender lived experiences with greater

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nuance. Our lives become as complex as any other group of individuals how experience their share of hardship and happiness. This research is, in essence, my attempt to *humanize* us, by revealing the joy and love we have for ourselves and our bodies, despite the systemic violence we face. Ultimately, gender euphoria is a uniquely transgender epistemology and way of knowing that is worthy of greater representation within the literature as well as transgender communities. It can be used as a means of connecting to others, to our bodies, and to our senses of self.

Gender euphoria is a powerful thing, and it is beautiful.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment Script

My name is Sam Tacit and I am a student in the Gender Studies Department at Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am conducting a research project called “Joyful Bodies, Joyful Minds: Gender Euphoria Among Transgender Adults Living in Canada” for my master’s degree under the supervision of Dr. Sonja Boon and Dr. Vicki Hallett. The purpose of the study is to investigate how transgender adults living in Canada define gender euphoria, and to learn about their experiences with gender euphoria.

I am contacting you to invite you to participate in an online survey in which you will be asked to answer questions about gender euphoria. Participation will require about 45 minutes in a single (1) session.

In order to fulfill the requirements to participate in this survey, all participants must be: 18 years of age or older, currently living in Canada, self-identify as transgender, have internet access to access the survey, speak and read and write in English, and be able to give informed consent.

Please note that this study is not associated with, or a requirement of, any organization involved in distributing the information, and that they will not know who does or does not participate in it.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please click the link below to access the online survey.

If you have any questions about me or my project, please contact me by email at [stacit@mun.ca](mailto:stacit@mun.ca).

If you know anyone who may be interested in participating in this study, please give them a copy of this information.

The link to the survey is below:

[https://mun.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_bJ9umbnXtvyb94h](https://mun.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bJ9umbnXtvyb94h)

Thank you in advance for considering my request,

Sam Tacit

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at [icehr.chair@mun.ca](mailto:icehr.chair@mun.ca) or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

## Appendix B: Recruitment Closing Script

Dear Participant and/or Interested Party,

Thank you for clicking on my survey. Due to the unexpectedly high volume of responses, the survey is no longer accepting participants as of 12:00AM, November 11, 2019. Thank you all very much for your interest and support. If you have any questions regarding the survey, please contact me at [stacit@mun.ca](mailto:stacit@mun.ca).

Sincerely,

Sam Tacit

## Appendix C: Informed Consent Form



Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of Gender Studies  
SN 4082, 232 Elizabeth Ave, St. John's, NL A1B 3X9  
Tel: 709-864-3322 [gndr@mun.ca](mailto:gndr@mun.ca) [www.mun.ca](http://www.mun.ca)

### Informed Consent Form

Title: Joyful Bodies, Joyful Minds: Gender Euphoria Among Transgender Adults Living in Canada

Researcher(s): Sam Tacit, Memorial University of Newfoundland Master of Gender Studies Student – [stacit@mun.ca](mailto:stacit@mun.ca)

Supervisor(s): Dr. Sonja Boon, Associate Professor – [sboon@mun.ca](mailto:sboon@mun.ca)  
Dr. Vicki Hallett, Assistant Professor – [vshallett@mun.ca](mailto:vshallett@mun.ca)

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled “Joyful Bodies, Joyful Minds: Gender Euphoria Among Transgender Adults Living in Canada”.

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact the researcher, Sam Tacit, if you have any questions about the study or would like more information before you consent.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

#### Introduction:

My name is Sam Tacit. I am transgender and nonbinary and my pronouns are they/them. I am a graduate student at the Memorial University of Newfoundland in the Gender Studies department. As part of my Master thesis, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Sonja Boon and Dr. Vicki Hallett.

**Purpose of Study:**

The purpose of this study is to learn about how transgender adults living in Canada experience gender euphoria. Gender euphoria is an enjoyment in one's gender identity (your sense of being a man, a woman, neither, both, etc.) and/or gender expression (clothing, makeup, etc.). This study also seeks to see if gender euphoria has any impact on how transgender adults feel about themselves (self-esteem) or think about themselves (self-image).

**What You Will Do in this Study:**

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to answer questions in the following survey. You will be asked about your age, gender identity, where you are currently living in Canada, and about your experiences with gender euphoria.

**Length of Time:**

This survey is estimated to take about forty-five (45) minutes to complete.

**Withdrawal from the Study:**

Should you choose to withdraw from this study at any time, simply close the window of the survey and DO NOT submit the information you have provided before doing so.

**Possible Benefits:**

The potential benefits to participants for participating in this study are greater insights into how gender euphoria can positively affect someone's self-image and self-esteem. The potential benefits to the scientific and scholarly community are a greater insight into how to better help transgender communities in coping with discrimination and self-esteem issues.

**Possible Risks:**

Given that transgender communities do face discrimination, the possible risks of participating in this study include emotional discomfort or distress when asked to speak about these experiences. In order to address these potential risks, we have provided a series of numbers and online resources, if you need to speak to someone. Please skip any questions you do not feel comfortable answering.

