

**EXPLORING THE PHENOMENON OF
GENDER IDENTITY AND GENDER
EXPRESSION**



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**EXPLORING THE PHENOMENON OF GENDER IDENTITY
AND GENDER EXPRESSION**



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It is assured that research work is original and has not yet been published anywhere else.



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Alizey Mobassar

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alizey".

Abstract

This study aimed to explore the understanding of gender identity and gender expression, giving voice to individuals who have been marginalized by society. The study adopted a Constructivist research paradigm, which acknowledges that individuals construct their own knowledge and understanding of the world through experiences and reflection. A Phenomenological Research Design was used, specifically transcendental phenomenology, which seeks to uncover the underlying assumptions and beliefs that people hold about a particular phenomenon. The data was transcribed using thematic analysis. The study was conducted with informed consent, and the participants were kept anonymous to protect their privacy.

The results of the study revealed five emerging themes: Realization of Gender Identity, Religion and Gender, Appearance and Gender, Mental Health and Gender Identity, and Masculinity and Femininity Paradox.

The study suggests promoting greater awareness and understanding of gender nonconforming and genderqueer identities. This includes promoting education and awareness around gender diversity, and challenging gender norms and expectations that limit individuals' expression of their gender identity. Overall, this research contributes to the understanding of gender identity and expression in a specific cultural context and provides insight into the challenges faced by individuals who do not conform to traditional gender norms.

Key words: Gender identity, gender expression, nonbinary, genderfluid, gender non-conforming, gender dysphoria, gender-binary

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Gender identity, as defined by the American Psychiatric Association, refers to an individual's deeply personal sense of being male, female, or another gender (such as genderqueer or gender fluid). It is an internal perception that cannot be readily observed by others. According to the American Psychological Association, the majority of individuals typically identify with the sex they were assigned at birth. However, for transgender individuals, their gender identity does not align with their assigned gender at birth. Gender is often recognized as a social construct comprising diverse norms, behaviors, and roles that evolve across different societies and time periods. Within this construct, commonly recognized gender categories include male, female, and nonbinary identities.

Moreover, gender expression can be seen in behavior, personality types, and appearance (such as attire, make-up, and physical characteristics). These modes of expression are frequently classified as masculine or feminine in cultural terms. Each person expresses their gender identification in a unique way, and this can vary across cultures (American Psychiatric Association, 2017). An individual's gender expression is outwardly visible through their physical characteristics and the way they present themselves.

It is essential to remember that gender expression and gender identity are separate and deeply personal aspects of a person's identity. Gender expression involves how someone outwardly presents themselves to others. On the other hand, gender identity encompasses an individual's internal sense and understanding of their own gender, as recognized by the Ontario Human Rights Commission. It's important to recognize that these concepts can vary

greatly from person to person, as everyone's journey of self-expression and self-identification is unique. An illustration of this can be seen in societal perceptions, where wearing a dress is often associated with a "feminine" gender expression, while sporting a tuxedo is typically attributed to a "masculine" gender expression within the context of the United States. However, these standards are culturally defined and can vary across different cultures and time periods. It is possible for a person's gender expression to differ from their gender identity. Similar to varied gender identities, a wide range of gender expressions does not necessarily indicate a mental illness, according to the American Psychiatric Association. Embracing and respecting the diverse ways in which individuals express their gender is essential in creating a more inclusive and accepting society.

Gender identity neither necessitates nor suggests the need for medical or mental health care. Gender dysphoria, on the other hand, can occur in people whose gender identification does not match up with their physical characteristics. Some individuals may need medical and/or surgical therapy for their gender dysphoria. In such cases, seeking the assistance of a compassionate mental health professional may be beneficial for those who are grappling with gender dysphoria or exploring their gender (Boskey, 2022).

The latest edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) outlines the diagnostic criteria for gender dysphoria. To receive a diagnosis of gender dysphoria, an individual must have a noticeable incongruity between their expressed or experienced gender and the gender assigned to them at birth, which must persist for at least six months. Children with this disorder must express their desire to be of a different gender verbally. The condition must cause significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning, or result in severe distress. Gender dysphoria can manifest in

different ways, such as having a strong desire to be treated as the opposite gender or wishing to eliminate one's sex characteristics. Another manifestation is the belief that one possesses behaviors and emotions that are typical of the opposite gender, according to American Psychiatric Association.

Hence, it's critical to realize that gender identity is not in and of itself a problem in cases of gender dysphoria. In fact, this is the reason gender dysphoria has replaced the term gender identity disorder. The issue is not with the identity; rather, it is with how the identity and body interact. Additionally, differences in physical and mental health might result from the prejudice and stigma transgender people endure (Boskey, 2022).

Data on the prevalence of various gender identities is generally not very reliable. This is due to the fact that sex alone is frequently asked about by researchers, not gender, despite the existence of numerous national surveys on population and health. Furthermore, they rarely inquire for gender in a way that is consistent across research, even when they do. Because of this, estimates of the population size of transgender people have varied significantly (Boskey, 2022).

Throughout its history, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has been steadfastly committed to fostering inclusivity and combating discrimination based on gender identity. Back in 1999, the OHRC took an important step by unveiling "Toward a Commission Policy on Gender Identity" and seeking input from the public. Building on this momentum, in 2000, the OHRC officially published its pioneering policy specifically addressing discrimination and harassment related to gender identity. Since then, the OHRC has remained a strong advocate, tirelessly pushing for gender identity to be recognized as a protected ground within the framework of Ontario's Human Rights Code (OHRC, 2014).

These efforts reflect the OHRC's unwavering dedication to upholding the rights and dignity of all individuals, irrespective of their gender identity.

In 2012, the inclusion of gender identity and gender expression as protected grounds in the Human Rights Code of Ontario prompted the OHRC to update their policy on gender-based discrimination and harassment. The OHRC conducted a comprehensive literature review between 2012 and 2013, which provided a wealth of information on various perspectives concerning gender identity and human rights. Additionally, the legal rights of transgender individuals have been increasingly recognized and safeguarded under Canadian and international human rights laws (OHRC 2014).

Pakistan has a long-standing issue with discrimination that is primarily based on an individual's sexual orientation and gender identity. The transgender community, in particular, has been largely ignored and subjected to various forms of harassment and violence (US Department of State, 2017). Sadly, this is a common occurrence, and it is not uncommon for members of the LGBTQ+ community to face discrimination and violence solely because of their sexual orientation. According to a study conducted by the Pan African Medical Journal, nearly 78% of Pakistan's transgender community, also known as the Hijra, have been victims of physical attacks, while 91% have experienced discrimination (Pan African Medical Journal, 2018).

Comparatively speaking to other nations, Pakistan has a worse overall human rights situation (ILGA Asia, 2021). Although there exist laws, they are not being implemented. Civil laws are not clear-cut. Every day, incidences of rape, harassment, violence against women, child marriages, identity crises, discrimination, violating labor laws, honor killings, targeted killings based on religion, and child abuse are reported. The primary contributor to

injustice is social disparity. In Pakistan, only the rich and powerful are guaranteed the protection of their human rights, and the system makes it difficult for vulnerable and marginalized groups to obtain justice (ILGA Asia, 2021).

LGBT people in Pakistan are typically divided into four distinct communities. For instance, the general public views people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex as belonging to the same community. They are not familiar with concepts like sexual orientation or gender identity and expression. In Pakistan, these concepts are not frequently used or understood outside of civil society organizations. People who identify as intersex or transgender can be identified by their attire. Regardless of their gender identity and expression, the general public would stereotype an intersex or transgender person as a transgender woman if they were wearing female clothing. As a result, their attire is the primary means of identification (ILGA Asian, 2021).

Due to stigma, the concepts of gender identity and gender expression are not widely accepted, and members of the LGBT community are less visible. They frequently use social media applications like WhatsApp and social networking sites like Facebook to connect (ILGA Asia, 2021).

Pakistan does not openly acknowledge the concept of gender identity and gender expression, and sexual and gender minorities are forced to remain “underground”, according to the IRB 2019 report. This is precisely why it is necessary that we slowly take steps to generalize this discussion to the public, and have it more openly documented. It is important to look at individual experiences of those struggling with their identity and expression in order to better understand their circumstances, and why this topic should be researched more in depth.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical basis of this study is based upon **Stigma Theory, Social Role Theory, Gender Schema Theory, and Queer Theory.**

Stigma Theory

Erving Goffman, a Canadian sociologist, claims that the term "stigma" refers to the circumstance in which a person is "disqualified from full social acceptability" (Fitzpatrick, 2008). Every person has a social identity which is what others see them as. A person's social identity represents who they are to others and how they are seen from the outside perspective. However, society has norms and expectations of every individual, or what Goffman calls "normals". Those who fall outside the societal norms, or choose not to follow them, are stigmatized against and outcasted (Sociology of Deviant Behavior, 2017). For example, homosexuality is a stigma described in Goffman's study, and was once classified as a disease or sickness by doctors. The removal of homosexuality from the psychiatric list of disorders in the United States occurred in 1974, largely thanks to the efforts of the gay rights movement, which played a pivotal role in changing societal attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community (Fitzpatrick, 2008). Another example of a stigma can be of a person identifying as gender queer, or gender non-binary in a Pakistani society. They would then be labeled as falling outside of the norm, and could be stigmatized against due to societal views.

Social Role Theory

Social role theory, a social psychology concept, explores the differences and similarities in social behavior between genders. Its core principle suggests that the social roles given to men and women in a society play a crucial role in shaping individual differences and similarities (Eagly & Wood, 2016). For example, in Western society, there is a large

majority of men in higher paid positions of power and status as compared to women. In industrialized economies, societal norms dictate distinct gender-based roles. Women are more likely to occupy the role of homemakers, serve as primary caregivers for their children, and work in the paid care sector. In contrast, men are more likely to serve as the primary breadwinners for their families and hold full-time jobs in the paid economy (Eagly & Wood, 2016).

However, in what ways do social roles vary for individuals who do not identify as exclusively male or female? Or how does one's own perception of their gender identity influence what role they play in society? These are some of the questions that will be explored throughout this study.

Gender Schema Theory

In 1981, Sandra Bem, a psychologist, introduced the gender schema theory, which posits that children acquire gender roles from the societal norms they are exposed to while growing up. A schema is a mental framework that helps individuals organize and classify new information they receive (Martin & Dinella, 2001). As children develop socially, they modify their behavior to conform to the gender norms prevalent in their society (Cherry, 2020). Gender schemas shape an individual's attitudes and beliefs regarding gender-appropriate behavior. According to this perspective, children selectively focus on and remember information that relates to their gender, which motivates them to guide their actions and develop gender-based assumptions and judgments (Zosuls & Ruble, 2008). For instance, a child raised in a traditional culture might view a woman's primary role as that of a homemaker and caregiver, while a girl raised in a more progressive environment may prioritize education and career.

According to the gender schema theory, children learn about the gender roles and norms prevalent in their culture. However, when it comes to individuals who fall outside of the gender binary, how do they decide which category they fall into? This is a pertinent question, especially in societies such as Pakistan, which have a patriarchal structure, where men hold the majority of the power, and women are often marginalized and considered subordinate (Ali et al., 2011). Men and women have their set duties and responsibilities which they have to fulfill. Through this study, we are looking to explore more in-depth how gender non-conforming individuals perform societal duties and fit into roles.

Queer Theory

In the 1990s, a novel theory called Queer Theory emerged, which challenges the notion of clearly defined and rigid identity categories, as well as the societal norms that establish a dichotomy of "acceptable" and "unacceptable" sexual orientations. The core objective of Queer Theory is to deconstruct the binary systems, aiming to eradicate inequality and difference, since, according to this theory, there is no such thing as a fixed normality, but only ever-changing standards that individuals may or may not conform to (Illinois Library, 2022). It challenges prevailing notions of gender and sexual orientation, and fights against social inequality (IU Libraries, 2022). This is one of the main goals of this research study, to normalize the discussion of gender identity, and break the illusion of a set “normal” in Pakistani society.

Rationale

As gender identity is becoming a more prominent topic in today's society, there remains much to be explored regarding identity and expression. Majority of the literature available regarding gender identity is related to transgenders (Saddique et al., 2017). Pakistan recognizes the third gender, however, there is not any visible recognition of other gender identities, or non-conforming individuals. Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics (SOGIESC) are not recognized by the Islamic Republic of Pakistan's Constitution as being protected categories on the basis of which discrimination is forbidden (ILGA, 2021).

The objective of this study is to explore how gender identity and gender expression are understood. This research aims to provide more information on the topic of gender identity and gender expression in Pakistan. As gender identity is a greatly vast topic, an in-depth understanding of gender identity is needed in order to open the door to further discussion.

Literature Review

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals often face discrimination, prejudice, and social exclusion that can manifest in various forms, including physical and mental abuse, harassment, and financial marginalization (United Nations, 2011). Research has shown that stigma and prejudice play a critical role as important intervening factors in psychopathology among LGBT people. Nonetheless, factors such as familial and societal support, reduced internalized homophobia, expectation of acceptance versus rejection, interaction with fellow LGBT individuals, and religious beliefs, may serve as intermediaries in the relationship between sexual orientation or gender identity and stress (Moleiro & Pinto, 2015).

Qualitative research was conducted on gender identity in March and April of 2017. Relevant issues based on sex and gender were explored. There were three question designs constructed in order to gain information on gender identity. The research used a total of 29 participants, which included cisgender individuals and the trans population, including nonbinary and intersex people. It was found that none of the questions were actually valid, and would result in a measurement error. The conclusion was that none of the three designs were recommended to be used, as they were not appropriate measurements of data. In general, both cisgender and transgender groups were open to discussing gender inclusivity (Census, 2021). Views regarding the acceptability of inclusion in the census or social surveys were heavily influenced by the specifics of the questions asked. Apart from the design of the questions themselves, participants' perceptions regarding what information should be included and what responses would be considered accurate were influenced by

different aspects of the census. It was recommended that in the next study, no subgroups should be excluded (Census, 2021).

In 2017, Malone conducted a quantitative study to examine the correlation between gender identity and adverse childhood experiences. The primary objective of the study was to investigate how childhood experiences affect one's gender identity. The researchers employed a survey method, and 327 individuals participated in the study after meeting the inclusion criteria. The participants were required to provide informed consent before filling the Gender Identity and Childhood Experiences (GICE) survey, consisting of 23 questions. However, after conducting a statistical analysis, the results showed limited evidence that an individual's gender identification is affected by their ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) score (Malone, 2017). The study's findings imply the need for further research and the use of more effective data gathering techniques to support clinical practice with the transgender population. (Malone, 2017)

While gender diversity is not considered a mental health concern, transgender individuals often face unique mental health challenges that are not encountered by the general population (Downing & Przedworski, 2018). Gender dysphoria, a common experience for transgender individuals, can lead to increased rates of anxiety and depression (Dhejne et al., 2016). This underscores the need for effective and compassionate support services that cater to the specific mental health needs of transgender individuals. Such resources can make a significant difference in promoting the well-being and happiness of transgender people, helping them navigate the complex terrain of gender identity and overcome the challenges they may face along the way.

