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FROM ANDROGYNY TO BINARY AND BACK: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF
NONBINARY TIKTOKS

By

Savannah “Freddie” Belle Hatton
B.A., Indiana University Southeast 2019

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts
in Sociology

Department of Sociology
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

August 2023

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A Thesis Approved on

April 27, 2023

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my best friend and closest companion: my dog Oscar. Through all of the ups and downs over the course of this journey, he has been with me every step of the way. Many cuddle breaks and petting sessions went into the making of this document.

ABSTRACT
FROM ANDROGYNY TO BINARY AND BACK: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF
NONBINARY TIKTOKS

Savannah "Freddie" Belle Hatton

April 27, 2023

This study explores how nonbinary individuals represent and express their gender on TikTok. Given the limited amount of research that has been done on nonbinary gender expression in online spaces, this study uses TikTok to observe the ways that nonbinary individuals perform gender. Additionally, given the relative newness of TikTok, this study serves to inform growing research on identity formation through social media. It used a sample of fifty TikToks by nonbinary creators to perform a content analysis. The findings reveal significant variation in how nonbinary individuals "do gender" on the platform, with some individuals identifying closely with binary labels, while others attempted to portray themselves as androgynous or fluid between the binary. Many utilized alternative/goth fashion to achieve their goals. Nonbinary individuals may use online "impression management" strategies to influence how their audience perceives them. This study's results carry significant implications for our understanding of how individuals create and express their gender identities in various ways. By examining how nonbinary individuals use TikTok to showcase their gender expressions, we can gain valuable insights into this expanding community and the ever-evolving dynamics of online identity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
INTRODUCTION.....	1
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	3
METHODS.....	12
FINDINGS.....	17
DISCUSSION.....	32
REFERENCES.....	40
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	44

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, there has been a notable surge in attention towards the manifestation of gender identity in digital spaces. Social media platforms have emerged as an outlet for individuals to explore and express their identities. This extends to nonbinary individuals who are people who identify beyond the conventional male or female binary. While nonbinary, individuals fall under what is commonly called the “transgender umbrella,” they differ significantly from binary transgender individuals who identify with the binary gender label that they were not given at birth. Though some nonbinary individuals are also comfortable using the label “transgender,” they exist outside of the gender binary (Darwin, 2020).

Despite existing research on nonbinary identity and experiences in academic and clinical contexts, there is a general lack of knowledge of how nonbinary individuals navigate online spaces. This study aims to bridge this gap by exploring how nonbinary individuals utilize TikTok, a popular social media platform, to express themselves and their gender identities. This study aims to offer valuable insights into the representation of gender in TikToks created by nonbinary individuals.

To accomplish this, I conducted a thorough content analysis of fifty TikToks with nonbinary-related tags. Through this analysis, I was able to identify various patterns, which revealed that nonbinary gender expression on TikTok varies widely among individuals. While some nonbinary creators express their gender within the traditional masculine/feminine binary, others seek to occupy a position of androgyny somewhere

between the masculine/feminine binary. A third group expressed a more fluid interpretation of gender expression, bouncing between the two binaries.

In addition, this study found that many nonbinary content creators rely on alternative fashion to achieve their desired gender expression. This finding suggests that fashion can be a powerful tool for nonbinary individuals to express their gender identity and challenge societal norms. Ultimately, this study contributes to a sparse but growing literature on nonbinary gender expression. It also suggests how Goffman's theory of impression management can be used to express gender on a digital platform. Finally, it broadens West and Zimmerman's (1987) theory of "doing gender" to include nonbinary gender identities and challenges its notion that the goals of "doing gender" are the same for everyone.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study seeks to answer the question of how gender is represented in the TikToks of nonbinary content creators. In order to answer this question I have utilized research on social media platforms, on nonbinary individuals, and the overlap between alternative/goth cultures and androgynous gender expression. Additionally, I have utilized West and Zimmerman's (1987) theory of "doing gender," Judith Butler's theory of gender as a performance, and Goffman's (1959) theory of impression management to inform my research.

Nonbinary Gender

In their revolutionary article, "Doing Gender," West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender "is not a set of traits, nor a variable, nor a role, but the product of social doings of some sort" (p. 129). In this way, gender is not an innate concept, rather, it is an action that individuals take to maintain their social position. They do this because, according to West and Zimmerman, society holds them accountable to gendered standards. West and Zimmerman specifically focus on the steps that binary transgender individuals take in order to be accepted in the role that they wish to be viewed. When an individual "changes" genders (for if, indeed, gender is an action, this is exactly what the act of "transitioning" entails), they must learn what is normative behavior for their new role. Thus in this context, the ideal "goal" for a transgender individual is to socially transition seamlessly into their new gender, following society's expectations of what it means to be a "good" man or woman, as closely as possible. In their article, West and

Zimmerman only consider binary genders, making it necessary for modern researchers to revisit this theory within the context of nonbinary gender. This study will attempt to begin answering the questions of “how” and “why” nonbinary individuals “do gender” through their usage of TikTok.

Similarly, in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler posits that gender is performative in nature. Like West and Zimmerman, Butler agrees that gender is not innate or fixed. Rather, she argues, that individuals perform gender through the use of language, gestures, and other practices. Because of the oppressive nature of gender, Butler believes that gender should “fail.” She says, “The failure of gender to be fully accountable for the construction of identity, the failure of discourse to produce the transparency it claims, requires a rethinking of the relations among power, knowledge, and the construction of identity categories” (*Gender Trouble*, 1990, p. 6). In this way, Butler advocates challenging the existing gender categories by acknowledging that gender is a social construction and actively participating in the disruption of traditional gender ideals.

By looking at how nonbinary individuals use TikTok, we can learn more about the nonbinary community and the values that are important to them. We can also examine how social media applications are used as outlets by oppressed minority groups. These things are not only important to understand on a sociologically theoretical level, but the insights that we have gained can also be utilized by mental health professionals to better understand the nonbinary population (Saha, 2019). This is especially important because nonbinary individuals are statistically more likely to experience increased levels of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation than cisgender individuals (Almeida et al.,

2009). Additionally, they also experience increased discrimination and emotional distress than binary transgender individuals (Bradford et al., 2018)

Research has identified a tendency for nonbinary individuals to hold androgynous body ideals (Galupo et al., 2021; Bradford et al., 2018). This ideal places an emphasis on thinness and reduced secondary-sex characteristics. Galupo et al. says, “Androgynous ideals were seen as providing a freedom from having a body or body parts that mark a binary gender and was likened to pre-pubescent bodies without developed secondary sex characteristics” (p. 74). This ideal is also informed by traditional white European beauty standards. To achieve this androgynous ideal, nonbinary individuals may seek hormone therapy and/or surgery, follow rigorous diet and exercise habits, or even develop eating disorders. If nonbinary individuals fail to achieve this androgynous ideal they may face increased levels of gender dysphoria, increased rates of being misgendered, or rejection from the overall trans/nonbinary community (Zamantakis et al., 2021).