LGBT+ Youthline: 1-800-268-9688

Trevor Project: 1-866-488-7386

Planned Parenthood: 1-800-230-PLAN

KidsHelpPhone: 1-800-668-6868

Crisis Text Line: Text TALK to 686868 for service in English

First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness: 1-855-242-3310

ShelterSafe.ca

### **Confidentiality:**

The ethical duty of confidentiality includes safeguarding participants' identities, personal information, and data from unauthorized access, use, or disclosure.

As a participant in this study, your confidentiality and privacy will be maintained in a variety of ways. No identifying information will be asked of you in order to participate. In addition, the data collected in this study will be presented in aggregate. Moreover, the data will be stored on a password protected computer that only the researcher and supervisors can access. As well as presenting the data in aggregate, some direct quotations may be used.

### **Anonymity:**

Your participation is anonymous and data is collected anonymously. Please do not include any identifying information or information you do not want reported.

### **Use, Access, Ownership, and Storage of Data:**

The data will be stored on a password-protected computer. The researcher (Sam Tacit) and the supervisors of this project (Dr. Sonja Boon and Dr. Vicki Hallett) will have sole access to the data. Data will be kept for a minimum of five years, as required by Memorial University's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research. After this five-year period, the data will be destroyed.

### **Third-Party Data Collection and/or Storage:**

Data collected from you as part of your participation in this project will be hosted and/or stored electronically on a password-protected computer. Should you choose NOT to proceed with the submission of your survey, simply close the window with the survey in order to not submit your responses. If you have questions or concerns about how your data will be collected or stored, please contact the researcher and/or visit the provider's website for more information before participating. The privacy and security policy of the third-party hosting data collection and/or storing data can be found at: <https://www.qualtrics.com/privacy-statement/>.

### **Reporting of Results:**

Upon completion, my thesis will be available at Memorial University's Queen Elizabeth II library, and can be accessed online at: <http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/search/collection/theses>.

### **Sharing of Results with Participants:**

If you have any questions about this study, please contact the researcher via email (listed below).

### Questions:

You are welcome to ask questions before, during, or after your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact:

Researcher: Sam Tacit – [stacit@mun.ca](mailto:stacit@mun.ca)

Supervisor(s): Dr. Sonja Boon, Associate Professor – [sboon@mun.ca](mailto:sboon@mun.ca)

Dr. Vicki Hallett, Assistant Professor – [vshallett@mun.ca](mailto:vshallett@mun.ca)

### ICEHR Declaration

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at [icehr@mun.ca](mailto:icehr@mun.ca) or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

### Consent:

By completing this survey you agree that:

- You have read the information about the research.
- You have been advised that you may ask questions about this study and receive answers prior to continuing.
- You are satisfied that any questions you had have been addressed.
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw participation from the study by closing your browser window or navigating away from this page, without having to give a reason and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.
- You understand that this data is being collected anonymously and therefore your data CANNOT be removed once you submit this survey
- 

By consenting to this online survey, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

Please retain a copy of this consent information for your records.

**By clicking the “I Accept” button below and submitting this completed survey, you are providing informed consent and that implies your agreement to the above statements.**

## Appendix D: Survey Questions

- 1) Are you 18 years of age or older? (Must answer 'Yes' to proceed)
- 2) Do you currently live in Canada? (Must answer 'Yes' to proceed)
- 3) If yes, please specify which province.
- 4) Please state your pronouns.
- 5) If possible, please explain how you would personally define your gender identity.
- 6) Gender euphoria has been defined as “the enjoyment of one’s gender identity, expression, or affiliation” (Squires and Brouwer 2002). By this, the authors mean that gender euphoria is essentially a sense of enjoyment in how someone identifies, and how they present themselves (such as through clothing, makeup, etc). Do you agree with this definition? Do you disagree with it? Why or why not?
- 7) What would you see as the strengths and/or limitations of this definition? How would you define gender euphoria? Please explain in your own words.
- 8) Have you ever experienced gender euphoria? Please describe any instances you experienced and are comfortable sharing below.
- 9) If you have experienced gender euphoria, how did experiencing gender euphoria make you feel or think about yourself? About your gender identity?
- 10) Have you sought out definitions of gender euphoria or sources on gender euphoria? What did you find on the subject? How do these discussions and definitions align (or misalign) with your definitions and experiences of gender euphoria?
- 11) If you have anything else to add about gender euphoria or your personal experiences with it, please do so below.