Roselli examined studies relating to the the neurobiology of gender identity and sexual orientation, which revealed that the early developmental stages are crucial in shaping these aspects of a person's identity (Roselli, 2018). During this period, the brain is undergoing differentiation influenced by various factors such as gonadal steroid hormones, genes, and maternal factors. The impact of these events can have significant implications for gender identity and sexual orientation (Roselli, 2018). Nonetheless, the reliability of these findings can vary, and our understanding of the complex interplay between these factors remains incomplete.

Although no particular candidate genes have been found, family and twin studies suggest that genes are involved (Roselli, 2018). The differences in sexual identity or orientation cannot fully be explained by the biological factors discovered to far, nor is it understood whether or how these factors may combine. Despite these drawbacks, it is evident from the available empirical evidence that biological factors have a considerable impact on an individual's sexual identity and sexual orientation. (Roselli, 2018).

A phenomenology study of gender dysphoria in adults was conducted in 2020, with the aim to systematically analyze and integrate the qualitative literature already in existence on the phenomenology of adult gender dysphoria. For this study, a meta-ethnography methodology was chosen. To do this, a structured investigation of the phenomenology of gender dysphoria in transgender people's experiences was conducted (Cooper et al., 2020). In the analysis, four main concepts and twelve sub-themes were found:

1. Distress due to dissonance of assigned and experienced gender
2. Interface of assigned gender, gender identity, and society
3. Negative social consequences of gender identity

4. Internal processing of rejection and transphobia

The study revealed the connection between distress caused by the conflict between an individual's assigned and experienced genders and the distress caused by the reactions of others towards their gender identity. Such reactions could manifest in the form of strangers misgendering them or being rejected by close family or friends (Cooper et al., 2020).

Diamond conducted research which explored the concept of nonbinary gender identities and gender fluidity among young people. The research suggests that gender identity is a complex and multifaceted concept, and some individuals may identify as neither exclusively male nor exclusively female (Diamond, 2020). Diamond argues that nonbinary gender identities and gender fluidity are not new phenomena, but rather have been present throughout history and across cultures. However, recent societal changes have created greater awareness and acceptance of these identities. The research also examines the challenges faced by nonbinary and gender-fluid young people, including discrimination and lack of understanding from others. Diamond emphasizes the need for greater support and resources for these individuals, including access to appropriate healthcare and education. Overall, the research contributes to a growing body of literature on gender diversity and the need for greater recognition and support of nonbinary and gender-fluid identities among young people.

A research conducted on bullying and victimization in relation with gender expression examined the relationship between gender expression and bullying victimization among high school students in four U.S. school districts (Gordon et al., 2018). The authors surveyed a total of 4,673 students, asking them about their experiences of bullying victimization, their gender identity, and their expression of gender through clothing and behavior. The results

showed that students who expressed themselves in gender-nonconforming ways, such as by wearing clothing or behaving in ways that did not conform to traditional gender norms, were more likely to experience bullying and violence. This was particularly true for male students who engaged in gender-nonconforming behaviors. Additionally, students who experienced bullying were more likely to have negative mental health outcomes, such as depression and anxiety.

Another research on LGBTQ+ self-acceptance aimed to explore the relationship between LGBTQ+ self-acceptance, minority stressors, and mental health (Camp et al., 2020). The results of the study showed that LGBTQ+ self-acceptance was negatively associated with minority stressors such as discrimination, prejudice, and victimization. Moreover, LGBTQ+ self-acceptance was positively associated with mental health outcomes such as psychological well-being, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. The study also found that social support played a significant role in promoting LGBTQ+ self-acceptance and mitigating the negative effects of minority stressors. Overall, the study highlights the importance of LGBTQ+ self-acceptance as a protective factor against minority stressors and the promotion of mental health among LGBTQ+ individuals. The study also suggests that interventions targeting LGBTQ+ self-acceptance and social support may have a positive impact on mental health outcomes for this population.

Similarly, a study explored the experiences of nonbinary individuals with gender dysphoria (Galupo et al., 2021). The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 205 nonbinary individuals who experienced gender dysphoria, and analyzed their responses using qualitative methods. The study found that nonbinary individuals experience gender dysphoria differently from binary transgender individuals, as they often do not feel a strong

connection to either male or female identities. Participants reported feeling trapped in a body that did not match their gender identity, but also struggled to articulate what changes they wanted to make to their physical appearance to alleviate this dysphoria. Many participants expressed frustration with the limited options available for nonbinary individuals in terms of medical transition, such as hormone therapy or surgery, which are often designed for binary transgender individuals. Participants also discussed the challenges of navigating social spaces, such as public restrooms or healthcare settings, where their nonbinary identity was not recognized or respected. Overall, the study highlights the unique experiences of nonbinary individuals with gender dysphoria and underscores the need for greater understanding and support for this community.

Research Objectives

1. To understand how gender identity is perceived by individuals living in Lahore.
2. To explore the phenomenon of gender identity and gain a deeper understanding of it.

Research Questions

1. What is the Phenomenon of Gender Identity?
2. How Gender Identity and Gender Expression are understood in individuals living in Lahore?

Chapter II

Method

This research aims to understand gender identity and gender expression in individuals. Qualitative research is particularly useful in studying gender identity and gender expression because it allows for a deep exploration of individuals' subjective experiences and perspectives (Hancock et al., 2007). Qualitative methods can help researchers gain an understanding of the complexity and diversity of gender identities and expressions, and the ways in which they are shaped by social, cultural, and historical factors. It allows participants to share their stories and experiences in their own words, without the researcher imposing preconceived categories or definitions onto their experiences. This can lead to a more nuanced understanding of gender identity and expression, and can reveal the ways in which individuals navigate and negotiate these concepts in their everyday lives.

Research Paradigm

The research adopted the Constructivist research paradigm, which is based on the philosophical belief that individuals construct their own knowledge and understanding of the world through experiences and reflection (Honebein, 1996). According to constructivist philosophy, learning is not just about passively listening to a teacher's lecture, but rather actively engaging in experimentation and discovering knowledge for oneself (Kalender, 2007).

Researcher's Assumptions

- Multiple perspectives were reported from each individual, and differing perspectives were used to develop different themes. Multiple realities exist.
- Quotes were used as evidence from participants.

- Researcher delved into the values that influence the narrative and incorporated their own perception of the participants.
- Researcher worked with details before generalizing, and provided a comprehensive account of the study's material.

Research Design

A Phenomenological Research Design was used to conduct this study. Specifically, transcendental phenomenology was used to explore the subjective experiences of individuals. Transcendental phenomenology is a philosophical approach that seeks to explore the underlying assumptions and beliefs that people hold about a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The goal of this type of research is to uncover the fundamental nature of a phenomenon by examining the ways in which it is understood by different individuals or groups. This approach assumes that there is an underlying unity to human experience, and seeks to identify the commonalities that exist across different perspectives (Yee, 2019). The aim of transcendental research is to uncover the deeper meaning of a phenomenon by exploring the perspectives of multiple participants.

Philosophical Assumptions

There are four philosophical assumptions in qualitative research, according to John Creswell:

1. **Ontological** (the nature of reality): Researchers acknowledge the notion of multiple realities, which they investigate by analyzing a diverse range of evidence from various perspectives and experiences. By doing so, they can provide comprehensive reports on these multiple realities.

In this study, we will be listening to multiple viewpoints and perceptions of gender identities, which reinforce the idea of multiple realities.

2. **Epistemological** (how researchers know what they know): Researchers strive to establish close proximity with the participants who are being observed. The subjective evidence is gathered by compiling distinctive viewpoints derived from thorough field investigations.

In order to get closer to the participants, one-on-one interviews will be conducted, where rapport will be developed throughout the interview process.

3. **Axiological** (the role of values in research): Researchers are transparent about their biases and values when conducting research, including the fact that the data they collect from the field is influenced by subjective factors.

The researcher's biases in conducting the research will be acknowledged, so that the data can be interpreted accordingly.

4. **Methodology** (the methods used in the process of research): Refer to the principles guiding the research methodology, including the techniques employed in the research, the manner in which it is conducted, and the language utilized.

Participants and Sampling Strategy

Although some qualitative researchers steer clear of the question of "how many" interviews "are enough," numerous papers, articles, and books suggest 5 to 25 participants as being sufficient (Dworkin, 2012). The sample for this research study was 6 participants, who were recruited by purposeful sampling strategy. Purposeful sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where researchers intentionally select individuals or groups that meet certain criteria or characteristics, rather than selecting a random sample from a larger

population (Palinkas et al., 2015). The goal of purposeful sampling is to identify and select participants who are likely to provide relevant and valuable information for the research study. in this case, about the phenomenon of gender identity.

Table 2.4 *Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

	Age	Gender	Pronouns	Sexuality	Appearance	Interview
Participant A	19	Genderfluid	She/they	Lesbian	Traditionally female presenting	In-person
Participant B	20	Cisgender female	She/her	Not mentioned	Tomboyish appearance	In-person
Participant C	19	Cisgender female	She/her	Fluid	Both feminine and masculine characteristics	In-person
Participant D	22	Genderfluid	They/them	Fluid	Androgenous	In-person
Participant E	21	Nonbinary	She/they	Lesbian	Traditionally female presenting	In-person
Participant F	23	Trans male	He/him	Straight	Traditionally masculine presenting	In-person

Inclusion Criteria

- Participants must be between 18-25 years of age.
- Participants must be university or college-going.
- Cisgender, as well as non-binary and genderqueer participants so as to get varied perspectives.
- Participants who are able to speak and understand the Urdu or English language.

Exclusion Criteria

- Participants who are married or used to be married.
- Participants who are divorced.
- Transgender female participants.
- Participants who have a history of mental health disorders that could interfere with their ability to participate in the study.

Data Collection Tool

The in-depth interview guide was used for this study as a tool of data collection. This qualitative research technique involves conducting 45-90 minute one-on-one interviews with 6-8 respondents to learn more about their viewpoints on a certain concept or idea. Also, in-depth interviews help develop rapport with respondents, making them feel comfortable enough to openly express and share their thoughts about a topic. This can lead to gathering of rich qualitative data (Guion et al., 2011).

The interview guide consisted of a total of twenty-seven questions, which included introductory questions, opening, key, and then closing questions. The interview guide was then verified by two teachers, and reviewed according to the changes needed. During the

interviews, participants often talked more about certain subjects, so further in-depth questioning was done during the interview sessions relating to their specific experiences.

Pilot Study

To conduct the in-depth interviews, an interview guide was developed. The interview consisted of the main topics or questions to be covered during the course of the interview.

Afterwards, a pilot study was conducted to test the validity of the interview guide. Two participants were purposefully selected for the pilot study. Their feedback was then used to take into consideration any changes needed to be made to the interview guide and the process of interviewing.

During the pilot study, it was discovered that there needed to be more detailed questions added to the interview guide regarding discrimination and judgement of gender identity. Also, during the pilot interviews, it was found that the participants often delved into deeper areas of gender identity and gender expression not mentioned in the interview guide, so it is necessary to question more in-depth during the main interviews.

Another area which needed improving was the building of rapport. Since gender identity and expression is a sensitive topic, it is necessary to build enough rapport with the participants so they are willing to open up and go more in detail.

Procedure

Following the pilot study, the main research study was conducted. Approval to undertake the study was taken from Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore. The purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants on the basis of their inclusion criteria. A social media post highlighting the details of the study was uploaded to the interviewer's social media. Upon

getting volunteers, they were then assessed based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria and chosen for the study. The participants were given informed consent, and were briefed on the study. The participants were of their right to discontinue at any moment and have their information erased. The participants' names were not disclosed, and they were referred to as Participant A, B, C, etc. Any other personal identifiers were kept anonymous. The participants had the right to not respond to a certain question, or not to disclose information if they choose. The goal of the researcher was to build comfort and rapport with the participant, so as to make the interview process as comfortable and relaxed as possible.

Once all participants agreed to take part in the research, they were each interviewed one-on-one. The participants were told beforehand that the interview is to be audio recorded using phone. Participant A was interviewed in an empty classroom setting. The interview was approximately 40 minutes long, and the participant expressed open body language and comfort. At one point, the participant expressed discomfort during the topic of sexual abuse. Participant B was interviewed in an empty classroom setting. The interview was 30 minutes long, and the participant expressed mostly a comfortable body language. However, the participant was not willing on speak into detail on certain topics, such as religion and relationships. Participant C was interviewed in an open ground in a university setting. The interview was approximately 35 minutes long. The participant took time to build rapport, but later became more comfortable. Participant D was interviewed in an open ground in a university setting. The interview was 53 minutes long, and the participant expressed extremely comfortable and open language. The participant was willing to go into detail on every topic and personal experience. Participant E was interviewed in an empty classroom setting. The interview was approximately 40 minutes long, and the participant was open and

comfortable throughout the entirety of the interview. Participant F was interviewed in an open ground in a university setting. The interview was 37 minutes long, and the participant expressed open and comfortable body language through most of the interview, however, was not as comfortable speaking about religion.

After the interviews were conducted, the researcher had to go back and listen to the audio recordings of each individual, and transcribe each interview onto a word document. This data was then be analyzed, and thematic analysis was done to understand the phenomenon of gender identity.

The following are the steps which were followed to conduct Thematic Analysis:

1. **Familiarization:** To begin the process, it's important to become acquainted with the data at hand. Before delving into the specifics, a comprehensive understanding of all the collected data is necessary. This may involve listening to and transcribing audio, studying written text and jotting down initial observations, and overall, becoming familiar with the data.
2. **Coding:** The act of coding involves recognizing particular pieces of text, commonly in the form of phrases or sentences, and allocating concise labels, known as "codes," that signify the content of those segments.
3. **Generating Themes:** Following the coding process, the next step involves analyzing the assigned codes, identifying similarities among them, and creating overarching themes. Generally, themes encompass a broader scope than codes, often encompassing a combination of multiple codes to form a single, cohesive theme
4. **Reviewing Themes:** The next crucial step involves verifying the precision of the themes we have developed. To accomplish this, we return to the original data set and compare it

to our established themes. We question whether there are any missing components, whether the data aligns with the identified themes, and what alterations can be made to enhance their efficiency. If we encounter any discrepancies or uncertainties, we may opt to merge, eliminate, or even create entirely new themes that align more accurately with the data set, depending on what will yield the most precise and practical results.

5. **Defining and naming themes:** To define themes effectively, it is crucial to establish clear definitions for each theme and determine how it contributes to our understanding of the data. Naming themes involves creating concise and straightforward labels for each topic, making them easily identifiable and comprehensible.
6. **Writing Up:** The final phase entails documenting the analysis of the data. To accomplish this, an introduction is necessary to outline the research topic, objectives, and approach taken to conduct the theme analysis. A methodology section should also be included, detailing the data gathering process and the methods utilized in the thematic analysis. In the results or findings section, each theme is explored in-depth, analyzing its frequency of occurrence and significance, with examples extracted from the data to support the claims made. The conclusion summarizes the critical findings and highlights how the study addresses the research topic, providing a comprehensive overview of the analysis conducted.