There is considerable variation in the labels that nonbinary individuals use (Darwin, 2020) and (Barbee & Schrock, 2019). According to research done by Darwin, many nonbinary individuals are comfortable with using the label of transgender, “while others did not believe that they were ‘trans enough’ or that they experienced enough discrimination to use the term.” Other terms that nonbinary individuals use include “genderqueer,” “genderfluid,” “agender,” and “gender nonconforming” (Barbee & Schrock, 2019). While there are different nuances associated with each term they can all be said to fall under the broader category of nonbinary—which is to say that the individual does not exclusively identify as a man or a woman. Researchers have also noted that the

majority of nonbinary individuals are assigned female at birth or AFAB (Bradford et al., 2018; Herman et al., 2015).

Social Media

Researchers have noted that with the rise of social media, the lines between the producers and consumers of media have become blurred (Jenkins, 2004; Mitra, 2010). This is especially true on TikTok where seemingly average people can become viral celebrities overnight. This means that TikTok trends can be more reflective of the average TikTok consumer than trends in other realms of pop culture where corporations and the rich and famous decide what is “trendy.” When people consume content from TikTok, they may assume that the TikTok creator that they are watching is entirely separate from corporate media. While this is true in many cases, large corporations have realized the power of viral sensations, offering paid sponsorships to large TikTok content creators. Therefore, while TikTok gives the impression of being more representative of the “average consumer,” this is not always necessarily the case. This is one example of how the roles of producers and consumers of media are blurred.

Existing research suggests that LGBTQ+ individuals utilize social media websites as a means of positive self-expression and community (Selkie et al., 2020; Bates et al., 2019). Heibert & Korte-Miller specifically look at how LGBTQ+ individuals used TikTok as a refuge from unaccepting home environments during the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown (2021). In their research, they suggest that LGBTQ+ individuals use TikTok communities as a sort of found family. While these authors focus on the experiences of broader LGBTQ+ individuals in social media, in this study I focus specifically on how the nonbinary population utilizes the specific TikTok platform.

There is also existing literature that supports the idea that social media is used in the process of LGBTQ+ identity formation (Pascoe, 2011; Heibert & Korte-Miller, 2021). According to Heibert & Korte-Miller, identity formation emerges “from TikTok users sharing the positive impacts of gender and sexual minority representation within TikTok videos” (2021, p. 9). Additionally, LGBTQ+ youth rely on social media sites to “build identity and culture” (Pascoe, 2011, p. 12). One way that LGBTQ+ youth use social media to build identity is through self-labeling. In Oakley’s (2016) study of nonbinary users on Tumblr, she emphasizes the importance of self-labeling in the process of identity formation for LGBTQ+. Self-labeling is when an individual publicly acknowledges their inclusion within a group. Social media sites make it particularly easy for LGBTQ+ individuals to announce their identity labels through “about me” sections and “bios.”

Existing literature also suggests that nonbinary individuals are more likely to participate in subcultures than binary people. Thelwell found that nonbinary individuals were more likely to post words in their Twitter bios such as: “cosplay,” “cosplayer,” “drag,” “d&d,” and “anime” (2021). This suggests that the type of content that nonbinary creators post is significantly different than binary individuals. This also relates to Oakley’s research in that, while not directly related to their gender or sexualities, these individuals participated in self-labeling. This is part of a wider trend that individuals on social media platforms participate in when individuals label themselves as part of a broader community. On TikTok, this is done primarily through the use of hashtags on videos. In TikTok, hashtags are words or phrases preceded by the “#” symbol that are used to categorize and organize content on the platform. When a user adds a hashtag to

their video's caption or comments section, it allows others to find and discover that content when they search for or click on that particular hashtag.

Impression Management

Much of the existing sociological literature on social media is based on the work of Erving Goffman and his theory of impression management (Mitra, 2010; Hogan, 2010). In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman proposes that all human interaction is carefully constructed so that individuals control the impressions that they make on other people. In these social interactions individuals act out roles that are often predetermined for them.

Social media theorists have taken this idea and have expounded upon it. Anandra Mitra (2010) argues that individuals manage their presentation of self through small narrative bits (narbs) that they share online. Additionally, he argues that the advent of social media has meant the breakdown of the barrier between public and private faces, requiring the introduction of a “cybernetic face,” one that takes into consideration the complexities and nuances of online interaction. On TikTok, individuals use this cybernetic face to show a side of themselves that may not feel comfortable revealing in real life. Even though TikTok is technically public (as long as the individual does not have a “private” account), its relative anonymity gives individuals a unique space to express themselves. Similarly, Hogan (2010) argues that online interaction should be understood with an exhibition metaphor rather than the dramaturgical one that Goffman introduced. In this way, individuals are not simply actors in a performance, rather they are the curators of their own exhibits—allowing for even greater control of impression management. Using Hogan’s notion of social media as an “exhibition,” an individual's

TikTok page could be likened to a personal museum of sorts, in which the creators are also the curators with complete control over the material that they want to publish.

Alternative/Gothic Aesthetics

Past research suggests that there is considerable overlap between alternative/gothic subcultures and gender nonconformity. Gothic subculture in particular values the aesthetics of androgyny (Goodlad, 2007; Goulding & Seran, 2009). This can be traced to one of the primary inspirations of gothic culture: the androgynous nature of the vampire. In myth, vampires, regardless of sex, have both the capacity to penetrate and be penetrated by fangs, transcending gender and sexual roles (Goulding & Seran, 2009).

Goth emerged as a music-based subculture in the late 1970s (Goulding & Seran, 2009; Nally, 2018; Goodlad, 2007) in which its followers adopted a distinctively dark aesthetic that often included aspects of gender nonconformity (at least, for men). Men within the goth subculture often adopted traditionally feminine modes of expression including long (black) hair, eye makeup, flowing articles of clothing such as skirts, and jewelry. Goodlad writes, “As inveterate cross-dressers, goth men may be seen to occupy the ‘third’ position described by Marjorie Garber: not a third sex, or third term, but ‘a space of possibility’ that opens once the contingency of gendered identities has been exposed” (2007, p. 107). This illustrates how the goth subculture has given men space to experiment with modes of expression otherwise unavailable to them within hegemonic society.