## Appendix E: ICEHR Approval



**Interdisciplinary  
Committee on  
Ethics in Human  
Research  
(ICEHR)**

St.  
John's,  
NL  
Canada  
A1C 5S7  
Tel: 709  
864-  
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icehr@  
mun.ca

[www.mun.ca/research/ethics/humans/icehr](http://www.mun.ca/research/ethics/humans/icehr)

ICEHR Number:	<b>20200624-AR</b>
Approval Period:	October 21, 2019 – October 31, 2020
Funding Source:	Not Funded
Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Vicki Hallett Gender Studies
Title of Project:	<i>Joyful Bodies, Joyful Minds: Gender Euphoria among Transgender Adults Living in Canada</i>

October 21, 2019

Mx. Sam Tacit  
Department of Gender Studies  
Faculty of Humanities and  
Social Sciences Memorial  
University of  
Newfoundland

Dear Mx. Tacit:

Thank you for your correspondence of September 27, 2019 addressing the issues raised by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) concerning the above-named research project. ICEHR has re-examined the proposal with the clarification and revisions submitted, and is satisfied that the concerns raised by the Committee have been adequately addressed. In accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2)*, the project has been granted *full ethics clearance* to October 31, 2020. ICEHR approval applies to the ethical acceptability of the research, as per Article 6.3 of the *TCPS2*. Researchers are responsible for adherence to any other relevant University policies and/or funded or

non-funded agreements that may be associated with the project.

The *TCPS2* **requires** that you submit an Annual Update to ICEHR before October 31, 2020. If you plan to continue the project, you need to request renewal of your ethics clearance and include a brief summary on the progress of your research. When the project no longer involves contact with human participants, is completed and/or terminated, you are required to provide an annual update with a brief final summary and your file will be closed. If you need to make changes during the project which may raise ethical concerns, you must submit an Amendment Request with a description of these changes for the Committee's consideration prior to implementation. If funding is obtained subsequent to approval, you must submit a Funding and/or Partner Change Request to ICEHR before this clearance can be linked to your award.

All post-approval event forms noted above can be submitted from your Researcher Portal account by clicking the *Applications: Post-Review* link on your Portal homepage. We wish you success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kelly Blidook', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Kelly Blidook, Ph.D.  
Vice-Chair,  
Interdisciplinary  
Committee on Ethics in  
Human Research

KB/bc

cc: Supervisor – Dr. Vicki Hallett, Department of Gender Studies, Faculty of  
Humanities and Social Sciences

## Appendix F: Participant Responses

Participant responses were gathered using the Qualtrics survey software. In total, 26 participants responded to this survey. Their response are listed below.

ResponseId	Q1	Q2
Response ID	Are you 18 years of age or older?	Do you currently live in Canada?

1	Yes	Yes
2	Yes	Yes
3	Yes	Yes
4	Yes	Yes
5	Yes	Yes

6	Yes	Yes
7	Yes	Yes

8	Yes	Yes
---	-----	-----

9	Yes	Yes
---	-----	-----

10	Yes	Yes
----	-----	-----

11	Yes	Yes
----	-----	-----

12	Yes	Yes
----	-----	-----

13

Yes

Yes

14

Yes

Yes

15

Yes

Yes

16

Yes

Yes

17

Yes

Yes

18

Yes

Yes

19	Yes	Yes
----	-----	-----

20	Yes	Yes
----	-----	-----

21	Yes	Yes
----	-----	-----

22	Yes	Yes
----	-----	-----

23	Yes	Yes
----	-----	-----

24	Yes	Yes
----	-----	-----

25	Yes	Yes
----	-----	-----

26

Yes

Yes

Q3

Q4

If yes, please specify which province.

Please state your pronouns.

Newfoundland and Labrador

They/them

Alberta

She/her

Newfoundland and Labrador

She/her/they/them

Ontario

They/them

Newfoundland and Labrador

He/him

Newfoundland and Labrador	he/him but also not adverse to she/her? i do NOT like they/them
Newfoundland and Labrador	They/Them

Ontario	they/them
---------	-----------

Quebec	She Her
--------	---------

Ontario	He/him
---------	--------

Newfoundland and Labrador	Any
---------------------------	-----

Nova Scotia	They/Them/He
-------------	--------------

Newfoundland and Labrador

He/they

Ontario

She/her, they/them

Ontario

They them

Nova Scotia

She, her

British Columbia

they/them

Ontario

They/she

British Columbia

He/him

British Columbia

they/them or she/her

Ontario

they/them

Nova Scotia

He/him

Ontario

She/Her or They/Them

Ontario

She/her/hers, they/them/theirs

Ontario

they/them

Ontario

They/them or fae/faer

Q5

If possible, please explain how you would personally define your gender ide

Queer, trans, non-binary

I am currentlt exploring, although I would consider myself a trans woman, perhaps a transfemme enby.

Transgender female

Transmasculine, genderqueer, non binary

A questioning/pre transition closeted trans man

I identify as a boy/male, and identify with masculinity but have a lot of feminine aspects, and things i like that are typically considered "feminine" that I feel i shouldn't have to shy away from to be myself. I am a transguy, but don't like referring to myself as such often.

Non-binary

Non-binary; as an afab person, the defining phrase I use when talking to cis people is "not a woman". While I dislike framing my non-binary identity based on the binary, this is often the easiest way to get cis people to not misgender me and not use feminine-coded language when referring to me. In general, I view my identity as a sort of ambiguous cloud that surrounds the area slightly to the masculine side of centre on the gender spectrum.