Ethical Consideration

Prior to conducting the study, ethical approval was obtained from Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore, and the Department of Psychology in Kinnaird College for Women.

Since the topic of gender identity and gender expression could be a sensitive area of discussion for some individuals, it is important to obtain informed consent from all

participants in your study. Participants were fully informed about the research and what their involvement will entail. They were also provided with the option to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

Participants were assured that their responses will be kept confidential and that their identities will be kept anonymous to protect their privacy. Special measures were taken to protect the audio recordings, such as using encryption and storing them in secure locations like a USB device.

Full disclosure of the researcher's role was provided to all participants, included how their data was going to be used in the study. The participants were given a detailed explanation of the research process, and reason for undertaking the study.

CHAPTER III

Results

This chapter includes the results, consisting of major themes and sub-themes, along with supporting quotations from participants. The results of this research were acquired through thematic analysis, which consisted of first transcribing the audio recordings, then searching for codes and highlighting the important points, and deriving major and minor themes based on the similarities between the transcripts. The themes were given appropriate names relevant to the data they incorporated. Important quotations from the participants which supported the themes were also gathered. There was a total of five major themes that arose.

The themes which emerged from the data have been shown in the following table (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 *Themes, Codes, and Quotations*

Major Themes	Subthemes	Codes	Quotations
Realization of Gender Identity	1. Discomfort with appearance 2. Childhood experiences 3. Learning about own gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never felt comfortable 	<p><i>“I just want to mention that I have never felt comfortable in my physical body, or with my appearance. Ever since I was young, I kept hearing this term that I was a ‘tomboy’, I don’t act like a girl, I’m a ‘khusra’.” (PF)</i></p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical body 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tomboy 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Khusra 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masculine representation 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dress more masculine 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be like my brothers 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understood things 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Met people 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talked to them 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part of growing up 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having an open mind 		<p><i>“I have always had a leaning towards, like, you know, a part of me really craved for masculine representation. And when my brothers used to buy clothes, I was like, I want similar clothes.” (PE)</i></p> <p><i>“With time I</i></p>	

*understood things.
I met people, I
talked to them,
they told me
things about
themselves, and it
just was a part of
growing up I
think,
understanding
things and having
an open mind
towards them.”
(PA)*

**Religion and
Gender**

**1. Religious
perspective on
gender**

**2. Feelings of
restriction**

**3. Influence of religion
on life**

- According to rules *“I believe that if I’m born this way, god made me this way. God gave me this body, I have no right to change it. I have to accept it, because the physical body is not related to the soul.” (PF)*
 - How I view myself
 - Have to accept it
 - No right to change it
 - Ruined a lot of things
 - Boxed me in
 - Tied up by it
 - Antagonistic towards religion *“I believe that if I’m born this way, god made me this way. God gave me this body, I have*
 - Stopped me to do certain things
 - Certain rules
-

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow your God successfully 	<p><i>no right to change it. I have to accept it, because the physical body is not related to the soul.” (PA)</i></p> <p><i>“It has stopped me to do certain things, because obviously there are certain rules that we have to follow. So yea it has affected me and the way I am or the way I do things.” (PB)</i></p>
Appearance and Gender	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expression of gender through appearance 2. Misidentification of gender 3. Societal roles based on gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Androgenous person • Fluid about gender • Act like a boy or act like a girl • Misidentified a lot • Mixed pronouns • Caused a lot of stress • Affect me mentally 	<p><i>“I think of myself as an androgenous person. I do not associate being feminine or masculine. I feel fluid about my gender.” (PA)</i></p> <p><i>“I do get misidentified a lot by people, because I’m not</i></p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dual personality • Dress more like a woman • Wear makeup • Complete opposite of me 	<p><i>completely out yet.</i></p> <p><i>Because of this people often used mixed pronouns for me, which does affect me a lot mentally. I have to play a dual personality.”</i></p> <p><i>(PF)</i></p> <p><i>“Because of my gender in this society I’m expected to behave like all the other girls around me, you know I’m expected to wear makeup or dress a certain way or behave a certain way.”</i> <i>(PB)</i></p>
Mental Health and Gender Identity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Experience during school 2. Judgement due to appearance 3. Problems with family life 4. Trouble with accepting identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School life was not good • Toll on mental health • Traumatic • Bullied a lot • Got made fun of • Toxic place 	<p><i>“My school life was not good because I realized a lot of things I went through a lot of things, and they did have a toll on my mental health,</i></p>

and sexuality

- Criticism and judgement *and last few years of my school life*
 - Cut my hair short *were really awful.” (PA)*
 - Lot of backlash *“Initially when I*
 - Someone is upset *cut my hair short, I got made fun of*
 - Keep my away from family *a lot over that. The environment*
 - Doubtful about myself *there wasn’t open at all, it was a*
 - Felt really weird for me *very toxic place.” (PF)*
 - Prayed for God to change me *“Because this is a part of myself that*
 - Hated myself for it *I can't really share with them, there's often like backlash whether I dress masculine, or whether it was feminine, someone is upset about it. So it usually does keep me away from my family,” (PD)*
- “I prayed a lot to be normal. I tried to you know*
-

			<p><i>distance myself from, from the things that I assumed were making me feel like this. I hated myself for a really long time. I prayed for God to change me and make me feel like everyone else.”</i> (PE)</p>
<p>Masculinity and Femininity Paradox</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understanding masculinity 2. Understanding femininity 3. Concept of gender-binary 4. Erasing the concept of gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confident about yourself • Strong physically • Egoistic • Wear a lot of makeup • Sensitivity • Comfortable energy • Motherly nature • Spectrum is wide • You can be anything • It’s very restricting 	<p><i>“The male has to be strong physically, a little bit mentally, yes. But that’s not a standard that should be kept. It of course, varies with every person who has a different mental health. But yeah, when I think of male, I think of a strong kind of person.”</i> (PC)</p> <p><i>“For femininity</i></p>

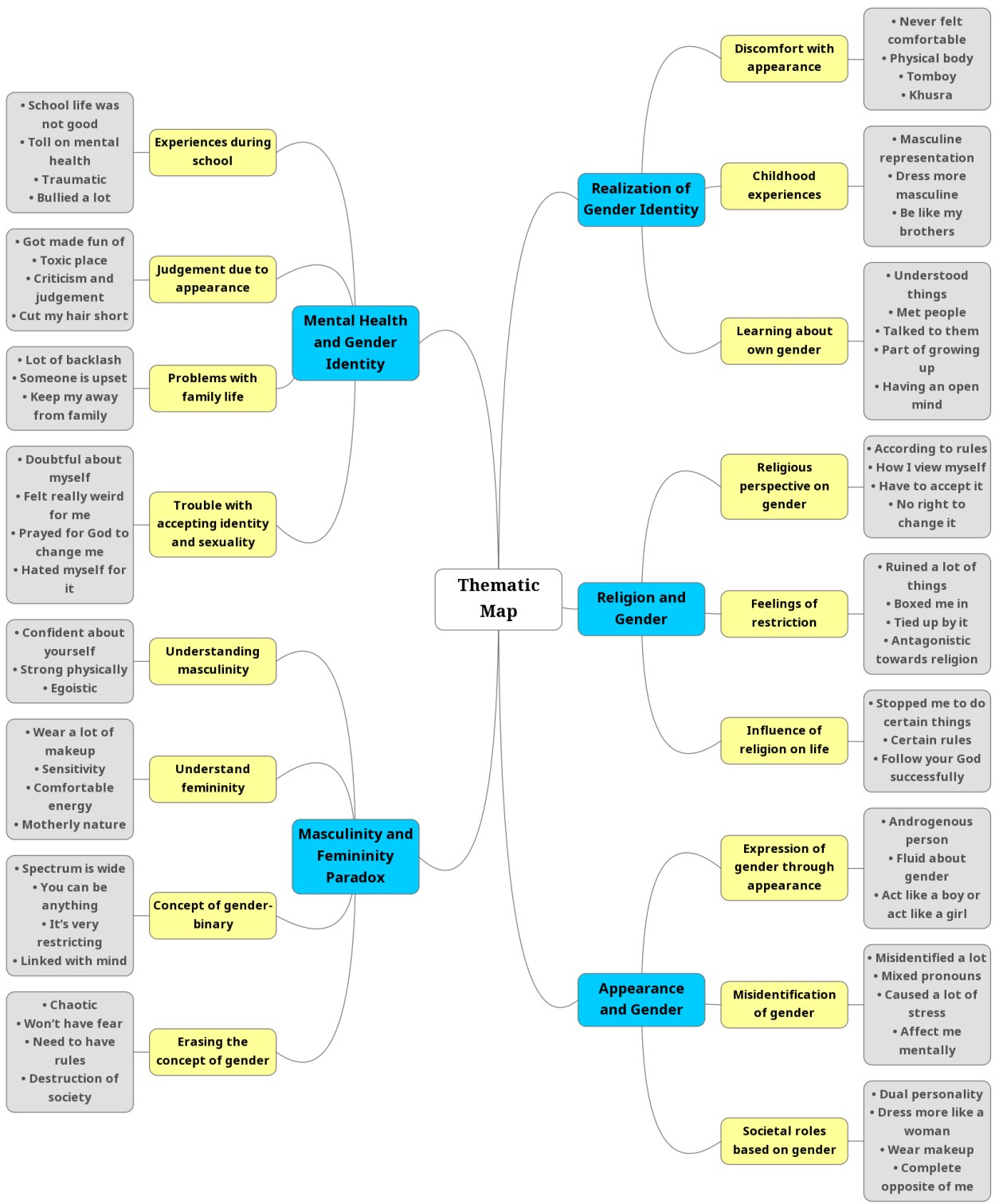
-
- Linked with mind
 - Chaotic
 - Won't have fear
 - Need to have rules
 - Destruction of society
- we think, you know, having that motherly nature to yourself, being nurturing, and being that type of, you know, having that type of comfortable, energy to yourself, that people feel safe around you.”*
(PE)

“Gender identity is linked with the person’s mind, so it can be different for anyone. Every person has their own view which they believe to be true. If someone doesn’t identify as male or female, but as a completely different gender, it could be that the justification they are giving is

correct.” (PF)

*“There's a need to
have to rules in
our society, to
some extent,
definitely. You
cannot run a
country, you
cannot run a
society if there are
no rules at all,
that will be
destruction of the
whole society.”
(PC)*

Figure 3.1 Thematic map



THEME 1: REALIZATION OF GENDER IDENTITY

While interviewing the participants, it became evident that all of them experienced a sense of realization of their gender identity. The topic of realizing gender identity was chosen because it is important we first and foremost understand how these individuals came to realize their identity. The following are the subthemes through which we will analyze their experiences.

1.1: Discomfort with appearance

Discomfort with the physical appearance was present within 3 of the participants. Participant F (he/him, age 23, trans man), when asked about why he decided to take the step of cutting his hair short, mentioned:

“First of all, I just want to mention that I have never felt comfortable in my physical body, or with my appearance. Ever since I was young, I kept hearing this term that I was a ‘tomboy’, I don’t act like a girl, I’m a ‘khusra’”. (PF)

Participant B (she/her, age 20, female) mentioned that due to her religion, she chooses not to change her gender into a man. This displays a clear discomfort with her current appearance. She said:

“I would want to change. If it was allowed, I would have changed. But since it’s not, that is the sole reason why I haven’t done it yet.” (PB)

During their interview, Participant D (they/them, age 22, gender fluid) revealed that since they started going through puberty, they had body image and self-esteem issues. They stated:

“It just really messed with the way that I looked, I started, you know, dressing more girly, because there was just so much so much questioning from people. And I hated answering to

them all the time, because I was a child, and I didn't really understand the nuances of it myself. I just feel like, well, this is how I feel comfortable, but I don't know how to explain it to you.” (PD)

All 3 of these participants expressed clear discomfort with their appearance at one point or another. Participant F and Participant B, who are biologically female, both had the desire to change their gender, although only Participant F uses he/him pronouns, while Participant B continues to use she/her pronouns. Participant D, also biologically female, identified as genderfluid, and expressed discomfort with appearance mostly during the time of puberty, when gendered expectations were placed upon them.

1.2: Childhood experiences

Experiences during childhood include the associations about gender which were formed as a child, treatment by parents, and self-concept as a child. When asked about her first memories associated with her identity, Participant A (she/they, age 19, gender fluid) recalled:

“When I was a child, my family used to consider me as a boy, I had short hair and everything, I was a tomboy kid. So it’s been like that since my childhood, that I’ve been associating with a different gender than I was born with.” (PA)

She also went on to further explain how she was a tomboy as a kid, and was treated as a boy, but had a traumatic experience which changed her identity.

“The reason I don’t associate as a girl is because something happened with a family member. It was sexual abuse, and that really changed things for me. I did not want to be close to that opposite gender in any way.” (PA)

Participant B (she/her, age 20, female), when talking about her childhood and family life, mentioned that the reason why she never indulged in girlish activities was because she had just one brother, and her mother never really placed the gendered expectations on her as a child. She said:

“My mother never really forced me to wear frocks and stuff like that. She was always neutral with the both of us, and... yea that is why I am how I am right now. She wanted me to do everything that I wanted. She never stopped me, never really cared if I wore clothes a certain way or played outside, so yea which is why I am how I am right now. I only had a brother. I never had the girly influence around me.” (PB)

When asked if she believed things would have been different if she was raised with a sister instead of a brother, she said:

“I do believe that if I had an older sister instead of a brother, things would have been different. Because I was influenced by my brother. If he was a girl than probably yea things would have been different.” (PB)

Participant D (they/them, age 22, gender fluid), when asked about their relationship with family, also explained how they were very tomboyish during childhood:

“I was very tomboyish in my childhood as well. Like doing sports and stuff and not really being enamored with anything feminine.” (PD)

Participant E (she/they, age 21, nonbinary) also had a similar account, explaining how she always craved for masculine representation within herself, and how she always engaged in typically masculine activities with her brothers. She stated:

“I was always like, you know, very big on power games. So, I’ve always had the thing inside me, I’ve always wanted to dress more masculine and just, you know, be like my brothers. And after some time, I just, I realized that it’s not a big deal, I want to wear it, I can wear it. If I want to buy masculine stuff I can buy masculine stuff, I can wear it.” (PE)

Participant F (he/him, age 23, trans man), when asked if he thought his environment had affected his identity in any way, went on to say:

“Since I was young, I was raised in a very simple environment. I’ve always been a tomboy, ever since I was born. So how can I say that there has been an influence on me of any kind.” (PF)

Participants A, D, and F all used the word “tomboy” to refer to themselves during their childhood. Participants B and E both associated their gender expression with their brothers growing up, however only Participant B believed that her gender expression would have been different had she been raised with an older sister instead.