However, while men within the subculture have been encouraged to challenge gender boundaries, Nally argues that the same is not true for goth women. In her analysis

of gothic magazines, she found that within goth spaces, women were confined to traditionally feminine modes of expression (2018). To my knowledge, there have been no prior studies looking at gothic expression by nonbinary individuals.

In addition to its acceptance of androgynous style, goth, and other closely related subcultures have been largely accepting of queer sexualities, at times even fetishizing them (Goodlad, 2007; Peters, 2010). This is especially true for bisexuality (Goulding & Saren, 2009; Nally, 2018) which could be seen as another acceptance of an “in between” identity and even a call back to the original gothic vampire.

Various subcultures have evolved from traditional gothic style and have kept its trademark flirtation with androgyny (Goulding & Seran, 2009). For the purposes of this study, I have chosen to refer to goth fashion and its related fashions as “alt/goth fashion.” While this is a vast oversimplification of many different styles and subcultures, I have deemed it appropriate for this study because of the frequency of its usage on TikTok, often in the form of hashtags such as #altfashion, #altmakeup, #altstyle, #goth, #gothfashion, and #gothstyle. Further research that teases out gender expression among discrete and specific subcultures/aesthetics may prove fruitful in the future.

In the past, there have been studies conducted to examine the ways in which LGBTQ+ individuals utilize social media platforms. However, in this study, the focus is specifically on how nonbinary individuals make use of TikTok to express their gender identity. The aim of this study is to shed light on the unique experiences of nonbinary individuals on TikTok and explore how they use the platform to express their gender expression in ways that may not be possible in offline settings. Through analyzing the content that nonbinary users share on TikTok, this study seeks to provide insights into the

role that social media can play in shaping and amplifying the voices of nonbinary individuals.

METHODS

TikTok has become an increasingly popular social media platform, particularly among younger generations, and according to backlinko.com, it has approximately 1 billion active users worldwide. It has also become a hub for creative expression and self-representation, with many users utilizing the platform to share their experiences, interests, and identities. Something that makes TikTok unique from other social media outlets is its “for you page” which tailors the content that a user sees depending on their specific taste. Additionally, the use of hashtags, while not a new convention, has been used extensively in the app to group similar content together.

TikTok users upload short videos (at the time that this research was done, videos on the app were limited to a three-minute length), which can include various other elements such as its accompanying audio or music which is called a “sound”, on-screen text, a caption, and hashtags.

For this study, I utilized the method of qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is a form of research that allows for the researcher to systematically analyze and interpret communication and media. While most content analysts tend to utilize quantitative analysis, qualitative content analysis allows for a more in-depth and interpretive approach. Quantitative analysis tends to focus more on statistical patterns, whereas qualitative analysis focuses more on the text, images, and audio of media, identifying themes and contextualizing them within the greater body of research (Klaus Krippendorff, 2009). I chose this method because I wanted to study TikToks, which are a form of media, but also because I wanted to go more in-depth than what a quantitative content analysis would allow.

This study also utilized a grounded theory approach to analyze fifty TikToks that were tagged with nonbinary-related hashtags. In order to achieve a diverse sample, I created a sampling method that worked along with the TikTok algorithm. Like many other social media applications, TikTok creates a complex algorithm based on users’ past activity in order to decide which videos show up on a user’s “for you page”. TikTok gathers information about the creators that users subscribe to, which types of videos they “like,” and also how long they watch specific types of videos.

Because of this, I decided against using my personal TikTok account due to my unique TikTok history (which would likely cause the algorithm to only show me videos

that it determined I would like). Therefore, I created a new TikTok account specifically for the purpose of this project. It must be stated, however, that I cannot be sure that the TikTok application did not still link some of the information from my previous account to my new account since I was still using the same device to access both accounts. This highlights one of the biggest challenges with working with social media. Due to the nebulous and ever-changing nature of internet content, it is impossible for researchers to replicate studies. Additionally, there was no way to measure the impact that my sample created on the platform or identifying the audience that it was produced for. It may prove beneficial for additional studies on the subject to focus more on audience.

With my new account, I refrained from subscribing to any TikTok creators. In addition, I only “liked” videos labeled with tags related to my research question. In the beginning, I “liked” videos with broad tags such as “lgbtqia+,” but once the algorithm began showing nonbinary and nonbinary-related content on my “for you page” I limited the videos that I “liked” to ones that were tagged with the following labels: #nonbinary #genderqueer #nb #enby #androgynous #theythem #genderfluid. All of this “primed the pump” so to speak so that my “for you page” eventually contained mostly content with these hashtags. In this way, I used TikTok’s algorithm to my advantage instead of trying to work against it.

I had originally planned on excluding content from my sampling frame that did not explicitly address gender. However, in the process of watching videos to create a “for you page” that I could use in my study, I realized that the concept of gender influenced content even when it was not explicitly mentioned. Even if a creator did not talk about being nonbinary in their video, I realized that I could still analyze the ways that

they presented their own gender expression through the way that they dressed, talked, etc... Therefore, I did not exclude any of the videos that I watched on this basis. As for the actual sampling frame, I included the first fifty videos that appeared on my “for you page” that had the following tags: #nonbinary #genderqueer #nb #enby #androgynous #theythem #genderfluid. This sample was collected in two batches. The first batch was collected from February 6, 2022 to February 7, 2022, and the second batch was collected from June 20, 2022 to July 1, 2022. I saved most (there were a few TikToks in my sample that had a setting which would not allow me to do so) of these TikToks to my phone so that I could watch them repeatedly. (Even in the few cases where the TikToks were not saved to my phone, I recorded the account’s information so that I could look them up as needed.)

Then I input all the relevant data of each TikTok in my sample into an Excel spreadsheet. The fields of data that I included were: sample number, name of TikTok creator, tags, caption, sound, transcription, and text used on the video itself. In addition to this, I created a Google document where I wrote detailed descriptions of the sample of fifty TikToks and coded them in the comment section. I first conducted line-by-line coding as suggested by Charmaz (2014), giving priority to in-vivo codes (codes that use direct language from my sample). I then categorized these into focused codes consisting of: passing (with the sub-codes passing as transmasculine and passing as nonbinary), using fashion to express one’s self (with the subcodes of using androgynous fashion and using alt/goth fashion), and finally gender-bending. I then wrote four “memos” which became the basis of my findings.