I am a trans woman

Trans man

Gender Queer

Demi-bou

Agender

I am a genderflux Demigirl. My gender fluctuates between girl and agender. Think of my gender like a dimmer switch. I can be intensely girlish, dimmed down all the way to no gender at all, or somewhere in between.

Gender queer, non-binary, genderfluid, trans-androgynous.

I identify as female

non-binary

femme-non binary

Gender retired

I'm a gender nihilist trans woman. Gender's fake but I'm not exempt from transmisogynist violence is a reductive way to articulate those labels.

non binary

I identify as a transgender male. My inner sense of gender is somewhere between genderless and male but I am most comfortable living as male in society.

The definition I prefer is "Mahu" which is a Hawaiian word meaning "In the middle". I also can use bi-gender interchangeably. My identity is about 80% feminine 20% masculine

non binary

Nonbinary, genderqueer, gendervague/neurogender(a gender that is informed by ones neurodiversity, in my case autism), agender, transmasculine

Q6

Gender euphoria has been defined

as “the enjoyment of one’s gender identity, expression, or affiliation”

(Squires and Brouwer 2002). By this, the authors mean that

gender euphoria is essentially a sense of enjoyment in how someone identifies, and how they present themselves (such as through clothing,

makeup, etc). Do you agree with this definition? Do you disagree with it?

Why or why not?

That's a pretty good definition, but it doesn't feel expressive enough?

Gender euphoria is beyond just enjoyment - it's a strong sense of belonging and rightness when it comes to your gender. And you experience the euphoria from the most unsuspecting things - like trying on a skirt, a shirt and tie, or having a stranger use the right pronouns. I dunno, when gender euphoria hits it's like a magical experience - but I guess that's hard to describe in a quick academic definition.

I would agree with this statement, although I might expand it to include affirmation of one's gender identity as well. A lot of the times when I feel euphoric, the majority of it comes from feelings of validation.

I highly agree with this definition. I do not feel more complete as I do when I am presenting how I feel within myself.

Yes I do. I have come to know gender euphoria as this definition and felt the joy associated with it.

I agree

I LOVE the idea of gender euphoria and its extremely useful, I think, for those trans people who don't experience dysphoria. You do NOT need to be dysphoric to be trans, and not everyone is going to be euphoric or dysphoric in the same ways. I personally was EXTREMELY dysphoric over my chest before top surgery, but have never felt dysphoria in regards to genitalia. I feel extremely euphoric when I'm called by my proper name, and I look in the mirror and see a masculine looking figure.

Bottom line, I think. Is some people feel indifferent about their gender assigned at birth, but VERY content and happy with another gender, and to say that those people, who only experience euphoria, aren't valid, is extremely transphobic and very "gatekeeping"

I most definite agree with this definition because it seems as if it would applicable to most, if not all, trans identifying people.

I do yes because I am happy within my trans identity

I agree with it, though my understanding of euphoria is influenced by the fact that I also experience dysphoria, so sometimes I see it for me as the lack of dysphoria or the ability to not be impeded by my dysphoria

Yes, I agree with this.

I do agree with this definition.

I agree with this definition.

For the most part, I agree.

I agree: gender+euphoria=state of happiness and excitement in identify

Yes, largely. I would also add that there is a sense of feeling "right", of being read the way you wish to be read, of seeing yourself in wholeness, of being gendered correctly, etc.

Agreed!

Yes - there is a deep, visceral pleasure in both expressing but ALSO being recognized for a part of my identity that felt unacknowledged for so long.

Seems like an alright definition. Covers people who identify with a gender and those who see it more as performance/performativity/expression/affiliation so that seems good.

yes i do, somewhat, because it lines up with my own experiences. However, there is also an element that goes beyond the word "enjoyment"; it's a feeling of rightness and really belonging in your body. like a "oohhh! so THIS is how its supposed to be!"

I would disagree and say gender euphoria is when your inner sense of gender is affirmed by an external event like something someone says or by clothing you see yourself wearing

I hadn't really thought about how I identify as "euphoric" by nature. I saw my dysphoria in the same way that one feels when they are ill. So conversely when one feels well, they don't see themselves as being "euphoricly well". My state in the opposite of being dysphoric is a state of: contentment. Which would be to say that it is at a state of normalcy. To me if I was in a state of gender euphoria, I would be ecstatic, or excited about my identity, which is not a seemingly sustainable emotional state.

I agree with it. Dysphoria didn't help me realise I was trans; I thought I was experiencing internalised misogyny and body dysmorphia. The things that helped me realise I was trans were being mistaken for a boy/confusing people in public.

Q7

What

would you see as the strengths and/or limitations of this definition? How would you define gender euphoria? Please explain in your own words.