1.3: Learning about own gender

Most of the participants came to learn about their gender and identity through different ways. For example, Participant A (she/they, age 19, gender fluid) said:

“With time I understood things. I met people, I talked to them, they told me things about themselves, and it just was a part of growing up I think, understanding things and having an open mind towards them.” (PA)

Participant B (she/her, age 20, female) learned about her identity later on, when coming to university opened her up to more possibilities and interactions with others. She mentioned:

“Well for the longest time I didn’t think there was anyone like me, because as I said I didn’t know that this community existed. I only came to know about it later on, in 10th grade. And when I came here in Kinnaird, I got to know more people who were, you know very into the community. And I think that’s how I got to know, through social media obviously, I got know that oh such people do exist, or oh there are certain people who associate themselves a certain way.” (PB)

Participant D (they/them, age 22, gender fluid) explained how they came to learn more about their gender through research. They said:

“When I was a teenager, I started reading up a lot more on gender identity and just gender in general. And plus I’m a debater, so I have a lot of knowledge about the philosophy of gender and stuff like that.” (PD)

Participant E (she/they, age 21, nonbinary), when asked how she came to understand her identity, she explained how she had always related with her brothers in engaging in masculine activities:

“For me, I have always had a leaning towards, like, you know, a part of me really craved for masculine representation. And when my brothers used to buy clothes, I was like, I want similar clothes. I didn’t want to buy frocks and all of the pretty stuff and all the dresses, I used to cry that I want what they’re getting.” (PE)

She then said how dressing how she wanted helped her realize her identity:

“Slowly, when I started to comfortably dress the way I wanted, it was it just made me feel more comfortable in myself. And I realized that I don’t want to identify as a sort of gender.” (PE)

Participant F (he/him, age 23, trans man) stated that it was through a friend that he got to realize his gender identity:

“As I grew up, I did my own research, and I got to know more. I realized my gender identity during lockdown. At that time, I did not know that I was a trans male, but I knew that I am not a lesbian. And one of my friends, she was a girl, she asked me if I would like to meet her friend, who was a trans man. And after the first meeting with him, I got to realize that, I am also like him. Before I did not know that this even exists.” (PF)

He also mentioned going to therapy, and how because of talking to his current therapist, he felt accepted and started using male pronouns:

“When I told her all of my experiences in life in detail, she said “you have a man’s soul”. No one had ever said those kinds of things to me. It felt like she accepted the man inside me. The first time I started using these pronouns, it was in front of her.” (PF)

THEME 2: RELIGION AND GENDER

The second topic to be investigated is regarding the role of religion with gender and identity. Religion played an important role in all of the participants’ lives, and many of their decisions and life choices were guided by it. It is important we delve into the prominent role it played in their lives in order to understand their point of views.

2.1: Religious perspective on gender

Religious perspective on gender pertains to how the participants viewed gender in regards to their religion. When Participant C (she/her, age 19, female) was asked whether religion played in a role in how she viewed herself, she replied:

“Yeah, it does play a role in how I view myself, because in my beliefs, what I am should be according to rules given to me by my God. So yeah, I think of myself like “yea I have to do this and I have to do that””. (PC)

Participant C also mentioned experiencing trouble with her sexuality and how she viewed that according to religion:

“When I was having troubles with my sexuality, it was about being attracted to another person with the same gender as me. And according to, well being a religious person, I know that it was not right. So that of course increased my anxiety.” (PC)

When Participant B (she/her, age 20, female) was asked about why she believes there are only two genders, she said:

“Well, being a Muslim, obviously there are certain things which are set for us, and I am someone who practices my religion, so that is why I do only believe there are two genders.” (PB)

She also described how she has feelings of changing her gender, but due to religion, she has decided not to do that:

“Well...now the world we are living in, it is easy to change your gender. Like biologically and things like that. So I have decided not to do that since you know it’s not allowed in our religion, and yea it’s one of the things that has affected me as a person, because I have to follow...because I believe in my religion, that is why I choose to. It’s not that I think it makes me uncomfortable or anything. Since I am okay with it, so, yea I think that I am okay with the choices I have made, according to my religion.” (PB)

Participant F (he/him, age 23, trans man) had similar feelings as Participant B. When he was asked about whether he has any plans of getting hormone therapy or top surgery in order to feel more masculine, he replied by saying:

“Um, the truth is, at times I really want to, but all these things are attached to my religious views. I believe that if I’m born this way, god made me this way. God gave me this body, I have no right to change it. I have to accept it, because the physical body is not related to the soul.” (PF)

Participants B and F both had feelings of wanting to change their biological gender, but decided not to because of their religious beliefs. Participant C believed that she has to be how God made her, and has certain rules to follow regarding her gender. When she talked about being attracted to someone with the same gender as her, she characterized that as being wrong according to her religion.

2.2: Feelings of restriction

Some of the participants felt restricted by their religion, and felt like they could not openly be themselves. Participant A (she/they, age 19, gender fluid) when talking about how religion has affected her, said:

“It has ruined a lot of things for me, because I know that I was born a Muslim, and it restricts me a lot, so I was never really very high on religion. I feel like it boxed me in.” (PA)

She also talked about how she would be living her life if she was living outside Pakistan:

“I would be living by myself. If considering my current girlfriend, I’d probably be living with her, and I would openly tell people about it, because with Islam you always get

restricted that you cannot talk about the person you love, you can't just say it to people, so if I was living somewhere outside, things would be a lot easier". (PA)

Participant B (she/her, age 20, female), who had previously mentioned wanting to change her gender but not doing so due to her religious beliefs, was asked about how she would be living if she did not have certain religious restrictions, to which she replied:

"I would be like more open about some things to people, because obviously if that's acceptable, I won't be scared of how people will judge me, or my partner in certain way. So yea I would be more comfortable with myself. I won't have to be you know scared of things, or think about that "oh if someone gets to know this they're gonna judge me" or they'll be certain consequences for that." (PB)

Participant D (they/them, age 22, gender fluid) talked about how they feel like they have to follow certain religious duties, which they did not want to:

"I think that is a huge reason why I got very, very distant from religion because my family is like, they're all Muslim. And they're quite, you know, religious in that manner of like, you know, they have certain ideas of what religion teaches you, and they want you to be that way." (PD)

They also went on to describe how their family expects certain things of them, such as to cover their head, pray, and recite Quran. In addition to that, their family expects them to not be friends with or get too close to boys, to which Participant D said:

"I definitely feel very very tied up by it. It's a huge reason why, you know, I feel antagonistic towards religion and Islam." (PD)

Three of the participants described clear feelings of restriction due to religion. Participant A felt restricted and boxed in by religion. Participant B felt uncomfortable with herself and her identity and felt like she could not be open about it, and Participant D felt like religion placed expectations and ideas on them which they did not want to follow.

2.3: Influence of religion on life

Religion affected some of the participants' lives in a prominent manner, including their mentality, identity, and relationships. For example, for Participant B (she/her, age 20, female), religion affected the way she views herself and her actions. She said:

"It has stopped me to do certain things, because obviously there are certain rules that we have to follow. So yea it has affected me and the way I am or the way I do things." (PB)

Participant C (she/her, age 19, female), when talking about religion, said she has to follow certain rules, and when asked how would things be different if she didn't have religion playing a role in her life, she said:

"I would do all of the things that I'm not allowed to right now. But also there are certain disadvantages to that, if I do all the things that my religion does not allow me to do currently, I would feel certain anxiety, and depression. And most probably I would not be alive right now." (PC)

She also went on to say how religion is an important factor in her life and makes her feel like she serves a purpose:

"You can only be successful if you follow your God successfully. If I do not have a religion, I do not have a purpose. It might not seem that immense to you right now, or anyone listening to this, but actually, it does have a really, really big influence on your life when you do not

have a religion. And I've actually experienced that. When during this one year, I was having troubles with myself, unintentionally I was just being distanced from God. Unintentionally, it wasn't intentional. But during the time I was facing depression and anxiety, that's when I realized that, no, I need to find God, that's important for me.” (PC)

Participant D (they/them, age 22, gender fluid) was asked about whether they consider themselves a religious person, to which they said:

“I think I consider myself as a occasional spiritual person. I don't believe in organized religions or even Islam or Christianity or, you know, the holy books and stuff like that. I don't believe in the, you know, image of God or priests, what they preach about, but I do think that there is a higher power.” (PD)

They also went on to describe their personal religious views:

“I've read a lot about religion as well, you know, like, up till a certain age so like, when I was seven or eight, I think it appealed to me a lot. Because it was just like, you know, I gravitated towards those key things of like being kind and being loving and being patient and stuff like that, like humanistic values. But now that I'm older, and I'm learning more about it, I think the way that I identify, the closest thing that I can say is like agnostic.” (PD)

Participant E (she/they, age 21, nonbinary) was asked about how she came to terms with her identity, to which she answered how she had grown up in a religious family, and felt like she was not normal:

“After some time, I was like, oh, this is not right I should not be feeling this way. I prayed a lot, I prayed a lot to be normal. I tried to you know distance myself from, from the things that I assumed were making me feel like this.” (PE)

Participant F (he/him, age 23, trans man) talked about being attracted to girls, but he could not act upon his attraction due to his beliefs:

“I have always been attracted to girls. I did try to get into a relationship with guys, but that never really clicked for me. I just couldn’t do it. I can’t even say ‘I love you’ to a man, I just can’t say it. With girls, I am also physically attracted to them, and obviously mentally too. But the thing is, like I said I’m very firm on my religious viewpoints. I won’t ever get into a physical relationship with a girl. I’m okay to the point of holding hands and hugging, but nothing more. If I ever come into a relationship, it will only be till that.” (PF)

THEME 3: APPEARANCE AND GENDER

The topic of appearance and gender pertains to how the participants express themselves through their appearance, whether they experience misidentification by others, as well as how they have to follow societal roles and expectations due to their gender.

3.1: Expression of gender through appearance

All of the participants expressed their gender through their appearance. If they identified differently than their biological gender, this was present in their appearance as well. When looking at her appearance outwardly, Participant A presented as a feminine girl, and it was not clear outwardly that she views herself as androgenous or has a fluid gender. When talking about how she identifies, she mentioned:

“I think of myself as an androgenous person. I do not associate being feminine or masculine. I feel fluid about my gender. Other people however, perceive me as a very feminine girl, which I have tried explaining, but people do not understand.” (PA)

When asked to describe her gender, she said:

“I can either feel feminine one day or feel masculine. I can act like a boy or act like a girl, and it should be okay.” (PA)

Participant B (she/her, age 20, female) presented as a tomboy girl, with above shoulder-length hair and a masculine dressing sense. She was asked about what she felt made her different from other girls, to which she answered:

“Like not wearing makeup. Not wearing feminine clothes, or like Eastern clothes like Pakistani clothes the way other girls dress up, I don’t do that. Wearing makeup or just other general interests such as you know like sports and stuff like that.” (PB)

Participant C (she/her, age 19, female) presented as a somewhat feminine tomboy, with short hair and androgenous dressing, however she also wore makeup. When talking about her appearance and dressing, she said:

“My dressing is sometimes criticized by certain people, you know, sometimes in a light hearted way, but they do think that I dress like a boy.” (PC)

Participant D (they/them, age 22, gender fluid) had an androgenous dressing style, with short hair. They used the term genderfluid to describe themselves, and when describing their gender expression, they mentioned:

“My gender expression is also very different than women and the way that women dress, obviously, so like, I am tomboyish I have short hair, I cut my hair when I started university. And I cut it like very short, like it was a boy cut. And I dress like usually in Western clothes. And even with like Eastern clothes is mostly like kurtas and stuff. And I don't, I don't wear makeup, I usually don't like, you know, dress up in a feminine manner.” (PD)

They also talked about how they don't want to box themselves in one category when it comes to the way they appear:

“There are certain days where I do feel more feminine, and then there are days where I feel more masculine. And so I don't like to box myself. And similarly for my gender expression as well. Like, I may not like doing full face makeup, but I like wearing nail polish times. I like wearing earrings, sometimes. Some days, I wouldn't want to dress in a kurta but other days, I feel more comfortable dressing in a suit or jeans and stuff like that.” (PD)

Participant E (she/they, age 21, nonbinary) had a typically feminine appearance during the time of the interview. When talking about how she would describe her gender, she said:

“For me, I just say that I am what I am. I'm not a girl I'm not a boy, I'm just me, I'm not this or that.” (PE)

She also talked about how she had wanted masculine representation along with her feminine side as well. Although at the time of the interview, she was dressed more feminine, she does not want to be limited to just that, and would also dress masculine on other days. When it came to dressing more masculine, she said:

“If I want to buy masculine stuff I can buy masculine stuff, I can wear it”. (PE)

Participant F (he/him, age 23, trans man) who is a trans man, presented in a fully masculine manner, with short hair and dressing. When talking about how he had transitioned his appearance from feminine to masculine, he said:

“I've changed my dressing, the way I portray myself outside I've also changed that. I feel like a completely different person.” and “Like before, I was portraying myself as a girl, now I portray myself as a boy”. (PF)

He also said:

“I have completely transformed outwardly. If you see me for the first time, you won’t be able to tell if I’m a girl or a boy. Usually at a first glance, everyone usually thinks of me as a 16–17-year-old boy. I look like a boy completely.” (PF)

He also mentioned his weight and how it contributed to him appearing more masculine now:

“Towards the end of 2021, I used to be really bulky, and during that time, I really didn’t like the way I looked. But after that, my weight started to reduce, and the entire previous year my weight has continued to drop. After July of last year, I had a drastic weight loss. Now I am happy with my body. No one can really tell my gender now due to my body shape.” (PF)

3.2: Misidentification of gender

Some of the participants experienced misidentification of their gender due to their appearance. Participant A (she/they, age 19, gender fluid) talked about how other people often invalidated her gender identity:

“Other people however, perceive me as a very feminine girl, which I have tried explaining, but people do not understand. Even my partner herself, she does not respect my pronouns, and it is a hard thing, I try explaining it to her but she just says that it’s in my head.” (PA)

She also mentioned how her mother viewed her identity:

“My mom does have an idea that I’m not how other people are, but she also thinks that it’s something that’s in my head and in me and I don’t act on it.” (PA)

Participant A had a lot of difficulty trying to make people understand her gender and how it does not always correlate with her appearance. She talked about how people would mostly only think of her as a feminine girl due to her outward appearance:

“When I used to explain it to them and they still would think of me like the way I look from the outside, I did start believed that “oh maybe that is who I am, who I’m supposed to be, how people will associate me with”, but now I really don’t care, because I have spent a fair share of time making people understand.” (PA)

Participant B (she/her, age 20, female) talked about how at times, people would judge her differently and misidentify her gender based on her tomboyish appearance, and assume things based on the way she looks:

“It makes me uncomfortable, because I don’t want people to assume that “oh she’s a certain way”, which people do nowadays a lot, even the people closest to me, they even do that. They just think and assume because of the way I look, or because of the way I am, or because of the way I do certain things. So yea that’s pretty uncomfortable.” (PB)

Participant D (they/them, age 22, gender fluid) talked about the discrimination they faced due to their gender:

“I use public transport as well. And I’m often like, around in public areas so I hear comments. People have wonder and, like, out loud, they ask you like, “are you a boy or are you a girl?” And there’s a lot of like harassment, you know, stuff as well, where people are just not comfortable because they don’t understand.” (PD)

They also talked about how people have refused to use their correct pronouns:

“I have had friends, you know, especially within debating society, like certain men who don't believe in pronouns, and who think that there are bigger issues in the world, I've had full blown, like arguments and fights with them, and, you know, trying to explain to them why pronouns are important, why gender identity is important.” (PD)

Participant E (she/they, age 21, nonbinary) talked about how she is misgendered here due to the society:

“I think this is the part where the society comes in. Because if someone misgenders me here, in Pakistan, I would feel bad, obviously. But I'm not really going to go into an argument about it. Because if I have explained it to them before and they still don't want to understand it, then there's not much I can do about it.” (PE)

Participant F (he/him, age 23, trans man) mentioned that he often gets misgendered a lot, and how he has to play a dual personality:

“I do get misidentified a lot by people, because I'm not completely out yet. Because of this people often used mixed pronouns for me, which does affect me a lot mentally. I have to play a dual personality. In front of some people I have to act as a female, in front of others I act as a male. This causes a lot of stress for me mentally. At one point it caused a lot of stress, but I've learned to manage it, because what else can I do about it. I can't really do anything.” (PF)

He also talked about how some of his friends did not want to accept his identity as a trans male, due to which he acts as a female in front of them:

“There are also some friends who don’t accept it. I did tell them, I came out to them, but they didn’t believe it. So now instead of cutting down those friendships, I’ve repressed my feelings in front of them. I have to act as a female in front of them.” (PF)

3.3: Societal roles based on gender

Societal roles refer to the roles society expects an individual to play based on their gender or the way they identify. The participants felt as if they have to follow certain rules and expectations due to society. When Participant A (she/they, age 19, gender fluid) was asked about whether she feels like she has to follow certain roles because she presents a certain way, she said:

“I know there are rules, but I will not follow them. These rules do not hold me back.” (PA)

She also said how she feels like she can’t truly be herself due to living in a conservative environment:

“The thing is, I can’t exactly be myself while being here because the society we live in is very conservative. On top of my that, my family is not accepting.” (PA)

Participant B (she/her, age 20, female) talked about having to follow certain rules, and not being able to express herself how she wants:

“You know being a girl I cannot always express myself like, a guy, since you know there are certain rules that society has that I have to follow. Like wearing a dupatta, stuff like that. Going out alone, things like... since being in Pakistan, and being raised up in a Pakistani household, these are the things that I have to follow, even though I don’t want to.” (PB)

She then explained how she is expected to behave and dress due to her biological gender:

“Because of my gender in this society I’m expected to behave like all the other girls around me, you know I’m expected to wear makeup or dress a certain way or behave a certain way.” (PB)

She mentioned how wearing certain clothes which she does not want to makes her feel uncomfortable:

“Wearing certain clothes, when I don’t want, obviously it’s an uncomfortable feeling for me as who I am. It’s like the complete opposite of me.” (PB)

When asked about whether she has faced any discrimination due to her expression, she said:

“People around us, in our homes and relatives even, they don’t really get how things are for me or for others around me, so obviously I am constantly hearing “oh you’re not acting like a girl”, “you’re not acting like other girls around you””. (PB)

Participant C (she/her, age 19, female) said that she is expected to dress more like a woman due to her gender:

“I am expected to dress more like a woman, wear long shirts and you know, wear jewelry and earrings and stuff like that.” (PC)

When talking about the roles men and women have to follow according to society, Participant C stated:

“For example, a man, it’s his responsibility to run the house, it’s not the woman’s responsibility to run the house as in when I say earning, I’m talking about financial issues. So the man of the house has to earn and he has to feed his family and the woman, she is allowed to have equal rights definitely, but in certain cases, she is supposed to be a bit, like

a level down from the men because that's important in our society and according to our religion.” (PC)

Participant D (they/them, age 22, gender fluid) talked about how they had always used male pronouns since a young age, but as they grew older, people would question them and ask them why they’re using male pronouns when they’re a girl:

“If they see, or they hear me referring to myself in male pronouns in Urdu, they question me, and they laugh about it and stuff like that. So it was at a very young age that I was being told that I have to dress more feminine and stuff.” (PD)

They also went on to describe how society placed certain expectations on them for dressing more feminine than they felt comfortable doing:

“I knew that there were certain boundaries with my gender expression that I had, I didn’t like breaking them and if I do, then I don’t like it. Like, I don’t like wearing heels. But I was, you know, expected to wear heels if I was dressing feminine, because that completed the look. And that completed the expectations that they had of me.” (PD)

They explained how there is more pressure on them now to fit a certain role because they are growing older:

“I mean, I still have the pressure from society, as well as my family, especially now that I’m older and you know, “becoming more of a woman”, and stuff like that. So there’s definitely a lot more pressure now.” and “I know that I can’t fully be myself if I am in this country, where there’s always certain expectations, and especially now that I’m growing older, I know, there’s, you know, talk of me getting married and stuff as well. I’m just not comfortable with that.” (PD)

Participant F (he/him, age 23, trans man) talked about how because he is biologically a female, his family and society expect him to act that way instead of a trans man:

“If you are biologically a man, and you identify as a man, you should have male characteristics and be able to portray them. But when it comes to me, biologically I am not a man, but I identify as a man. But society and my family expect me to have feminine characteristics. I’m not like that.” and “Before when I used to look like a girl, I had to follow certain roles, and even now I still do at times. My family members still expect me to act like a girl.” (PF)

He also faced discrimination due to his identity as a trans male, where people called him derogatory terms and tried to invalidate his identity. When asked to talk about these experiences, he said:

“People mostly call me ‘khusra’ a lot. I’m a photographer, I go to events for wedding photography. So at the events, at most of the places, people accept me, and think of me as ‘cool’. But on the other hand, I’ve also had some bad experiences. One time, an aunty refused my entry. At that event, I had to act like a female, I had to go there and say that ‘I’m a girl’. When I went to that aunty and told her I’m a girl, she was like “no, you’re not a girl. You are definitely a boy”. I have to face these sorts of things often. People come up to me and call me a khusra or deny who I am.” (PF)

THEME 4: MENTAL HEALTH AND GENDER IDENTITY

The subject of mental health and gender identity discusses the impact of gender identity on an individual’s personal life, including their family life and experiences during school, as well as the judgement they faced by others. All of the participants talked about their mental health being affected to some degree due to their being different from the norm.

4.1: Experiences during school

Some of the participants described having negative experiences during school because of their gender expression and identity. Participant A (she/they, age 19, gender fluid) was asked about her experience during school, to which she replied:

“My school life was not good because I realized a lot of things I went through a lot of things, and they did have a toll on my mental health, and last few years of my school life were really awful. In my college, things did change because there was a new environment, and it was a new start, so things were better then.” (PA)

Participant B (she/her, age 20, female) talked about how she did not know much regarding gender and identity during her school life, however during university she came to know more about it due to interactions with different people:

“I think I got to know about gender identity and stuff like that when I came to college. Before that I wasn’t really sure about these kinds of things, or if things existed in this manner.” (PB)

Participant D (they/them, age 22, gender fluid) described their school experience as being traumatic, but college life being more open and accepting:

“School was a little bit traumatic, but that was more because it was a private school. So there was a lot of pressure and competition and stuff like that.” (PD)

When talking about their college life, they said:

“(name of college) was more comfortable for me. It was very comfortable for me because it was an all-women’s college. And so I had a lot of safe space and was very, like, accepting and welcoming in that manner.” (PD)

They also described their university experience as being fluctuating:

“With my university, it's been-it's been kind of fluctuated, there are some people that I have that are, you know, very, very safe and who I can be very comfortable with. And then there are others who are, you know, not as welcoming.” (PD)

Participant D also talked about feeling pressured during school to appear a certain way:

“I definitely felt pressured in my school as well, because a lot of attention was given to me. So I felt a lot of pressure to be more feminine and to not be so aggressive or to appear a certain way.” and “I definitely felt the pressure that I had to conform. And as a child, it was very difficult to separate what were my own feelings and what were the feelings that people were pushing on to me. That was quite difficult, but then eventually, when I did get away from those friends or that circle, you know, I started isolating myself a lot.” (PD)

Participant E (she/they, age 21, nonbinary) mentioned being bullied during school due to her coming out as bisexual:

“I got bullied a lot, for different reasons. But when I like, when I was in grade nine, I came out publicly to my, to my friends, and then it just went to the entire school. Everyone knew that I was into girls. And after that, I did get bullied for this reason. My school experience was like, not very amazing. It was like with a lot of ups and downs.” (PE)

She talked about having experience a lot of hate and discrimination due to her sexuality during school:

“I was just out as a bisexual person, but I still got, like, you know, a lot of hate and discrimination, especially from my close friends.” (PE)

Participant F (he/him, age 23, trans man) also mentioned being bullied during school, and not being able to make friends easily:

“I didn’t have a great experience in school, I also didn’t really have any idea about gender back then. I got bullied a lot as well, and you know, I was unable to make friends easily. People used to look down on me. It has gotten easier now in university comparatively.” PF

He talked about people making fun of him behind his back and being treated negatively by teachers:

“I have often seen people making fun of me, and talking about me behind my back. The teachers also did a lot of favoritism and used to make fun of me.” (PF)

4.2: Judgement due to appearance

Three of the participants experienced some kind of judgement due to their appearance, which adversely affected their mental health. Participant A (she/they, age 19, gender fluid), who had an outwardly feminine appearance but identified as gender fluid, talked about how her partner does not respect her pronouns and does not see her as gender fluid because she presents feminine:

“I try explaining it to her but she just says that it’s in my head. She says that I was born a girl, so I am a girl. She does not agree on the front that I am androgenous, which is unsettling and we’ve argued over that multiple times.” (PA)

She also said that when people did not respect her identity even after explaining it to them, she did start to doubt herself because of it:

“When I used to explain it to them and they still would think of me like the way I look from the outside, I did start believed that “oh maybe that is who I am, who I’m supposed to be,

how people will associate me with”, but now I really don’t care, because I have spent a fair share of time making people understand.” (PA)

Participant E (she/they, age 21, nonbinary) mentioned how she felt like she had to act a certain way in past relationships due to her appearance, and how her previous partners expressed some degree of discomfort and confusion with her gender expression:

“For me, a lot of times, in my past relationships, some things that have happened is that my partners either see me as someone very feminine, or someone very masculine, and they expect me to play a certain role, and if I, you know, dress a different way or I act a different way, they are very surprised because they don’t expect me to be that way. But as a non-binary person, I don’t have to fit in a certain role, like feminine or masculine or any other role. I just want to be myself. And for me, my partners have always expressed discomfort sometimes and sometimes some degree of confusion and disgust in response to that, like oh now why is she being so masculine now, or why is she being so feminine, and most of them have never even used my proper pronouns for me.” (PE)

She then talked about how while being in a relationship, she felt like she could not be herself and had to change herself to fit another person’s liking:

“I could not be myself around her, and if I was being masculine, she would not like me, or she would not find me attractive. And because of that I had to be this very feminine girl around her all the time, and it didn’t make feel good about myself. I felt like I had to change not just my look, but my identity as well. Because for me, the way I look is the way I identify. So, for me, I’m a very self-expressive person.” (PE)

Participant F (he/him, age 23, trans man) explained how he got made fun of for cutting his hair short, and was in a toxic university environment. Although he changed universities later, he still some experiences judgement:

“Initially when I cut my hair short, I got made fun of a lot over that. The environment there wasn’t open at all, it was a very toxic place. Now I’m studying in (university name). The thing is there are a lot of students from rich backgrounds here, so they happen to be more liberal and open-minded. So they are more accepting here, but there are still some people who make fun here as well. I have to tolerate criticism and judgement here as well, but overall it’s much better here.” (PF)

4.3: Problems with family life

Three of the participants had problems in their family life which affected their mental health. Participant A (she/they, age 19, gender fluid), when asked about her family life, stated how she explained her sexuality to her two sisters and mother, but had a negative experience:

“I openly told my elder sister that I like girls, she was confused at first but I tried explaining it to her, I obviously had to lie a bit, but she was okay with it, she understood that. My second sister is very homophobic, and I tried explaining things to her as well, but she threatened me. And my amma, my mother, I told her that I feel this way and I can never ever look at guys the same way. I can be like one, but I can never like one. And she was weirded out at first, but she told me that, again, it’s all in my head and I will change.” (PA)

She mentioned how she has a twin sister, who used to be bisexual, but now judges her for her sexuality and identity:

“I have a twin who used to be bisexual, and now she’s not, and constantly I am hearing things from her that “oh I’m going to go to hell for this”, from my twin sister who used to be bisexual, and now she’s straight.” (PA)

She also feared that her twin sister would disclose her relationship with a girl to her mother:

“It has been very toxic. We are not good to each other and for each other, because she’s the type of person who will bring me down if something goes wrong with her, and constantly I’m living in the fear that she’s going to tell my mom about my girlfriend and I.” (PA)

Participant D (they/them, age 22, gender fluid) explained how their family is not aware of their identity, and how their relationship with their family is affected due to being gender fluid:

“I’m reaching that age now where my mother will always, you know, bug me about like “ab baal lambay karlo, ab chotay na karo”. Like, my dad is very cool with it in the sense that he actually treats me like one of his sons.” (PD)

They also talked about how they usually dress up in a suit during events, which leads to backlash:

“My sister as well, you know, will sometimes speak like “ab tm sariyan pehna shuru kardo for events”. Because I usually wear a suit. And so because of that, because this is a part of myself that I can’t really share with them, there’s often like backlash whether I dress masculine, or whether it was feminine, someone is upset about it. So it usually does keep me away from my family.” (PD)

Participant F (he/him, age 23, trans man) explained how he has to play a dual personality, since his family does not know of his gender identity:

“My family, including my relatives, have no idea about my gender identity. Obviously, a part of them must know, it’s very obvious, but they still deny it.” (PF)

When asked about whether he faces any pressure of getting married from his family, he said:

“My family does pressurize me on the topic of marriage, but obviously they are not going to force me. They won’t get me married until I want to, which obviously is not going to happen.” and “I am forced a bit. People do try to use emotional blackmail on me, but I am very firm on my stance.” (PF)

He also stated that because his family does not know of his identity, he cannot publicly come out, so he often has to act like a female in front of certain people:

“I’m not totally out yet. If my family knows I’m out as a trans man, I would have no problem being myself everywhere I go, I would openly come out on my social media. But my family doesn’t believe it. And I know if my family finds out from a third place, it would cause a problem for me.” (PF)

4.4: Trouble with accepting identity and sexuality

One of the participants expressed trouble accepting her sexuality. Participant C (she/her, age 19, female) stated that her fluctuating sexuality was a phase, which caused her a lot of doubt and uncertainty, at which point she felt like she had to consult her family for help:

“I was doubtful about myself, because I felt like I didn’t really know myself anymore. Because everything felt new. And it felt weird. It kind of felt really weird for me, because I

was... I've never had any trouble before with my sexuality or anything in life. That was a first for me.” (PC)

She went on to say how this made her hate herself:

“I kind of hated myself for a year or so more than a year. And after that when the pressure got really immense, that's when I had to open up to my family that I was facing problems and stuff like that.” (PC)

When she opened up to her family, they were supportive and wanted to help her:

“I didn't talk directly to them because I was afraid about what they were going to think of me because when we are living in this society and our religion it's not really a good thing to have troubles with your sexuality. So I told my sister and she told my parents that I was having troubles and they knew They knew, but they were waiting for me to open up to them. And they were very supportive of me in the sense that they wanted to help me.” (PC)

Participant C also believed her troubles with sexuality was due to her environment, and being surrounded by mostly women:

“When I was facing that issue with my sexuality, I was surrounded by a lot of women and since I had been restricted from males in my life, that kind of also led to that issue.” (PC)

She also mentioned having trouble with her gender, and wanting to change it in order to gain the affection of another woman, however now she claims she does not have these feelings anymore:

“I wanted to change my gender because I wanted to gain the affection of someone I liked, who was the same gender as me. So that's why I wanted to change my gender.” (PC)

Participant E (she/they, age 21, nonbinary) talked about having a stage of denial with her identity:

“I had a really prolonged state of denial where I was going back and forth back and forth with my identity, but it took me some time like right now I have entirely made peace with the fact that I am the way I am.” (PE)

She also said how she hated herself for not being “normal” like everyone else:

“I hated myself for a really long time. I prayed for God to change me and make me feel like everyone else. But I soon realized that it was a waste of time and it was just something which was a part of me and it cannot be changed. And I should just stop hating myself for it and just accept it.” (PE)

THEME 5: MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY PARADOX

The last theme to be explored is the masculinity and femininity paradox, which relates to how masculinity and femininity is viewed irrespective of gender, along with the concept of gender binary, and erasing the concept of gender, which discusses how society would function without the existence of gender.