It is important to note that I identify as both queer and nonbinary and also have a small TikTok following on my personal account (at the time of this writing I have a little over 1,000 followers). My personal experience with nonbinary TikTok gave me a unique perspective when conducting this research since I could relate to many of the TikToks in my sample on a personal level. While this insider's perspective likely gave me an advantage while coding my sample, it is also true that I may have unintentionally overlooked or taken for granted details in these TikToks that an outsider would have noticed. Additionally, my identity as a white researcher may have also biased my perspective, especially in relation to the unique intersection of nonbinary identity and race/ethnicity.

FINDINGS

Passing as Transmasc: "You'll never look like a real boy"

Although all fifty of the TikToks in my sample had nonbinary-related tags, a number of them had additional tags which expounded on their gender identity and/or sexual orientation. Thirteen of the TikToks had tags that identified the content creator with identity labels that align with the existing two identities of the gender binary. Of these, twelve of them aligned themselves with masculine identities with terms such as “transmasc” and “ftm,” while only one of the TikToks was tagged as “transfemme.”

These findings are significant on two fronts. First, even among individuals who identify with labels such as “nonbinary,” many of them still choose to identify very closely along the gender binary. An individual may have various reasons for doing so. Perhaps they feel very close to society’s notions of what it means to be a man or a woman, yet they also understand that these are constructs that do not actually exist in nature. Or perhaps, they view themselves as “mostly” masculine but also recognize flexibility within their gender. Regardless of their motivations, by grounding my research in queer theory, it is important to recognize the validity of the identities of the individuals that I am researching no matter how specific.

Secondly, this finding is important because- it corroborates previous literature that suggests individuals who identify as “transmasculine” (including terms such as “transmasc,” “ftm,” and “transman”) are more likely to also identify as nonbinary than

“transfeminine” (including terms such as “transfemme,” “mtf,” and “transwoman”) individuals. Indeed, one of the most common themes among individuals who tagged their posts as “transmasc” (or other related tags) was adherence to “traditional” gender transition practices such as binding, getting top surgery, and passing as a “man.” Others showed off their transition “progress” through a series of photos or videos in which they progressively become more masculine. Ultimately the focused code of “passing as transmasc” (which was a more specific subset of the code “passing”) appeared 6 times in my sample, or in around 12% of these TikToks.

In one post exemplary of the “passing as transmasc” code, we are shown a picture of a young, traditionally feminine-looking person with brown skin and long brown hair. The accompanying onscreen text says “you’ll never look like a real boy.” We then transition into a video clip of a traditionally masculine person taking off their shirt in slow motion to reveal a hairy stomach, healed surgery scars below their nipples, and hairy armpits. The person is clearly the same person from the original picture but they are older and now, have chin-length hair, and a short beard. The person walks to the camera, and runs their fingers through their hair, laughing. The post is accompanied by the following tags: #trans #ftm #transgender #nonbinary #enby #topsurgery #transition #topsurgeryftm. In this post, the creator mocks the words of the unseen voices who told them that they would “never look like a real boy” by showing off their typically masculine features. In doing so, the creator is boasting about their ability to “pass” in the gender binary. Still, the accompanying tags of “nonbinary” and “enby” suggest that they still recognize an aspect of their identity that is “other.” Because the creator does not elaborate on this apparent “contradiction,” we are left only to speculate exactly how the

creator fits both their desire to pass as a man and their nonbinary-ness into a cohesive identity.

In a similar post, another creator shows off their transition progress by using pictures and video clips of themselves as they progressively become more masculine. They start out with a video clip where they have long, dark black, wavy hair and they wear a black bralette and black pants. In the next clip, they have short hair. In the following snippet, they are shirtless with a towel around their waist and fresh horizontal surgery scars mark their chest right below their nipples. The video continues in this fashion until the final clip in which they are topless and their surgery scars are barely visible. They also have black hair on their chest and a hint of a mustache on their face. This is set to an audio that says “Gorgeous, gorgeous girls become tiny little grimy rat boys that have small mustaches” This audio follows the TikTok trend format of starting with the phrase “gorgeous, gorgeous girls” and then an explanation (usually tongue in cheek) of what these “gorgeous, gorgeous girls” do. In this particular example the act of “becom[ing] tiny little grimy rat boys” is supposed to invoke humor due to its incongruence with the phrase “gorgeous, gorgeous girls.” The creator is poking fun at themselves in a very self-aware and almost self-deprecating way. It is interesting to note that this audio is not original. Rather, it was created by another TikToker and has been used by 615 other creators at the time of this writing. From this, we can surmise that at least 615 other people have identified with this audio enough to put their own video to it. Therefore, the process of becoming “tiny little grimy rat boys” is not unique to this creator.

More contradictions arise in other posts tagged “transmasc”. In one TikTok, a full-figured individual tries on a variety of binders for the intended purpose of educating

fellow full-figured nonbinary/transmasculine individuals on which binders work the best. After showing off several in their collection they express their frustration with binders in general by saying, “I still have boobs. Like they're still there. I still look like I have like a B cup. And I understand that I'm not going to be completely flat without surgery. I understand this. But it is frustrating that I can't get even close.” Like the creator of the previous TikTok, this creator also seeks to look more masculine, however, because of their size they find it difficult to do so. This is particularly interesting because it is the only TikTok in my sample that features a plus-size content creator. The reasons for and the consequences of this oversight will be explained in greater detail later.

Other videos that I coded as “Passing as Transmasc” include a video of someone asking for help to pay for top surgery, a video of a person weighing the pros and cons of pursuing top surgery, and a video in which a person demonstrates how they use tape to bind their chest—all of which were tagged with both “transmasc” and “nonbinary” labels. The fact that these videos are tagged with both "transmasc" and "nonbinary" labels suggests that the people in the videos identify as nonbinary but also feel that the label "transmasc" accurately reflects their gender identity. This indicates that the nonbinary label is complex and the gender expression of those who use the label varies from person to person. Additionally, the inclusion of videos related to top surgery and chest binding highlights some of the challenges and experiences that non-binary people who are AFAB may face when seeking gender-affirming care. These challenges may include financial barriers, lack of access to medical care, and limited options for gender-affirming treatments.

Passing as transfemme: "You don't get to decide what is and isn't feminine" (sic)

In contrast to the high number of transmasc tags in my dataset, only one TikTok was tagged as "transfemme." In this one TikTok, an individual wearing punk-rock style clothing and holding a skateboard walks towards the camera while the text "for a transfemme person you don't dress very feminine" appears on-screen. The video is accompanied by the song "Woman" by Doja Cat in which she sings "Princess or queen. Tomboy or king. You've heard a lot you've never seen. -Mother Earth, Mother Mary rise to the top. Divine feminine." The person points to themselves and lipsyncs with the music, "I'm feminine." They give the camera the middle finger, stand up, and skateboard away. The caption at the bottom of the video says, "You don't get to decide what is and isn't feminine. (pronouns they/she btw)" (sic) and the associated tags are #theythem #punx #transfemme.