In my experience, gender euphoria is something you experience in brief, intense moments. It's not the kind of enjoyment that is always there, but it's something you feel as a result of feeling that you wholly fit your own gender. But how do you put into words such a personal, intense, emotional experience? I've barely even talked with other trans folks about what it's like to feel gender euphoria, so I'm not sure my experience of it is like anyone else's - perhaps it is less intense and a more overall feeling for some people?

I think a strength of the definition is that it includes being associated/affiliated with the right gender. Sometimes just being grouped in with the right people can trigger feelings of gender euphoria, and we often forget about that. People could see this as a purely aesthetic thing, but it's waaaay beyond just how you dress and look.

Euphoria is difficult to define in rigid terms. Some things bring euphoria some days and some days they don't. For example, some days I feel euphoric wearing makeup and some days I don't feel any different. This could be due to the fact I might be non-binary or gender fluid, however, so take that with a grain of salt.

This definition seems to take into the account the out of body experience that some trans individuals feel. When I am presenting as my true self I feel like nothing else matters. I say it is out of body because for myself personally I do not feel limited to my physical body anymore.

Enjoyment does not have to be the only word to describe these feelings. Terms like affirmation, pride, strength, encouragement, love are some that come to mind among others.

In my experience, gender euphoria for me is a feeling of extreme joy/contentment when I am perceived as a male.

I already explained it woops.

One strength of this definition is that it does not define euphoria as based on dysphoria. For my personal experiences, it would be accurate to describe gender euphoria as a distinct absence of dysphoria, but this is not true for all trans people as not all trans people experience dysphoria in the first place.

Being content with ones gender identity

This definition fits a broader context for people who see their expression of gender as an uplifting process, and though it doesn't address the ways in which being affirmed and not feeling social, physical, or emotional burdens can be freeing to a person. Perhaps again, my perspective is not the widest scope of euphoria possible to explain this concept

I think a limitation to the definition could be that it doesn't address situationally, being more so on a spectrum of enjoyment. Some days the feeling of enjoyment is stronger and plays out in various ways. But I don't think it needs to necessarily explain that.

Basically just anything that makes you feel secure in your gender, whether that is clothing or your hair, how you Express yourself.

I feel that there are limitations in this definition in that gender euphoria can be measure on a spectrum much like many other aspects of the human condition. So while "enjoyment" is technically accurate I don't think it full captures the potential intensity of the feeling.

I would add that gender euphoria can also come specifically from how others perceive your gender and react. For example, when someone uses the correct pronouns without being told.

Another limitation is the lack of weight being given to the feeling. Simply calling it "the enjoyment of" diminishes how powerful the feeling can be, even life saving. For folks who have felt gender dysphoria their whole lives and have finally achieved gender euphoria for the first time, I wouldn't just say they're having fun with it. It's elation. It's relief. It's excitement. It's comfort in one's own skin. We don't just do it because we enjoy it, but because it might save our lives.

A weakness is that it done not provide much context.

See above for my answers to strengths/limitations. Gender euphoria is the feeling of gender affirmation/joy/happiness/contentment that can c  
As opposed to disphoria caused by the feeling of repulsion with usually gendered aspects of the self, gender euphoria is the positive and self affirming feeling of being pleased with and content with gendered aspects of the self.

I think euphoria has connotations of transience, and it's important to recognize that after the dust settles, there is still a very real sense of belonging and contentment in oneself that arises from both expressing and being recognized as your chosen gender. It isn't perhaps euphoria - more like affirmation, contentment, or comfort.

I think the above definition works.

the strengths are that it gives an opposite to gender dysphoria, and can help those who don't feel dysphoria to recognize their euphoria.

The limitations are that the wording is very specific; "enjoyment" could be taken to mean the same feeling you get when you have your favourite food. like i said above, the feeling of it goes past enjoyment and into rightness and truth.

I would disagree and say gender euphoria is when your inner sense of gender is affirmed by an external event like something someone says or by clothing you see yourself wearing

The loss in using "euphoria" is the pretense of it being "an intense state, or feeling". I have had brief moments where I have felt giddy that I have reached a point in transition that was by self standards; successful. These are moments of being elated or euphoric regarding my identity.

So gender euphoria to me is described as having moments of intense feelings of happiness in regarding one's gender identity.

Gender euphoria is the experience of joy or happiness from ones gender identity being recognised and/or supported.

Q8

Have you ever experienced gender euphoria? Please describe any instances you experienced and are comfortable sharing below.

Absolutely, and a few times stick out. The first time I tried on a men's button-front shirt while binding. They wouldn't let me try on the shirt in the men's change rooms, so I used the women's. The shirt was a size too big, but I couldn't stop staring at myself in the mirror. I was seeing what I -could- look like and it matched up so perfectly with how I -wanted- to look.

The same thing happened when I tried on a pair of canvas joggers for the first time. The pants minimized my hips, so it looked like I had a much more masculine waistline... And I started to cry. I thought I was crying at first because of dysphoria, but it was actually because I was so happy. I finally felt like the me I saw in the mirror matched the version of me I saw in my head. Suddenly, all new possibilities for social interactions went through my head and I imagined all these great scenarios just living my life, but with less noticeable hips.