5.1: Understanding masculinity

Each of the participants had separate viewpoints regarding the concept of masculinity, including how it is understood and what characterizes masculinity. Participant A (she/they, age 19, gender fluid), when talking about masculinity, said:

“Masculinity is when you’re confident about yourself, and you do not hold back in saying things, for me that’s more of a masculine energy.” (PA)

She also added how people in society will always judge those who stand out as different:

“If your appearance is different from the norm in any way, people will judge you for it. They will make things up just because you look a certain way.” (PA)

Participant B (she/her, age 20, female) talked about how she does not believe in the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, but instead wants people to break out of it:

“Around us obviously there are stereotypical things that, like I said only boys will do that or only girls will do that. I do not personally believe that, because I am a girl, and I do those things, and I want those stereotypes to be over with because I want other girls to indulge in that, since I have girl friends all around, I don’t really have that much boys who are my friends, which is why I want girls to think that “oh they can do this too”, you know.” (PB)

She was also asked the question of whether society tends to accept masculine women as compared to feminine men more, to which she had a similar reply as Participant A:

“I don’t think it’s acceptable either way, because the society just instantly ticks them off that “oh she’s being masculine” or “he’s being feminine”, so at least in our society it’s still not acceptable that a person is acting the other way around.” (PB)

Participant C (she/her, age 19, female) talked about what qualities or traits she associates with men:

“The male has to be strong physically, a little bit mentally, yes. But that's not a standard that should be kept. It of course, varies with every person who has a different mental health. But yeah, when I think of male, I think of a strong kind of person.” (PC)

When talking about masculinity, she added:

“When I think of masculinity, I think, it might be a big negative but it's my view, someone egoistic.” (PC)

Participant D (they/them, age 22, gender fluid) said that they don't subscribe to typical stereotypes of traditional gender roles, such as short hair on a woman being masculine. However, they also explained how they can fall into the traps of such thinking from time to time:

"I do sometimes fall into the traps of those traits, like, okay, if you dress like, you know, in jeans and wear more masculine clothing, if you don't wear makeup, if you don't, like, wear a lot of jewelry, if you don't like that, that would be more masculine in my head." (PD)

They also talked about how personality and interest plays a role in being viewed in a certain manner:

"I think personality also plays a role in the traits that you have. So like the kind of interests that you have, like I've seen some women who are just not interested in politics or economy at all. And, unfortunately, that is a trait that in my head is considered more masculine." (PD)

They also explained how if a woman dresses or is more masculine, she is seen as strong, and although she also faces backlash from others, it is less than if a man was to be feminine:

"I think since masculinity is, like, associated with strength, and being strong, and femininity is considered more weak, that definitely plays a role into how people treat you." (PD)

Participant E (she/they, age 21, nonbinary) said that she would not like not associate any qualities or traits to any gender, and just sees them as a person, and referred to masculinity and femininity as being energies:

"I mean masculinity and femininity those are just energies and auras, they are very visible. Like you can tell that this person has a masculine energy or a feminine energy." (PE)

When asked to describe her view of masculinity, she said:

“I think masculinity is all about being secure in yourself. Being confident. I think it's very trivializing.” (PE)

When talking about whether society accepts masculine women more than feminine men, she explained how it's easier for masculine women because even if they have short hair, they can change their dressing and hide their masculine side in front of others if needed. She stated:

“For people who are born in a female body and then acting masculine, the biggest concern that they face from their family who has been, you know, “grow out your hair” and you know, just a little bit of argument over that.” (PE)

Participant F (he/him, age 23, trans man) said that he doesn't associate qualities or traits to any gender, and anyone can be anything. When asked what he considers to be masculine, regardless of gender, he replied:

“In our society, masculinity is seen as being able to hide your true feelings. That's considered strong, and rigid, and kind of like a robot. But this is not real masculinity. In my eyes, masculinity is that when you actually have to be strong, you are, and you're rigid, and intelligent. You're able to make decisions even if you're in pain. And you're soft-hearted towards your family. You know where to draw the boundary.” (PE)

He also said that clothing affects how a person is viewed, as well as their hair:

“People judge a lot based on clothing. Other than that, in our society, people are also judged by their hair. Like if they have a beard or moustache. But when it comes to me, obviously I don't have a beard or moustache, which is why when people look at me they

either think I'm a boy from 9th/10th class, or they say "you're a khusra". They don't consider me as a girl." (PE)

5.2: Understanding femininity

Each of the participants describe their viewpoints regarding femininity, it's qualities and traits. Participant A (she/they, age 19, gender fluid) characterized femininity to be linked with softness:

"Femininity is considered to be linked with softness. There's also this ayat in the Quran that translates to "the hardness of a man and the understanding nature of a woman are meant to go together because they complement each other". They're opposites." (PA)

Participant B (she/her, age 20, female) said that makeup makes someone appear feminine, as well as their dressing sense:

"Makeup is one of the things that makes a person really feminine in our world, at least right now. And when it comes to masculinity, then again I think there is a certain way of dressing up and things like that, you know the outside look of a person, that's what really gives off the masculine or feminine energy of a person. Like if you're wearing makeup or dressing a certain way." (PB)

Participant C (she/her, age 19, female) said that she views females to be strong-willed, as well as having a softer side:

"When I think of femininity, I think of a person who is soft hearted, kind, gentle and strong." (PC)

Participant D (they/them, age 22, gender fluid) had a similar view, explaining how makeup and dressing plays a big role in making someone appear as feminine:

“If you are someone who wears a lot of makeup, or wears a lot of like feminine clothing, so like traditional desi clothing as well, that is considered feminine.” (PD)

When talking about men being feminine, they mentioned how femininity is often viewed as weak:

“I think, generally, femininity is something weak. When men are more feminine, they are seen as weak, and unfortunately, I don't want to say this, but like, “oh ye to na mard hai” you know, just really bad slurs like that. And they definitely face more backlash from their peers if they dress more feminine.” (PD)

Participant E (she/they, age 21, nonbinary) described femininity as having a nurturing and motherly nature, with a feeling of comfort and safety:

“For femininity we think, you know, having that motherly nature to yourself, being nurturing, and being that type of, you know, having that type of comfortable, energy to yourself, that people feel safe around you. I think that's femininity for me.” (PE)

When talking about people born in a male body acting feminine, she said that it's unacceptable for people in this society to accept:

“If someone who is born a male, is feminine, or acts feminine or is pretty looking or has a pretty face, even that is unacceptable. They're like, oh, why is he so pretty, they use slur words for them, which is very disrespectful.” (PE)

Participant F (he/him, age 23, trans man) found it difficult to explain what femininity was. According to him, he simply viewed it as someone who shows a lot of sensitivity.

When talking about what makes someone outwardly appear feminine, he said:

“When it comes to femininity, it’s you know very typical, like girls wearing shalwar kameez, getting ready and doing their makeup. And also the element of sensitivity is there.” (PF)

5.3: Concept of gender-binary

The participants expressed different views regarding the concept of gender-binary, and whether they believed in it. Participant A (she/they, age 19, gender fluid) was asked about how many genders she believes exist, to which she replied:

“I think the spectrum is really wide. The way people say there are just 2, male and female, I do not agree with that. You can associate yourself as anything, and that should be considered okay.” (PA)

She also mentioned her thoughts regarding gender-binary:

“I might wake up and feel feminine, or I might wake up and feel masculine. I don’t believe in gender binary for myself, other people can however.” (PA)

Participant B (she/her, age 20, female) believed in only two genders, male and female, which was influenced due to her religious views:

“Well, being a Muslim, obviously there are certain things which are set for us, and I am someone who practices my religion, so that is why I do only believe there are two genders.” (PB)

Similarly, Participant C (she/her, age 19, female) also believed in only two genders:

“I do believe in gender binary. I do believe that there are just two genders, male and female. There isn’t an in between.” (PC)

Participant D (they/them, age 22, gender fluid) explained that they believe binaries can be circumstantial, where they can benefit some people but restrict others:

“Since I've read a lot about the stuff and I've seen, like people from all walks of life, I think that, you know, for example, for trans individuals, like if there's a trans woman, for her giving into that binary of being more feminine is very, very important in order to validate her own identity. But if you apply that same binary to someone who is, you know, gender fluid or non-binary, I think it can be very, very triggering for them. So I think binaries are very circumstantial, like it depends on their circumstance. There's some situations where binary can help an individual, but there are certain situations where binaries are actually very, very restricting for them.” (PD)

Participant E (she/they, age 21, nonbinary) viewed gender-binary as being nonexistent, and there being countless numbers of genders which people can make up:

“You can identify as, whatever you feel, and no one has the right to come and tell you that you're just making things up at some point. Because everything is made up.” (PE)

On the topic of gender-binary, she said it is very restricting, and a concept made up by society to control people into fitting in one category or another:

“I don't believe in gender binary, I think it's very, it's very, you know, it's very restricting. It's like, you know, the society wants to control us. So they're like, okay, this is male this is female, act this way act that way don't do anything else. Because if you do anything else that would be wrong, and I don't believe that.” (PE)

Participant F (he/him, age 23, trans man) did not have much knowledge of gender-binary, and said that he only knows of three genders:

“I only know of three main genders, male, female, and trans. I don’t know about any other gender because this has been the extent of my research and I didn’t go further into it.” (PF)

He was then explained about the concept of gender-binary, and asked his view on it, to which he replied:

“The world is so big and there are so many different kinds of people in the world we can’t even imagine of. So how can it be that there are just these two genders in the world.” (PF)

He also explained that according to him, gender is linked with a person’s mind, so people can identify in any manner:

“Gender identity is linked with the person’s mind, so it can be different for anyone. Every person has their own view which they believe to be true. If someone doesn’t identify as male or female, but as a completely different gender, it could be that the justification they are giving is correct.” (PF)

5.4: Erasing the concept of gender

The participants were asked how they believe the world would look like without the concept of gender being present, without gender-based roles or expectations. Participant A (she/they, age 19, gender fluid) said:

“I think it would be chaotic. Because again, we as humans, we always need some rules or regulations, or some restrictions to believe in. Because if there was nothing, we would be doing anything and everything, and it would be chaotic.” (PA)

She believed it is important to have rules and regulations in place, and also stated her belief that everything exists for a reason:

“Everything exists for a reason, everything that’s here is here for a reason. If God exists, then these rules are here for a reason. In my opinion, I think the rules are here so that we have more structure and a proper plan to follow or not to follow.” (PA)

Participant B (she/her, age 20, female) believed that the world would be a better place without the existence of gender or gender roles:

“I think the world would be a better place for a lot of people, and people would feel more comfortable to express themselves how they want to express themselves without thinking how they will be judged by the society.” (PB)

She explained that people wouldn’t have the fear of being judged and would be free to be themselves:

“People won’t have the fear in themselves to express themselves. Because most of the times people you know hide who they truly are because of the fear that they will be discriminated a certain way or they will be judged a certain way.” (PB)

Participant C (she/her, age 19, female), similarly to Participant A, believed the world would be chaotic without the existence of gender:

“There’d be a lot of chaos. I feel like there’s a lot of confusion around and if there are no genders like, who are we if there aren’t any genders? Who are we supposed to be with? It feels absurd. A bit absurd. If there are no genders, there isn’t really a different point of femininity or masculinity, kind of feels weird.” (PC)

She also said that there needs to be rules which guide society, otherwise it would lead to destruction:

“There's a need to have to rules in our society, to some extent, definitely. You cannot run a country, you cannot run a society if there are no rules at all, that will be destruction of the whole society.” (PC)

Participant D (they/them, age 22, gender fluid) had the view that without gender, the world would be much more accepting and peaceful:

“I think it will be much more accepting and peaceful place. Because if you erase gender completely, then it's more that you see everyone according to if they're human or not.” (PE)

They stated that by erasing gender, you also erase all stereotypes and expectations and pressure of fitting into a certain role:

“If you erase gender, it also erases, you know, stereotypes and expectations and, you know, pressure of like, what role you have to fulfill. I think, in that sense it would be more accepting.” (PD)

Participant E (she/they, age 21, nonbinary), like Participant A and C, believed in the need for roles in society to maintain order, however, it does not have to be limited to the binary:

“I think that to some certain degree we do need gender identities whether they are binary so I would not like to imagine a world without gender roles at all, because we do need some of it to an extent. Like to maintain a certain amount of order. But I also believe that we do need gender, but it does not have to be limited to the binary system.” (PE)

Participant F (he/him, age 23, trans man) said that, according to him, gender is important and necessary to regulate who we are, and without it, things would be confusing:

“I don’t think it would do much good. Since gender is important and we need it to regulate who we are. Even if you’re not a male or female, you still need to identify as something, otherwise everything would be very confusing.” (PF)

CHAPTER IV

Discussion

This chapter highlights an analysis of the research with interview findings and methods. Purposeful sampling strategy was used to select a total of six participants who were suitable for the interviews and fit the criteria. Realization of gender identity, religion and gender, appearance and gender, mental health and gender identity, and masculinity and femininity paradox were the main themes which emerged from the data.

The data collected in this research showed that all participants came to realize their gender identity in different ways. Half of the participants mentioned feeling uncomfortable with their appearance and in their body. One of the participants was a trans man, and one was a gender fluid individual. This data was supported by previous researches as transgender and non-binary individuals can often feel uncomfortable with their physical appearance (Berg, 2023).