In this post, the creator responds to the offscreen criticism that they should be more "feminine" by lipsyncing to the Doja Cat song "Woman." In this song, Doja Cat lists off different modes of expressing femininity that include nontraditional femininities ("tomboy or king"). This post illustrates how trans+ individuals resist pressures to "pass" or to act more traditionally aligned to the gender binary. It is also a striking example of how nonbinary individuals use pop culture references to convey their ideas about gender.

Passing as Nonbinary: "Little do they know... [sparkle emoji] GENDER EUPHORIA [sparkle emoji]"

In eleven of the TikToks in my sample, creators revel in their ability to confuse cisgender individuals regarding their gender identity. Creators who delight in confusing

cisgender individuals can be further divided into two categories. The first category, which I will talk about in this section, is what I will call “passing as nonbinary.” This is different from the second category which I will refer to as “gender bending.” I will elaborate on “gender bending” in a later section of this paper.

While passing is a concept that has been a term traditionally used within the transgender community to denote a transgender individual who is successfully viewed as a man or woman, in this essay I would like to extend the term to a phenomenon among nonbinary people in which they are successfully able to project an air of androgyny. In this way, to pass as nonbinary is to confuse the audience of a gender performance so that they cannot identify the individual’s AGAB (assigned gender at birth). To pass as nonbinary is to fail at passing as a man or a woman.

In one TikTok in my sample, a visibly androgynous person performs a skit to a preexisting TikTok sound. In the default TikTok font, it says: “POV Going to the restroom as an androgynous Non-Binary”. As they walk to the door a “person” from off-camera says “Um, excuse me the men’s restrooms are over there.” The on-screen person turns around revealing a slightly feminine physique and looks down at their obviously bound chest. The “person” off camera continues, “Oh, oh sorry I thought you were a—” The onscreen person puts their hands on their chest and looks back up at the “person” off camera. “Sorry what?” they say. “The men’s restrooms...” the off-camera person trails off confused. “Oh. Over there? My bad.” the on-camera person points to a direction off camera. The on-camera person smiles and walks off in that direction. The off-screen person says, “ "Wait, ma'am--sir-ma'am." The description below the video says “Little do they know... [sparkle] GENDER EUPHORIA [sparkle]. In this example, the creator

performs a skit to illustrate the confusion that their androgynous appearance causes and the “gender euphoria” (a term used by transgender and nonbinary individuals to describe feeling happy with their gender identity) that such confusion causes. This is in stark contrast to the “gender dysphoria” that a binary transgender person may feel when being misgendered in a similar situation.

In another video, a person with short hair, a backward ballcap, a white plain tank top, and a silver chain necklace uses the random filter “STYLE SCANNER.” The filter causes colorful lines to move up and down the screen as if it is “scanning” the creator. The filter text says: “the perfect style for you is…” and various styles flash across the screen in a roulette style. The filter lands on the words “Gender Free.” Upon seeing the style that the filter chose for them, the person smiles ecstatically and raises their arms in triumph. This TikTok reinforces the idea that there exists a strong connection between a nonbinary identity and a successfully androgynous (or “gender free”) style.

On the other side of the spectrum, several TikToks in my sample express the resistance that individuals who fail to “successfully” pass as nonbinary or otherwise fail to meet the androgynous ideal face within the nonbinary/trans community. In one TikTok, an individual who wears some elements of a traditional feminine style (such as a pink tank top, eye makeup, and their hair in pigtails) uses a dialogue prerecorded by themselves to imitate a conversation with someone. On the screen are the words: “this is usually how it goes:” They lipsync to the prerecorded audio and look straight at the camera as the audio says “I’m trans.” The off-screen “person” says “Wooh Yeah yeah trans rights woo yeah”. The on-screen person smiles and lipsyncs, “Alright. Okay. And I still like to present feminine sometimes.” The “other” person says “Ooooh trender.

You're not really trans ahh I'm an asshole ahh" The person on screen claps and says "Okay, alright. We're done. We're done." The video is captioned: "I am TIREDDDDD [fake mustache emoji] [black hand up emoji] I will continue to do whatever tf I want, the end". This individual utilizes the skit format to demonstrate their experience as a genderfluid/transgender person (as they describe themselves with tags). Because they like to wear traditionally "feminine" clothing, they face resistance from individuals who do not respect their trans identity and label them a "trender" (a derivative of the term "transtrender"). Despite this, the individual demonstrates their resolve to continue dressing as they like.

One TikTok in my sample attempts to normalize the apparent contradictions between a non-androgynous body and a nonbinary identity by looking into the camera and saying, "Hey, man dude pussy bro. Bro who definitely uses he/him or he/them pronouns. Definitely not a woman. Your tits look fantastic in that top, dude. Keep having a great day, bro." They laugh. The video is captioned "based on a real interaction w me and my partner" and is tagged "#lgbt #lgbtq #trans #nonbinary #fyp". Here, the creator uses words associated with "female" anatomy such as "pussy" and "tits" while also recognizing and validating the unseen subject's nonbinary identity. This radical combination of contradictory elements seems to be a reaction to and against the "androgynous ideal."

Gender Bending "The power I have. Gender BENDER"

One of the most popular types of TikToks is transition videos. In these videos, creators will film themselves over a preexisting sound (usually a snippet of music) and tactfully cut the video in an inconspicuous place. The goal is to achieve a seamless

transition into the next shot where the creator will show off some sort of change that occurred in the time between shots. This change is typically a change in outfit, makeup, lighting, or setting. The result is that the creator seems to “magically” transform through the power of video editing. At the time of this writing, the hashtag “transition” has been used 78.2 billion times on TikTok. This type of video naturally lends itself to showing off dichotomies. Whether it is a creator transforming from their bedhead and pajamas into a full face of makeup and a polished outfit, or a creator magically teleporting from their bedroom to the bustling center of Times Square, this type of TikTok thrives on contrast. Perhaps, then, it is no surprise that transition videos have become popular among a specific group of nonbinary content creators.