The biggest for me was putting on lipstick and mascara for the first time. It allowed me to view my face in a feminine manner for the first time, despite some of my masculine features (ie. At the time I still had a beard). Secondary was wearing a dress, which just felt so right. It still does. The third one that's quite notable would be when my friends call me by she/her pronouns, or when I see those pronouns used to refer to my name. There is a website called the pronoun dresser which lets you substitute your name and pronouns in several passages, which really helped me cement they were for me. When I get euphoria I get a tingly happy feeling in my stomach, mostly because I'm scared but also because it makes me feel right. I smile a lot when I try to present as a woman.

When I am experiencing gender euphoria it is kind of hard to put into words, as I've mentioned to me it feels out of body. When I am wearing makeup and my hair is down I really feel euphoria.

When people use the correct pronouns or assume my gender is different than what was assigned at birth. People being open minded, curious and accepting. Chest binding, shopping for affirming clothes, hormone changes from hrt. Hair cuts/ grow. Feelings of androgyny.

I experience gender euphoria almost daily when I am perceived initially as male due to my appearance. I also experience gender euphoria when I wear my binder and give the illusion of a flat chest.

Woops, I guess i already explained this also, but i feel it when people use my name/pronouns, and i see my flat chest/masculine figure

The amount of euphoria I felt the first time I tried on my binder was incredible, and I spent at least 2 hours that night trying on all of my shirts and crying because my clothes were finally fitting in a way that made me feel good about myself. While this is the most dramatic version of euphoria that I have experiences, there is some aspect of euphoria in my every day life whenever I'm gendered correctly, for example.

No I have not

I experience euphoria at being gendered correctly, at expressing myself in the outfits I put together, and when I am with my partner as he as wonderfully affirming

Yes, the first time I ever put on a chest binder I was so euphoric about it, I actually ended up being sexually turned on by the feeling of euphoria. That peak moment passed quickly, and I don't usually experience that when wearing a binder now, but it still gives me a very solid sense of gender euphoria and comfort daily. That was probably one of the most notable instances. And anytime I try on clothes that I like and they fit properly, but yet look good, I also experience euphoric feelings.

I have. I didn't know what it was at the time though. I think my greatest source of gender euphoria is dying my hair. When I have short hair that's brown I'm gendered as a man or a woman, when I dye it a fun colour people don't know what to think of me. I like that.

Yes I have.

As a person with a fluid identity my experience with euphoria can be inconsistent.

For example, I have felt euphoria when wearing certain clothing, been called certain pet names, or pronouns. Sometimes euphoria has even been triggered in reaction to other people. For instance, when around individuals who have a strong masculine energy I often feel very feminine by comparison. So, if I am interacting with them on a day where I feel very "girly" that can trigger euphoria.

However, the same situations can also make me feel nothing or apathetic on days where I am not the gender being affirmed. So for example, if someone gives me a feminine coded compliment on a day where I am feeling genderless I will likely feel nothing.

Yes.

When I dress so androgynously that someone has to ask me my pronouns, or wait to hear my voice to assume my pronouns, or simply assumes that I use they/them pronouns.

Sometimes when I'm doing a drag show, the embodiment of masculinity that I don't have access to outside of drag can be euphoric.

Generally, regarding my appearance, when I adhere to gender normative standards of femininity it improves my confidence and mood.

Binding my chest with kt tape for the first time and climbing a tree while enjoying the feeling of my shirt against my bare skin for the first time since elementary school. Buying men's short sleeves button downs for the first time. Cutting my hair short and finally enjoying a haircut for the first time in years.

Yes, it is the driving force of my transition, when I look my best I feel it deeply. It happens for me often now.

I experience gender euphoria when I look in the mirror and see a person who appears genderless or ambiguously gendered, and elegant and graceful within that.

Most of my experiences like that have been sexual so I'll omit 'em, but being in bed with people who see me as I am is pretty vulnerable and wonderful. Also really like discussing gender with people who have deep, nuanced critiques of gender as such, that gives me that feeling along with one of camaraderie or community.

yes, when i got my first chest binder, When my facial hair became thicker and stronger, and when a young kid asked me if i was a boy or a girl.

Seeing myself finally have full facial hair, seeing myself in a suit, seeing myself without breasts, getting called sir

Jeez....ok. After my managers were informed of my change, I came to work as myself. Makeup, nail polish and more feminine clothing. I knew I had arrived. I experienced moments like this while on a European trip a few weeks later. Also, when my hair reached my shoulders.....I have a hair thing, I had long hair as a teen and identified strongly with it and my feminine side. So when I grew it again at 49 it was, well a quantum improvement in my identity.

Yes. When I first cut off my long hair, the first time I bound my chest or wore a binder, when people use my preferred pronouns

Q9

If you have experienced gender

euphoria, how did experiencing gender euphoria make you feel or think about yourself? About your gender identity?