When it came to childhood experiences, it was found that three of the participants had referred to themselves as “tomboys” growing up. All three were gender-nonconforming individuals. Research suggests that there is a link between gender-nonconformity in childhood and an increased likelihood of identifying as non-binary or transgender later in life (Olson et al., 2016). While not all gender-nonconforming children grow up to be non-binary or transgender, many individuals who identify as non-binary or transgender have reported experiencing gender-nonconforming behaviors and preferences during their childhood (Zucker et al., 2012).

Two of the participants described learning about their gender identity through interactions with other people, who opened them up to having a better understanding of their

own identity. Exposure to information about diverse gender identities, including transgender and non-binary experiences, can increase awareness and knowledge about the range of gender identities beyond the binary understanding of male and female. This exposure helps individuals understand that gender identity is not solely determined by biological sex (Martin & Ruble, 2010).

In this research, religion played a major role regarding how some of the participants viewed gender. Two of the participants believed in just two genders, male and female, and did not believe in other gender identities outside of the binary. Two of the participants wanted to change their gender but due to their religious beliefs, they did not. Also, some of the participants expressed feeling restricted by their religion. For example, Participant A felt “boxed in” by her religion, while Participant D stated feeling “tied up” by it. Both of the participants were gender non-conforming. Some religious traditions adhere strictly to a binary understanding of gender, which defines only two distinct genders: male and female. This perspective often views gender nonconforming individuals as deviating from the established norms, leading to their marginalization or exclusion within religious communities (Campbell et al., 2019).

When it came to appearance and gender, all of the participants expressed their appearances differently. For example, Participant A and Participant E both had typically feminine appearances during the interview, but identified as non-binary. It's important to bear in mind that gender expression and appearance can differ widely across nonbinary people just as it might between people who identify as cisgender (those who choose the gender assigned at birth). A study on gender fluidity and nonbinary gender identities among children and adolescents revealed that nonbinary people have the option of adopting a

gender-neutral or androgynous appearance, or they can choose to present themselves in a way that corresponds with society's expectations (Diamond, 2020). Some nonbinary people may also experiment with gender-affirming appearances, such as wearing attire typically associated with the opposite gender or incorporating aspects from multiple genders. This was present in the research as Participant E, who identified as gender fluid/nonbinary, was dressed in a typically masculine manner at the time of the interview, but also stated that they like wearing earrings or nail polish sometimes. The study mentioned that nonbinary individuals can identify as both male and female, which was present in the example of Participant A and Participant E, who claimed they can feel both like a man and a woman, therefore using the pronouns she/they.

Some of the participants often experienced misidentification of their gender due to their appearance. Participant F, who was a trans man, talked about repressing his feelings and having his mental health affected due to having to play a dual personality of both a man and a woman to satisfy others. According to a journal article by Cate Swannell, misgendering has a negative impact on trans individuals' mental and physical wellbeing (Swannell, 2020). Another research on the experience of misgendering among trans and gender diverse people found that misgendering causes a significant amount of stress among individuals (Gunn, 2020). This was present in Participant F and Participant B, who expressed discomfort when getting misgendered and feeling distressed.

Societal roles based on gender were present in all participants. Three of the participants expressed significant discomfort when having to fit into certain roles of society. For example, Participant F claimed his family still expects him to act like a female, and Participant D explained how they dislike being forced to wear feminine attire. Participant B

also said that she has an uncomfortable feeling when she is forced to wear certain clothes or do makeup. All participants felt that gendered expectations did exist of them. A research based on associations of sex, gender, and gender role beliefs with mental health attitudes revealed that gender role beliefs were the most significant predictor of mental health attitudes, with more traditional beliefs associated with greater stigma (Erazo, 2020). This supports the data collected in this research which showed that traditional gender roles can negatively impact individuals' mental health.

The theme of mental health and gender identity described how individual's mental health was affected due to their gender identity. Four of the participants reported having negative experiences during school. Participant A, who was nonbinary, talked about her school life being awful. Participant D, who was gender fluid, described their school experience as being traumatic due to gendered expectations and pressure to fit in. Participant E, who was nonbinary, mentioned being bullied due to her sexual orientation as bisexual. Participant F, a trans man, also talked about being bullied during school and negative treatment in university. This data is supported by previous research. Research on gender expression, violence, and bullying victimization established a link between gender nonconformity and school-based violence (Gordon et al., 2018). The study founded that transgender and gender nonconforming individuals in school are more like to be victims of bullying as compared to cisgender individuals. Another journal article on the associations of nonconforming gender expression with bullying victimization also discovered that Individuals who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming have an increased likelihood of experiencing bullying (Lian et al., 2022). Yet another research that explored bullying among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth discovered that bullying of LGBT youth is influenced by a variety of

factors, including stigma related with LGBT individuals, and the presence of specific norms within social circles that contribute to an elevated occurrence of bullying targeting LGBT individuals (Earnshaw et al., 2016). This can then lead to LGBT individuals' mental health being adversely affected, which can be seen in the example of Participant E, who started to hate herself due to her sexuality and gender identity.

According to Stigma Theory, one form of stigma experienced by gender nonconforming and genderqueer individuals is social rejection. This can involve exclusion from social groups, bullying, and harassment. Research has shown that gender nonconforming youth are more likely to experience victimization and social isolation than their cisgender peers (Toomey et al., 2018). This social rejection can have negative impacts on mental health and well-being. Internalized stigma is another form of stigma that can affect gender nonconforming and genderqueer individuals. This involves the internalization of negative attitudes and beliefs about oneself based on social stigmatization. Research has shown that internalized stigma can lead to negative outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Layland et al., 2020).

Although all participants reported having judgement due to their appearance, three of the participants experienced adverse mental health effects due to judgement. Gender nonconforming and transgender individuals frequently encounter stigma and discrimination based on their appearance, which includes experiences of verbal abuse, physical violence, bullying, and social rejection (Miller & Grollman, 2015). Such negative experiences contribute to higher levels of psychological distress and mental health problems. This can be seen in three of the participants who described experiencing discomfort from judgement by others and bullying due to their gender expression.

Participants described experiencing problems with their family lives due to their gender identities, which included judgement from family members, being forced to change their appearance, and playing a dual personality in front of family. This was supported by previous research. A study published in 2014 examining coping and psychological distress among genderqueer individuals found that transgender individuals often experienced pressure from family members to conform to gender norms and expectations, including pressure to change their appearance (Budge et al., 2014). This can be seen specifically in Participant F, a trans man, who describes playing a dual personality in order to please family members and their expectations of him acting like his assigned gender at birth.

Research has shown that social role theory can be a useful framework for understanding the experiences of gender nonconforming and gender queer individuals. For example, one study found that gender nonconforming individuals reported higher levels of depression and anxiety, and lower levels of self-esteem, compared to gender conforming individuals, which the authors suggest may be due to the social disapproval and stigmatization that they experience for not adhering to traditional gender roles (Hendricks & Testa, 2012). Similarly, another study found that gender nonconforming individuals experienced higher levels of victimization and discrimination, which was associated with higher levels of psychological distress (Roberts et al., 2012). This suggests that societal pressure to conform to binary gender roles can lead to negative health outcomes for gender nonconforming individuals. Social role theory provides a useful framework for understanding the experiences of gender nonconforming and gender queer individuals, as it highlights the role that societal expectations and norms play in shaping gender identity and behavior, and the potential negative consequences of deviating from traditional gender roles.

Research on LGBT+ self-acceptance founded that lower levels of self-acceptance are associated with poorer mental health (Camp et al., 2020). Two of the participants had difficulty accepting their gender identity and sexuality. Participant C stated that she felt attracted to the same gender, and wanted to change her gender in the past, but now claims that it was a phase and she does not feel the same way as before. She said:

“Well it has happened to me when I was facing that issue with my sexuality, I was surrounded by a lot of women and since I had been restricted from males in my life, that kind of also led to that issue.” (PC, she/her, age 19, female)

Participant E, a nonbinary individual, described going through a process of self-hate due to being different in her sexuality and gender identity:

“I prayed a lot to be normal. I tried to you know distance myself from the things that I assumed were making me feel like this. I hated myself for a really long time. I prayed for God to change me and make me feel like everyone else. But I soon realized that it was a waste of time and it was just something which was a part of me and it cannot be changed.” (PE, she/they, age 21, nonbinary)

The theme of masculinity and femininity paradox explored how individuals viewed these two factors. Majority of the participants described masculinity as being confident and secure in yourself, and being strong physically. Femininity was seen as being characterized by softness, kindness, a gentle and nurturing attitude, being motherly, and being sensitive. A study on gender norms and the mental health of boys and young men discovered that young men are often influenced by conventional gender norms that encourage them to exhibit traits such as strength, competitiveness, control, and an absence of vulnerability (Rice et al., 2021). These societal expectations tend to prioritize characteristics like toughness, anger,

hostility, and emotional restraint. Another research on the multiple dimensions of gender stereotypes stated that men are often described as exhibiting greater agency compared to women, assuming leadership roles and maintaining control, while women display greater attentiveness to others and in fostering interpersonal connections (Hentschel et al., 2019).

Gender schema theory proposes that individuals internalize cultural beliefs about gender roles and use these beliefs to organize their experiences and behaviors (C. Martin & Dinella, 2001). This theory suggests that individuals develop schemas, or mental frameworks, for what is considered "appropriate" or "typical" behavior for males and females based on societal norms and expectations. Gender schema theory also explains how individuals use gender as a way to make sense of the world around them. Gender nonconforming and gender queer individuals may find it challenging to fit into binary gender categories and may instead create their own gender schema that is more aligned with their sense of self (Benson & Bussey, 2022). A study on childhood gender nonconformity found that gender nonconforming youth experienced higher levels of peer victimization, anxiety, and depression compared to gender conforming youth. These negative outcomes were partially explained by the internalization of societal gender norms and expectations (Roberts et al., 2012).

When exploring the concept of gender-binary, it was found that two of the participants who identified as nonbinary/gender fluid did not believe in the gender-binary at all. Two other participants did believe in the gender binary because of their religious views of there being two genders. Some individuals who identify as nonbinary or gender fluid may reject the gender binary altogether, viewing it as a limited or restrictive framework for understanding gender diversity (Galupo et al., 2021). They may feel that the binary system

does not accurately represent their own experiences and identities. This rejection of the gender binary can stem from the belief that gender exists on a spectrum or that gender identities can extend beyond the confines of male and female (Schudson & Morgenroth, 2022).

The concept of gender being present in society was also explored, and four of the participants emphasized that there is a need for gender and identities to exist, so as to maintain order and structure in society and prevent chaos. Two of the participants believed the world would be more accepting and peaceful, and a better place without gender roles and expectations. Research on defending the sex/gender binary explained that apart from establishing a strong sense of identity and self, the gender binary divides the complex social world into two separate categories, which then makes it easier for individuals to understand social interactions (Morgenroth et al., 2021).

Queer theory challenges the ways in which gender binaries and heteronormativity are reinforced in social institutions and cultural representations (Minton, 1997). One of the key contributions of queer theory has been to challenge the idea that gender is a fixed and binary category, with only two options of male or female. Queer theory recognizes the complexity and diversity of gender identities and expressions, and validates the experiences of gender nonconforming and genderqueer individuals (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018).

Gender identity and gender nonconformity are complex and sensitive topics that are still not widely accepted in many parts of the world, including Pakistan (Latsch & Becker, 2022). Pakistan is a conservative society with deeply entrenched gender norms, where traditional gender roles are strictly enforced, and any deviation from these norms is often met with hostility, discrimination, and violence (Ali et al., 2011). There is a significant lack of

awareness and understanding around gender identity and gender expression. The prevailing cultural and religious attitudes towards gender roles are based on binary notions of male and female, and any deviation from these norms is often stigmatized and seen as a threat to societal order and morality (Pamment, 2010). The transgender community in Pakistan, known as khawaja siras or hijras, faces significant discrimination and marginalization (Alam, 2019). They are often forced to live in isolation, deprived of basic rights and opportunities such as education, employment, and healthcare. They are also subjected to harassment, violence, and abuse, with little or no legal protection. Despite these challenges, there are some positive developments in Pakistan towards recognizing and protecting the rights of gender nonconforming individuals. In 2018, Pakistan passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, which allows individuals to self-identify their gender and provides them with legal protection against discrimination, harassment, and violence (Hashim, 2018). However, the implementation of this law is still a challenge, and more needs to be done to create awareness, build acceptance, and provide support for gender nonconforming individuals in Pakistan (Farhat et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The current qualitative research explored the phenomenon of gender identity and gender expression. The results of the study discovered that gender identity and expression is deeply intertwined with social and cultural factors, including norms and expectations around gender roles and behaviors. The Pakistani society traditionally views men as more dominant, assertive, and competitive, while women are seen as more nurturing, emotional, and submissive. These norms can create pressure for individuals to conform to certain gender expectations, which can lead to feelings of discomfort or dysphoria for those who do not identify with their assigned gender. For transgender individuals, the experience of gender dysphoria can be particularly intense, as their internal sense of gender does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth. This can lead to significant distress and can have negative impacts on mental health and well-being.

One of the main struggles that nonbinary, gender nonconforming, and genderqueer individuals face is the lack of recognition and validation of their gender identity by others. In the Pakistani society, gender is still largely viewed as a binary concept, with individuals expected to identify as either male or female. This can make it difficult for nonbinary and genderqueer individuals to express their gender identity and be recognized as valid and legitimate.

Nonbinary, gender nonconforming, and genderqueer individuals also experience discrimination and harassment due to not conforming to the traditional gender norms and expectations. This consists of verbal and physical harassment, as well as exclusion and marginalization in various social settings such as in schools and university. Within their families, these individuals can face similar challenges related to lack of understanding and

acceptance. Family members may struggle to accept their gender identity, or may not have the knowledge to talk about gender diversity. This can create tension and conflict within the family, which can impact the individual's mental health and well-being.

To address these challenges, it is important to promote greater awareness and understanding of gender nonconforming and genderqueer identities, and to create more inclusive and welcoming environments for these individuals. This includes promoting education and awareness around gender diversity, and challenging gender norms and expectations that limit individuals' expression of their gender identity.

Strengths

The use of a transcendental approach in this study allows the researcher to gain insight into the individual experiences of each participant. This approach emphasizes the importance of understanding the subjective experiences of individuals, which is particularly important in the study of gender identity and expression.

Gender identity and expression is a sensitive topic in Pakistan, and not much information or research is available regarding this. The present study addresses the topic of gender identity specifically in relation to individuals in Pakistan, and contributes to a widening area of discussion.

The use of in-depth interviews allowed the researchers to gather detailed information about each participant's experiences of gender identity and expression. This approach can facilitate the development of a rich understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences.

Limitations

Since gender identity and gender expression is a deeply personal topic, some of the participants were hesitant to talk more openly regarding certain areas, such as religion, personal experience, and romantic relationships.

The research consisted of participants who were cisgender, non-binary, gender fluid, and trans male. It did not include other identities such as transgender females, gender neutral, agender, and more. The topic of sexuality could also have been further explored in regards to gender, however, some participants were unwilling to discuss it in detail.