In one TikTok in my sample, a creator shows off their feminine outfit in the mirror which includes pigtails, a mini skirt, and thigh-highs. With a change in the music, the creator transitions to a masculine-looking outfit in which they wear a beanie, cargo boots, and a white tank top which shows off their muscular upper body. The on-screen text says “When you feel fem in the morning and masc in the evening.” The video is tagged #androgynous #fyp #femboy #masc #masculinity #bi #gay #panpanic #altrittok #genderfluid #bipanic. In this video, a genderfluid creator has used the TikTok transition trend to show off their “fem” (sic) and “masc” looks. In this essay, I will refer to this type of transition in gender performance as “gender bending.”

Although perhaps more appropriate, I have refrained from using the term “gender fluidity” to describe this mode of expression since many individuals use “gender fluid” as a gender identity label in itself. While there seems to be a lot of overlap between individuals who identify as genderfluid and creators who either refer to or participate in

gender bending in their TikToks, for the purpose of this paper, I will treat these as two separate concepts. To give some perspective, the hashtag “genderfluid” was used fifteen times in my sample (28%) and the concept of gender bending was referenced in five TikToks in my sample (10%). Of the five TikToks that I coded as “gender bending,” all but one of them included the hashtag “genderfluid.”

In another TikTok that I tagged as gender bending, a person with shoulder-length black hair and a polka-dotted low-cut dress lip syncs to an audio snippet from the movie *Encanto* that says, “Camilo, stop pretending to be Dolores so you can have seconds.” On the screen, the words “stop pretending to be fem in order to get what you want!” appear. The person “swipes” the screen” and the video cuts to the same person now wearing a black Slipknot hoodie. It is perhaps significant to note that in the context of the movie from which the “sound” comes from, the character (Camilo) is a literal shapeshifter who uses his power to transform into his sister to try to trick his way into getting more food. In this example, the creator uses a pop culture reference to illustrate how they utilize gender bending to “get what they want.” This video highlights how nonbinary individuals change their gender presentation in order to manipulate how other individuals perceive them in different situations, even going so far as to reference literal shape-shifting.

Another video in my sample that uses a gender bending transition features a person in typically masculine attire who sprays a liquid onto their reflection and wipes the liquid off to reveal themselves wearing full “glam” makeup and a low-cut top. The trend of the gender bending transition demonstrates how nonbinary content creators take

popular TikTok trends (in this case the transition) and adapt it so that it becomes relevant to a nonbinary audience.

Two other cases in my sample reference “gender bending” although they do not use the TikTok transition to demonstrate two different looks. Instead, one content creator simply shows off their typically masculine style and poses the question, “how is my masc look compared to my fem look?” to the audience, presumably making the assumption that the viewer has watched other videos of theirs in which they show off their “fem look.” In contrast, in another video a person in typically feminine, hyper-sexualized attire uses the text function to say “The power I have. Gender BENDER,” presumably referencing their ability to switch between a feminine and masculine gender presentation.

Regardless of whether they are utilizing the transition trend or simply referring to shifting their gender presentation, all of the content creators in my sample who I coded as “gender bending” had one thing in common: they all demonstrated a sense of pride in their ability to change their appearance. This suggests that nonbinary individuals do not always alter their appearance out of a necessity to “pass” in certain circumstances (although it is very likely that many nonbinary individuals do indeed feel pressured to change their gender presentation for this reason). However, my research suggests that nonbinary and, in particular, genderfluid individuals often feel a sense of elation and perhaps empowerment by their chameleon-like ability to manipulate how the world sees them.

Using Fashion to Express One's Gender Identity: Participating in Goth/Alt Subcultures

One of the primary themes that I identified in my content analysis sample was the use of alternative fashion among nonbinary TikTok creators. In many videos in my sample the use of fashion was addressed directly either in the content of the video such as in the case of makeup tutorials or in “get ready with me” videos (a type of TikTok video where the content creator takes the viewer through their process of picking out an outfit and getting ready) or in the caption of the video. In fact, I coded over half of the videos in my sample (54%) as utilizing fashion to express one's gender identity. Additionally, 6 of the TikToks in my sample (12%) were tagged with hashtags that referred to some variation of alternative/goth subcultures (such as #alt, #goth, #alternative, #punk). However, not all content creators that participated in aspects of the alt/goth subculture used such tags. Therefore I identified aspects of the alt/goth style in order to code the TikToks in my sample appropriately. Aspects of the alt/goth subculture that I used as identifiers were facial piercings, copious amounts of black eye makeup, black clothing with features such as rips, tears, patches, and chains, hair dyed unnatural colors, and an emphasis on accessories such as fingerless gloves, chokers, and body harnesses.

In one video, a white person with short, curly, black hair talks vlog-style to the camera. Their ears are stretched and they have their septum, lip, and nose bridge pierced. They are wearing what appears to be a black sun hat, round glasses, and black eyeshadow on their eyes. They have a slight mustache and a hint of a beard. A cross dangles from one of their stretched ears and they wear some kind of bleached animal skull as a

necklace. Their shirt is black with a lace collar. It is not apparent whether this shirt would be classified as “men’s” or “women’s.”

In this example, the individual in the video has adopted a style that might be classified as “goth,” “emo,” or simply “alternative.” Several other creators in my sample adopted a similar style. This is especially interesting because it suggests that nonbinary individuals may be drawn to pre-existing subcultures. One reason that this could be the case is that individuals who are more likely to reject the gender binary may also be more likely to reject society’s fashion norms. The goth subculture in particular may be appealing because goth fashion has traditionally been associated with nonconformity in gender expression, with men often wearing makeup, jewelry, skirts, and other items traditionally associated with femininity in western culture.

In another TikTok, a creator participates in a trend in which they show what they wear on each day of the week to a song that sings “Wear this on Monday. Wear this on Tuesday. Wear this on Wednesday. Wear this on Thursday. Wear this on Friday”. In the video, the creator transforms from a “punk” style (featuring a leather vest, fishnet fingerless gloves, and black platform boots) to a “softcore” style (in which they wear a white “peasant” style top, pink fingerless gloves, a pink and white gingham skirt, pink knee socks, and baby pink platform shoes), to a “techwear” outfit (with a black leather bodysuit and a black mask that covers the bottom of their face), to an “elf-core” style (including fake elf ears and a white dress with a green bodice), and finally a kawaii style (in which the creator wears exaggerated makeup with white eyeliner underneath their eyes to make them appear more cartoonish, a baby pink choker with spikes, a lavender “Kuromi” t-shirt, a lavender plaid “school girl” style skirt, and mismatched, layered knee

socks.) The accompanying tags include references to their gender identity including #genderfluid, #theythem, #trans, and #queer as well as references to their style such as: #alt #altok #alternative #altstyle #genderfluid #punk #goth #pastel #softcore #elfcore #elf #techwear #platforms #platformshoes.