It feels awesome, like everything is clicking into place and like it all matches up. It felt like a relief as well - like "oh, thank god, now I don't have to worry about this as much". After I tried on those pants and saw my hips were kinda hidden, it was a rush of relief to know that if I wore that type of pants, I would look how I wanted to look. It gave me a sense of control over my appearance that I hadn't had before - women's clothing never de-emphasizes your hips and so I thought I would just always be stuck with noticeable hips. However, the joggers and following euphoria showed me that wasn't true, and I was so relieved. There's also excitement because then you know that it is indeed possible to become the person you want to become, and to look how you want to look, and to present as you intend to present. Gender euphoria is very confirming for your gender identity, and it makes specific labels feel less important. That feeling of belonging is so much more important than labels

The first time I wore lipstick, I looked at myself in the mirror and said to myself, "oh fuck, I'm trans". My first feelings were a mixture of "wow, this is what I've been supposed to be like all these years" and "my life is going to be a lot harder if I do this". My mindset changed from "am I really trans?" to "I am definitely not male, but do I really want to go through with transitioning?" almost instantly. There are a lot of challenges with being transgender in Alberta, and I primarily worried about my career prospects. My gender identity feels like something I need to hide. I do not present feminine in public aside from a shaved face, longer hair, and a couple of women's cut coats that are still rather androgynous. Euphoria in this instance has not been enough for me to present in public. It has become more of a "is this worth it" question rather than "is this real".

It made me look at myself in the mirror differently. Usually I feel a sense of dysphoria and who I see is not who I am. However, when I see myself with makeup I do not question what I look like.

Confident, loved my self a little more, appreciated my own identity and helps eliminate self doubt. Empowered.

Gender euphoria for me is usually an extreme high, followed by an extreme low. I experience joy at first, and then usually feel a multitude of emotions such as fear, anger, and resentment towards myself and the barriers I face in attempting to socially/ medically transition and the fact that I will never truly be a cis male.

Made me feel validated, like I know who i am, because who I am makes me happy. People should be allowed to feel happy in their own bodies, and if seeking out this euphoria is what's going to do it for them, then they should go for it. Gender is different for everyone.

The first time I experienced euphoria and was able to recognize it as euphoria was that first time I tried on my binder. As I mentioned before, it was an incredibly emotional experience for me because it solidified everything that I had been mulling over about gender, and it made me realize that seeking hormone therapy would be a very important step for me. It was an incredibly freeing experience, and the lessened dysphoria with the binder has allowed me to explore my presentation a lot more. It has been amazing to figure out which clothes make me feel good about myself, and I am so glad that I trusted my gut and bought the binder.

Pretty dang good, it is really nice and wonderful to feel euphoria

It made me feel comfortable, excited, and confident. I think more highly of myself, and more secure in my gender identity especially when I experience gender euphoria.

It gives me self confidence, it makes me feel like I deserve to take up space, that I deserve to exist. It makes me feel like I deserve to be seen and be heard, and not being a binary gender is okay.

Gender Euphoria is the feeling of being free. It the feeling of being completely unbound and able to express yourself however you want. It makes you feel energized and light. Social interaction come more easily and bring you more joy.

But you also simultaneously feel whole and grounded. You feel at home and connected to your body. It makes your sense of self feel strong, stable, and unflappable.

These two concepts together create a sense of peace and harmony.

Happy, comfortable, valid in my gender identity. Like I'm finally being seen as who I am, rather than being crammed into the binary boxes our society has constructed and perpetuated.

As above.

At first (before I was out to myself) it was stressful because it reminded me that there was a Big Gender Elephant in the Room that I hadn't dealt with. But after I had starting coming out, it felt good and affirming because I got to explore my gender more. Gender euphoria was the primary reason that I knew I was non-binary.

It helpsnto affirm my identity.

I felt perfect, as if there wasn't anything missing or wrong with me. Finding out how to dress in a way that left me feeling complete has led me to identify as somewhere that's both outside of and playing with gender as a concept. In some ways I feel like I now experience the same sort of lack of gender conflict that cis people feel, albeit with an expression that is not cisnormative.

Made me feel like gender is fake and so is the self and that's great since then you can just play and have fun. Flux and flow, not the static nature of a label or identity, makes me feel something approximating gender euphoria and that comes from recognizing the uniqueness that I am becoming at all times, always different and changing and growing. That's the stuff I like, and it makes me feel and think about me and all my friends and the wonderful diversity we all represent.

it feels really, really good. moving towards becoming more neutral, more androgynous, makes me feel amazing, and like my body fits me better. it was always mine, but i had to make some adjustments. the euphoria is better at affirming gender identity than dysphoria, because with dysphoria, it's only "shit somethings wrong and i hate it". with Euphoria, it becomes easier to find the things that make you go "oohhhh so this is what it's meant to be THIS is right".

It made me feel elated, validated, safe, confident

It was a celebration of my arrival. To finally feel an assemblance of peace, normalcy, rightness and comfort(love).