In this example, the creator shows off their many different and often seemingly contradicting styles including “harsher” looks that feature more traditional aspects of alt/goth culture such as the color black, and “severe” textures such as leather and chains with “softer” more feminine styles that feature pastel pink and Sanrio characters. The creator acknowledges these contradictions by using tags such as “alt, punk, techwear, and goth” in contrast with tags such as “pastel, softcore, and elfcore.” In this example, the harsher more traditional alt style could be said to represent masculinity with its darker colors and harsher textures whereas the contrasting styles represent traditional femininity with light colors and soft textures. In this way, the creator shows off how they utilize a variety of different gender expressions over the course of a regular week. It is also worth noting that the creator felt that it was relevant to tag this post as “genderfluid” which not only describes their nonbinary gender identity but also gives us insight into how they view modes of expression. Just as they do not feel like they have to fit into one single interpretation of gender, it would seem that they also do not feel that they must stay fixed into a single style. In this way, the creator may be said to exhibit “style fluidity” in addition to “gender fluidity.”

Other examples of the use of alternative/goth styles include a creator who wears makeup with dramatic winged eyeliner, a number of necklaces layered atop one another, and a very low cut “spaghetti-strap” black dress with a black leather corset at their waist.

Another creator wears a black overbust corset that reveals a small amount of cleavage, black eye makeup, a paperclip earring in one ear and a stud in the other ear, a chain necklace with a lock on it, baggy light blue trousers that are synched at the waist with a plain black belt, and a mesh fanny pack on their hip. All of these examples illustrate how nonbinary individuals draw on alternative fashion as a source of inspiration for their modes of expression and how these styles often include mixing feminine and masculine clothing. Additionally, these examples show the wide range of styles available to nonbinary individuals.

DISCUSSION

Due to the increasing percentage of the population that is beginning to identify as nonbinary, this study is crucial to understanding the present state of the gender binary. Through examining how nonbinary individuals express their gender identity on the internet, we can better understand this emerging population and its needs. Taking into account this population's high risk of depression and suicidal ideation, understanding how they view and express gender is vital to how clinicians and mental health practitioners can help this at-risk group. On a more theoretical level, this study helps to illustrate how nonbinary individuals are utilizing social media to chip away at the façade of the gender binary itself.

This study found that many nonbinary TikTok creators also identify as transmasculine and use the TikTok platform to demonstrate how they make efforts to pass. Interestingly, there were significantly fewer nonbinary creators who identified as transfeminine. Others use the application to talk about "passing as androgynous" and the joy felt when this is done successfully, as is the case with the individual who captioned their video of themselves not passing, with "little do they know... [sparkle emoji] GENDER EUPHORIA [sparkle emoji]." Some nonbinary individuals use TikTok to demonstrate their ability to "genderbend" and reveal an individual elation that comes from doing so, such as the individual dressed in feminine clothing proudly proclaiming in the text of the video "the power I have. Gender BENDER". Finally, this study found that many nonbinary

individuals use preexisting styles and subcultures (namely gothic and alternative) as means of gender expression.

This study sought to address a gap in our understanding of how nonbinary individuals engage with social media platforms and how they express their gender identity in digital spaces. While there is some literature on nonbinary identity and experiences, much of it focuses on academic or clinical contexts rather than exploring how nonbinary individuals actively perform and express their gender identities in daily life.

The findings of this research suggest that nonbinary individuals on TikTok use the platform to express and explore their gender identities. Specifically, nonbinary creators on TikTok use the platform to showcase their efforts to pass, express joy in successfully achieving androgynous gender expression, and demonstrate their ability to fluidly express gender. They also use preexisting styles and subcultures for gender expression. However, it is important to note that there may be extensive variation in how nonbinary individuals represent their gender on TikTok. These findings may not represent all nonbinary individuals on the platform.

This study highlights how nonbinary content creators have adapted the TikTok transition trend to show off their gender performance in a phenomenon that I have labeled "gender bending." This transition is not always used for passing. Still, it is a source of pride for nonbinary individuals, particularly genderfluid people who enjoy the ability to change their appearance in a chameleon-like way. This trend demonstrates how nonbinary content creators have adapted popular TikTok trends to make them relevant to

their audience. This is particularly significant because it illustrates that some nonbinary individuals “do gender” in a very fluid and sometimes even contradictory manner.

Finally, an analysis of the TikTok videos in my sample found that over half (54%) utilized fashion to express their nonbinary gender identity, and 18% of the videos in the sample used alternative/goth fashion, which often included facial piercings, black clothing, and unnatural hair colors. In this way, it would seem that TikTok creators have adopted goth and/or alternative subculture styles, which may appeal to those who reject gender norms in fashion. This is similar to Thelwell’s (2021) finding that nonbinary individuals were more likely to identify with aspects of “nerd culture” than binary individuals. Although the alternative/goth and nerd subcultures are very different, they both reject “mainstream” ideals of how to behave and dress. This may appeal to nonbinary individuals who already exist on the boundaries of what is acceptable in hegemonic society.

Overall these findings about nonbinary TikTok creators suggest that they are actively engaged in "doing gender" by using the platform to demonstrate their efforts to pass, to talk about their experiences of gender expression, and to reveal the joy they feel when they successfully "genderbend" or "pass as androgynous." This illustrates how heterogeneous the category of nonbinary is. The goals of nonbinary individuals differ substantially. Some wish to align themselves with either the masc or femme binary. Others wish to become something neither masculine or feminine, but rather something “in between.” Finally, there are those that wish to bounce back and forth between gender expressions in a very fluid manner. The implication of this finding is that the concept of “doing gender” that was created by West and Zimmerman, becomes much more

complicated when extended to nonbinary individuals. This is also significant because it illustrates how nonbinary individuals utilize impression management to manipulate how others view them. The findings of this study suggest that the idea of "doing gender" is not a one-size-fits-all approach that applies to all individuals. Rather, it highlights the diverse ways that individuals actively create and perform their gender identities, which may not conform to traditional binary gender norms and expectations. This highlights the fluidity and flexibility of gender expression. It also suggests that individuals have agency in how they express their gender, and that social media platforms like TikTok can provide a space for nonbinary individuals to explore and express their gender identities in ways that are empowering and authentic for them. In this sense, TikTok creators can very much be viewed as the curators of their own personal museums just as Hogan (2010) suggested nearly a decade before TikTok rose to fame. Overall, the implications of this study suggest that the concept of "doing gender" should be broadened to include the diverse ways that individuals actively create and perform their gender identities, rather than being limited to traditional binary gender norms and expectations.