It made me more comfortable existing and taking up space as a trans person, and more confident in my identity as trans and nonbinary

Q10

Have you sought out definitions of gender euphoria or sources on gender euphoria? What did you find on the subject? How do these discussions and definitions align (or misalign) with your definitions and experiences of gender euphoria?

I've never googled gender euphoria because I didn't feel the need to. I had explained the pants-trying-on situation at a trans support meeting, indicating it as dysphoria. That's when folks piped up and explained that I was feeling euphoric, not dysphoric. Honestly, a word-based definition didn't matter because I knew what gender euphoria -felt- like. Buuut a definition would probably be helpful to explain how it feels to other people. But I think it's probably one of those things that can never be fully understood until it's felt.

Not particularly. I'm still exploring, and although I suppose I'm seeking out euphoria, I don't see myself as doing so. I simply see myself as trying to be the person I was meant to be.

My understanding about gender euphoria comes from my understanding of gender dysphoria. When I am feeling dysphoria, I could crawl out of my skin. But when I am feeling euphoria I finally feel like my skin is attached.

They all matched to my understanding.

Gender euphoria is not talked about nearly as much as dysphoria but the definitions and peer experiences I've heard have pretty much aligned completely with my own experience.

The only definitions I see that misalign with what I perceive it as, are from those who claim it's not a real thing, or that it's not enough to make someone a "real trans". Those arguments or lack of recognition, are just trash.

The bulk of my education has been through talking with other trans people, and so far those discussion and definition aligned very well with my definitions and experiences.

No I have not

My understanding of euphoria is limited as I'm not more educated on this matter, but I certainly have my own personal thoughts on it from having heard about the concept from online peer groups. The discussions online are all over the place and hard for me to follow, so I've chosen to stick away from those resources for now

No, not really. I have never looked up definitions or sources specifically. But I have engaged with others about the topic informally with my queer friends.

I havent really sought out gender euphoria.

I haven't found any academic definitions. The understanding I have accumulated has been through word of mouth via the trans community.

No

I have not, I graduated from Sociology and Social Anthropology at Dalhousie University in 2015 but the understanding of the subject of gender identity has expanded since that time.

I have recently been doing a research project that involves venturing into trans tumblr communities and have encountered a WIDE variety of definitions of euphoria, including the idea that it is just the opposite of dysphoria, which I wouldn't agree with. I would say that also tumblr was my primary source for definitions of euphoria before I came out, and I held on to the idea that if you had euphoria (even if you didn't have dysphoria) that could also be an experience that could make you trans. My understanding of euphoria's definition mostly aligns with these 2014-2015 tumblr definitions.

Yes.

Nope, not really. I've seen posts saying about how it is about the feeling you get when you find an expression that works for you.

Haven't really sought out definitions or sources, no.

not really, the subject just comes up with peers and it was usually defined as "the opposite of dysphoria" in combination with the given definition above. never had a full like, discussion on it.

No, I have only looked into gender dysphoria.

The wiki definition of gender dysphoria is a much more aligned definition to what I think gender euphoria is. Other sites and discussions on social messaging sites (such as Reddit) also seem to reflect on the moment in ones reflection rather than a "state of being". Although I noticed that the question of what is gender euphoria was a very common thread, suggesting that it is a newer term that is still finding main stream (at least in 2SLGBTQ circles) inclusion and use.

[https://gender.wikia.org/wiki/Gender\\_Euphoria](https://gender.wikia.org/wiki/Gender_Euphoria)

To some extent. Most definitions are similar to mine, though everyone differs on phrasing.

Q11

If you have anything else to add about gender euphoria or your personal experiences with it, please do so below.

I wish that people talked more about gender euphoria than gender dysphoria. It was pretty popular to define transness through the experience of dysphoria, but we don't subscribe to that anymore. I feel like the trans community overall should be defining transness through the experience of euphoria rather than dysphoria. I reckon that euphoria is the reason people figure out that they're trans, because they've felt a sense of belonging and gender alignment. Euphoria gives you a sense of direction for your trans journey. Whereas dysphoria is just a shitty fucking feeling, and sometimes it's so hard to pinpoint why you're feeling it. Dysphoria gives you no direction for your gender. Euphoria gives you a sense of where your gender feels best, or where you most belong with gender, what feels the most right.

I am struggling a lot with self hatred for a while, especially after coming out as non-binary, but the euphoria is one of the only factors in my life that makes me feel secure in my identity and proud of myself for realizing it.

I hope this study helps people but I am not understanding the relevance, some more context might encourage expanded responses.

I think gender euphoria is a big enough umbrella that it covers a lot of feelings and thoughts, seems like a nice way to shorthand what are basically pretty unique and vastly differing experiences between trans folks. Shorthand is useful when you don't know someone, but I can't imagine saying "gender euphoria" to a friend I know well when a story and description of the feeling in-depth would be more accurate and capture what I loved about it more specifically.