Another key concept of the "doing gender" theory is societal accountability. In this regard, the findings of this study are complicated. While one of the observed groups seemed to be held accountable to an ideal, androgynous standard of being nonbinary (even resulting in the ostracization of individuals who failed to meet this standard), the individuals who participated in the practice of "gender bending," seemed to delight in challenging any kind of accountability. The very idea of "gender euphoria" seems to be a personal reaction to "doing gender" with little to do with the societal accountability. This suggests that gender accountability exists to some extent even among the nonbinary

population. However, this accountability is not nearly as universal or constraining as the accountability experienced by binary individuals.

The findings of this study also suggest that nonbinary individuals actively participate in the “failure of gender” as proposed by Judith Butler. They do so by performing gender in ways that actively contradict the ways that society has deemed appropriate. In the case of individuals who try to “pass as androgynous,” the success of their gender performance lies in the failure to pass as a man or a woman. This could be considered a way in which “gender fails” in nonbinary gender expression.

Additionally, the use of preexisting styles and subcultures such as gothic and alternative as means of gender expression suggests that nonbinary individuals are not only "doing gender," but also actively creating and defining their own gender identities and expressions based on cultural and social contexts. Therefore, these findings illustrate how nonbinary individuals use TikTok to both challenge and conform to gender norms (such as nonbinary individuals who feel constricted to the “new norm” of ideal androgyny), while actively constructing and expressing their own unique gender identities.

The study also suggests that nonbinary individuals on TikTok engage in impression management as a way of expressing and communicating their gender identities. The use of TikTok to demonstrate efforts to pass as transmasculine or androgynous can be seen as attempts to shape the impressions others have of their gender identity. In addition, the use of preexisting styles and subcultures as means of gender expression can be seen as a form of impression management, as individuals use these cultural symbols to signal their gender identities to others.- This is consistent with Goffman's (1959) concept

of impression management, which refers to how individuals present themselves to others to shape the impressions that others form of them.

While all fifty of the TikTok videos in this study had nonbinary-related tags, 13 also included binary gender identity labels, mostly "transmasc." This suggests that some nonbinary individuals still identify closely with binary gender identities, especially transmasculine individuals. Many videos focused on traditional gender transition practices and passing as male, and some expressed frustration with not being able to achieve a more masculine appearance. This is important because it seems to suggest that certain nonbinary individuals "do gender" in a very similar fashion to binary trans people. That is to say that they use impression management tactics in order to appear more masculine in the eyes of their audience.

This also corroborates past research that suggests that AFAB individuals are more likely to identify as nonbinary than AMAB individuals (Bradford et al., 2018; Herman et al., 2015). This could be because AMAB (assigned male at birth) individuals face more hostility when expressing queer gender expression than AFAB (assigned female at birth) individuals (Wareham, n.d.) and feel the need to "fully transition" into a more normative binary gender so that they can pass. For this reason, "passing" is especially important for transwomen due to safety concerns.

Additionally, this study highlights the phenomenon of "passing as nonbinary" on TikTok, where creators confuse cisgender individuals regarding their gender identity. "Passing as nonbinary" involves projecting an air of androgyny that prevents audiences from identifying the individual's assigned gender at birth (AGAB). The study presents examples of TikToks that feature creators who successfully pass as nonbinary, confusing

others. It also highlights the resistance individuals face in the nonbinary/trans community for failing to meet the androgynous ideal that has been defined by researchers such as Galupo (2021).

In these examples, creators express frustration over the resistance to their gender expression; such was the case with the individual who was met with the insult, “trans tender.” In addition, this study touches on the normalization of the apparent contradiction between a non-androgynous body and a nonbinary identity, such as the example in which the creator says “Hey man dude pussy bro ... Your tits look fantastic in that top.”

All of this affirms the importance of self-labeling as recognized by Oakley (2017). The nonbinary creators in my sample often used tags to identify themselves with a smaller group within the nonbinary gender identity such as transmasc or genderfluid. In several instances, they also addressed how their gender expression either challenged the image associated with that label (such as the case of the individual who said “you don’t get to decide what’s feminine”) or conformed to the expectations of this label, (such as the case of individuals who tagged their videos as #androgynous and portrayed a typically androgynous means of gender expression).

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that nonbinary individuals on TikTok use the platform in various ways to express and explore their gender identities. Many nonbinary creators identify as transmasc and make efforts to pass, while others focus on passing as androgynous or genderbending. Additionally, preexisting styles and subcultures like gothic and alternative are often used as means of gender expression. These findings highlight the diversity within the nonbinary community and the

importance of platforms like TikTok as a space for self-expression and exploration of gender identity.

Limitations

One of the primary limitations of this study is its small sample size. Because only fifty TikToks were analyzed, caution should be utilized when attempting to generalize the results to the larger community of nonbinary TikTok creators. Future studies should consider analyzing a larger sample. Additionally, this study did not look at the interactions between users in the comment section which may prove beneficial to understanding how nonbinary individuals communicate with other individuals online.

Another limitation is that, because I was the only one working on this research, there was no way to achieve inter-coder reliability. This would have better ensured the reliability of the codes that were identified. Future research on this topic would benefit to have more than one coder.

Other limitations include a relative lack of diversity within the sample. Of all the fifty TikToks, only nine of them (18%) featured BIPOC creators. Additionally, only one TikTok included a plus-size creator. The reason for this lack of diversity is likely due to inequality embedded within the TikTok algorithm itself. According to Trevor Bofonne, “TikTok fame mirrors general fame in the United States, which privileges whiteness and conventional Western beauty standards” (2022, p. 28). This underrepresentation of diversity is a significant problem as it limits the generalizability of the study's findings and may perpetuate existing inequalities in society. Future studies could look specifically at POC nonbinary TikToks and plus-size nonbinary TikToks to see if any unique trends emerge.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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EDUCATION

M.A.	University of Louisville:	Applied Sociology	Ongoing
B.A.	Indiana University Southeast:	Sociology, Communications	2019

PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS

Gender, Sexuality, Popular Culture, LGBTQIA Studies, Social Movements

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

2019, 2021-Ongoing	University of Louisville Diversity Fellowship
2019	IUS Sociology Academic Achievement Award

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2019 “This is a Man’s World but it Wouldn’t be Nothin’ Without a Woman or a Girl: Women in the Animated Film Industry.” Presented at the IUS Student Conference.