Recommendations of the Study

There is a need to conduct further research on gender identity and expression in Pakistan, including quantitative studies that can provide a broader understanding of the prevalence and experiences of nonbinary, gender nonconforming, and genderqueer individuals in the country. It is also important to educate the general public, including families, schools, universities, and healthcare providers, about gender diversity. By providing education and information about gender diversity, people can better understand that gender is a complex and diverse experience. This can help reduce stigma and discrimination against individuals who do not conform to traditional gender norms and expectations.

Future Implications

More research is needed to explore the experiences and needs of nonbinary and gender nonconforming individuals in Pakistan, as these identities are often overlooked or marginalized in research and policy discussions. This could include longitudinal studies to track the mental health and well-being of gender diverse individuals over time, as well as qualitative research to understand their experiences of discrimination, exclusion, and violence. The study highlights the negative impact of societal norms and expectations on the mental health and well-being of gender nonconforming and genderqueer individuals. Therefore, it is important to develop mental health support services that are specifically tailored to the needs of these individuals. These services can provide counseling, support groups, and other forms of mental health support to help individuals cope with the challenges they face.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM



Informed Consent Form

I _____ have been informed of the procedure of the research on the topic “Exploring the Phenomenon of Gender Identity and Gender Expression”. I understand that by agreeing to participate in this research study, I am consenting to allow the researcher to collect and analyze information about me. I have been informed about the purpose of the study, what will be expected of me as a participant, and any potential risks or benefits. I am aware of my right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or consequence. I understand that my privacy and confidentiality will be protected to the fullest extent possible and that my personal information will be kept confidential and secure. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions that I may have about the study and I am satisfied with the answers I have received. By providing my consent, I am acknowledging that I am participating voluntarily and that I have not been coerced or pressured into participating.

Name of the Participant: _____

Participant Signature: _____

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Demographic Form

It is stated that the information provided here will be kept confidential. Please answer the questions below:

1. Full Name: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Gender: _____
4. Pronouns: _____
5. Sexuality: _____
6. Nationality/Ethnicity: _____
7. Country of Birth: _____
8. City: _____
9. School: _____
10. University: _____

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

Introduction

My name is Alizey Mobasshar, and I am currently a Semester 8 Bachelors student in Kinnaird College for Women University. The purpose of this study is to investigate the phenomenon of gender identity and gender expression in individuals living in Lahore. All personal data gathered in the study will be used with consent. The privacy of the participants will be protected, and the results will be accurately represented.

- How would you like to be referred to? What are your preferred pronouns?
- Where are you from?
- How long have you lived here?
- How old are you?
- Where did you get your education from?

Opening Questions

Opening questions are questions which allow a participant to answer in their own words. They can't be answered with a simple "yes" or "no" response, instead they lead the participant to tell their story in detail.

- What do you previously know about the term gender identity?
- What do you know about the term gender expression?
- Do you think gender identity and gender expression are similar?
- Do you think gender identity and gender expression can be separate from each other?
- What are your first memories when learning about gender?

- Do you believe there are certain roles people are expected to follow based on their gender, or the way they look?
- How are you expected to behave because of your gender? And how do you feel about these expectations?

Key Questions

Key questions are the main questions which are designed to collect core information to answer the research questions.

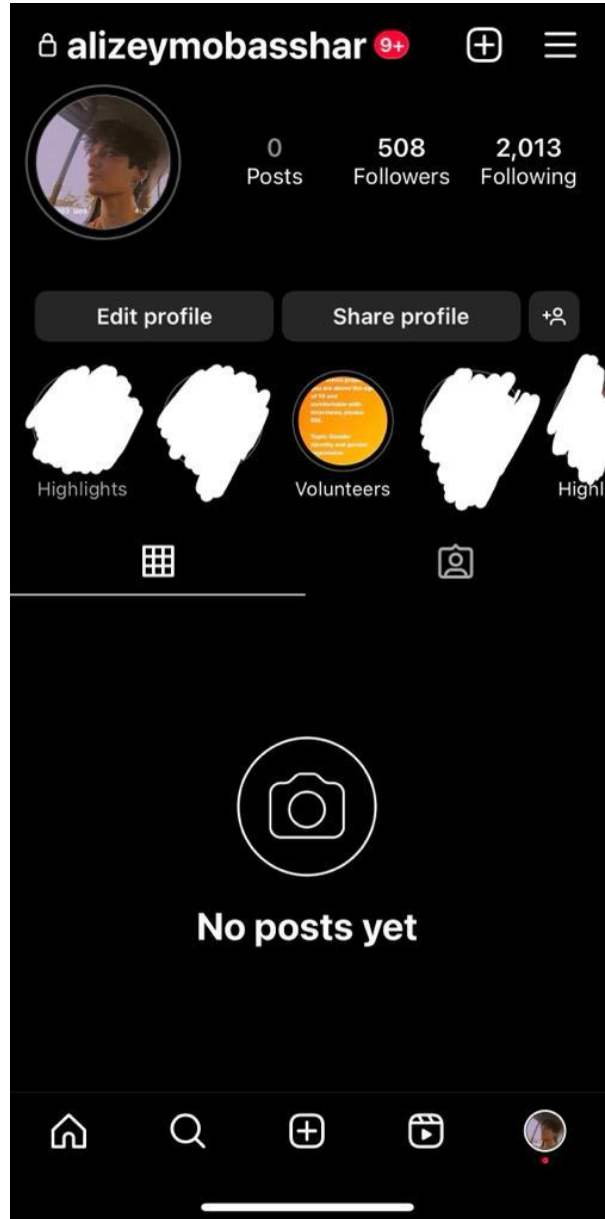
- How many genders do you believe there are?
- What qualities or trait do you associate with different genders?
- What do you consider “masculinity” and what do you consider “femininity”?
- Is it more socially acceptable for females to be masculine, than for males to be feminine? Why do you think?
- Do you believe in gender binary? Why or why not?
- How would you describe your gender?
- How did you come to understand your gender?
- If someone misidentifies your gender, how do you feel? What feelings come up?
- Have you ever faced any discrimination due to the way you express your gender, or the way you identity?
- Do you think the way a person is raised can affect their gender identity?
- What would a world look like without gender?
- Lastly, is there anything else you would like to add, or talk about?

Closing Questions

It is not ethical to abruptly end an in-depth interview, and not to leave the participant in an emotionally vulnerable state. It is also important to be thankful to the participant. Closing questions slowly disconnect the interview, and are general and broader.

- How do you feel about this interview?
- Is there anything that made you feel uncomfortable throughout this session?
- What do you think you learned after this interview?

Image 2.8 Social media post for volunteers



APPENDIX D

TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEWS

Observation: Participant was pretty open and expressive. She was comfortable. However during the talk of SA, she needed some time so recording was paused. Appearance of participant was traditionally feminine. She felt comfortable w/ me using "she" pronouns.

Transcription 1 (Person A)

My name is Alizey Mobassar, and I am currently a Semester 8 Bachelors student in Kinnaird College for Women University. I am doing this study is to investigate the phenomenon of gender identity and gender expression in individuals living in Lahore. All your personal data gathered in the study will be used with your consent. Your privacy will be protected, and interview will remain anonymous.

How would you like to be referred to, what are your pronouns?

My pronouns are she/they because I think I'm **genderfluid**, I do not want to be associated as a feminine person or a masculine person.

Where are you from?

I'm from Lahore.

How long have you lived here?

All my life, I was born here.

How old are you?

I am 19.

Where did you get your education from?

I studied in Sacred Heart Convent, I did O levels from there, and I did my inter from Kinnaird.

How has your experience been during your education time?

My school life was not good because I realized a lot of things I went through a lot of things, and they did have **a toll on my mental health**, and last few years of my school life were **really awful**. In my college, things did change because there was a new environment, and it was a new start, so things were better then.

What do you know about the term gender identity?

Gender identity is the term you use to refer to yourself, and gender identity is how other **people perceive you**.

Do you think that gender identity and gender expression can be similar?

No, because you can think something about yourself and other people can think the exact opposite of it, so it can't be the same thing.

Why do you feel like gender identity and gender expression has to be separate from each other?

Because everyone has their own point of view, you can think something about yourself, but how other people look at you can be different because obviously they would have a different point of view, and they will perceive it a different way.

Have you personally experienced this?

I think of myself as an androgenous person. I do not associate being feminine or masculine. I feel fluid about my gender. Other people however, perceive me as a very feminine girl, which I have tried explaining, but people do not understand. Even my partner herself, she does not respect my pronouns, and it is a hard thing, I try explaining it to her but she just says that it's in my head. She says that I was born a girl, so I am a girl. She does not agree on the front that I am androgenous, which is unsettling and we've argued over that multiple times.

When did you first start learning about your identity? What are your first memories associated with it?

When I was a child, my family used to consider me as a boy, I had short hair and everything. I was a tomboy kid, and I always grew up with the idea that "oh I'm a boy, not a girl", and everyone treated me like that until a certain age and then "oh, now I'm a girl". So it's been like that since my childhood, that I've been associating with a different gender than I was born with.

Do you believe there are certain rules you have to follow because you look a certain way?

I know there are rules, but I will not follow them. These rules do not hold me back. Many people have judged me for it, like my friends in 1st year when I first told them about how I am as a person. They started forcing religion on me like "oh tum kalma parho, you'll be fine you'll be a Muslim". But I am a Muslim, I accept that about myself, that's just how I am as a person, and they were not every understanding about it. They used to tell me that it's all in my head. If it was all in my head till now, I would have changed. It's hard to make people understand.

How do you feel about living in this society and having all these gendered expectations of you?

The thing is, I can't exactly be myself while being here because the society we live in is very conservative. On top of my that, my family is not accepting. My mom does have an idea that I'm not how other people are, but she also thinks that it's something that's in my head and in me and I don't act on it. Also, I was a tomboy when I was a kid, I was treated as a boy. When I was a toddler, I was feminine, and I associated with that, but then something happened. The reason I don't associate as a girl is because something happened with a

At this point, Participant A told me to stop the recording b/c she was feeling overwhelmed. Continued after 10 min.

family member. It was sexual abuse, and that really changed things for me. I did not want to be close to that opposite gender in any way.

How many genders do you believe there are?

I think the spectrum is really wide. The way people say there are just 2, male and female, I do not agree with that. You can associate yourself as anything, and that should be considered okay.

Has the way other people look at gender influenced you?

Before in the past it did, because I did believe that there's either males or females, and for the longest time I didn't believe in transgenders.

How did you come to realize your current belief then?

With time I understood things. I met people, I talked to them, they told me things about themselves, and it just was a part of growing up I think, understanding things and having an open mind towards them.

Do you believe that there are certain traits attached to gender?

No I don't think so. I don't believe you have to have certain traits attached to your gender.

What do you consider "masculinity" and what do you consider "femininity"?

Well, femininity is considered to be linked with softness. There's also this ayat in the Quran that translates to "the hardness of a man and the understanding nature of a woman are meant to go together because they complement each other". They're opposites.

Masculinity is when you're confident about yourself, and you do not hold back in saying things, for me that's more of a masculine energy. Feminine energy is where you're more meek and naïve.

Do you think it's more socially acceptable for females to be seen as masculine than it is for men to be seen as feminine?

Yes, I do believe this. But with time as things keep changing, I think people will be okay with it. If your appearance is different from the norm in any way, people will judge you for it. They will make things up just because you look a certain way.

Have you seen this happen either to you or people around you? Them being judged because of the way they look?

Yes, my girlfriend. She has always had more masculine energy, and not feminine at all, and she learned a lot about the LGBT community a lot late, but even before, people did target her for it, that "oh maybe you do have a girl in your life" just because of the way she looks. I think it's obviously because of the way you look, people are very shallow, they're going to

talk about the first thing they see, and not understand you or try to look deeper into the situation.

Do you think there is such a thing as gender binary? Where you identify as either male or female, and you have to fit into one category?

No. Because sometimes I might wake up and feel feminine, or I might wake up and feel masculine. I don't believe in gender binary for myself, other people can however.

How would you describe your gender?

I can either feel feminine one day or feel masculine. I can act like a boy or act like a girl, and it should be okay.

Okay, so let's say you wake up one day feeling either masculine or feminine, would you want to be referred to differently?

Yes, that's why my pronouns are she/they, and I want people to respect that. If they do, I would appreciate that, but again, people think that it's not a big deal.

When you tell people close to you about your gender, how do they act?

The person closest to me is obviously my partner. She does not even try to understand this, and if I can't expect her to understand, how can I expect someone else to.

Has this been a problem in your relationship?

It was in the beginning, but now I've made my peace with it, if she's not going to be open to this, if she's not going to understand, it's fine as long as I know myself that this is how I associate myself, then that's okay with me.

If you had to explain yourself to someone who doesn't really know about gender, how would you tell them that this is who I am?

Well that would be hard, it won't be easy. I will try explaining that I can either feel like a proper feminine girl, but I can also feel like a boy, and I don't think there's more to it.

If someone misidentifies your gender, what feelings come up?

I will have no compassion for them, because they don't even try to respect me. But you know at this point I'm so done with it, and I'm tired of explaining it to people, that I really don't care.

So before, when you tried to explain your gender to people and they didn't understand, do you feel like it affected you or your personality in any way?

It did, when I used to explain it to them and they still would think of me like the way I look from the outside, I did start believing that "oh maybe that is who I am, who I'm supposed to be, how people will associate me with", but now I really don't care, because I have spent a

fair share of time making people understand, making my friends understand, and **it has been 2 constant years that I have been trying**, and they still do not respect me in that manner, and I've just given up because if they cannot understand I can't keep explaining it to them every day.

If people close to you are not respecting your pronouns and your identity, do you still want to have them in your life?

No. I had friends before, now **I don't think I have friends anymore**, there are very few people who I actually talk to but **I do not have close friends. It's just my girlfriend, and that's it.** If I didn't have her in my life I would be a **really lonesome loser.** It's because I've tried being around people, I've tried being myself around people, but it just never worked the way it should have been.

Do you feel like people are not accepting at all?

Yea, because when I first told them they said "oh you're the first person that we've ever met in our life who's like that, and **aesay to koi bhi nahi hota, tum be change hojao gi?**"

I was going to ask this next but you've already answered it, whether you have faced any discrimination because of your gender?

Yes, I don't keep those people around.

Can you talk a bit about your family?

I have 2 elder sisters and a brother, and a twin, and I openly told my elder sister that I like girls, **she was confused at first** but I tried explaining it to her, I obviously had to lie a bit, but she was okay with it, she understood that. **My second sister is very homophobic**, and I tried explaining things to her as well, but **she threatened me.** And my amma, my mother, I told her that I feel this way and I can never ever look at guys the same way. I can be like one, but I can never like one. And **she was weirded out at first**, but she told me that, again, **it's all in my head and I will change**, but for now that she knows, it's okay with me. It's a bad thing for me to say, but I'm waiting for them to just go, so that I can be myself.

Do you think that the way a person is raised can affect their identity?

Yes it can, for example, if you're around something for a really long time, **it can mold your mind in a different way**, but if you do explore yourself, do other things, obviously **they will have an effect on you, and they will change you.**

Do you think that nowadays people are more willing to explore their personality and understand themselves more?

I think with every coming generation **we're leaving behind many typical stereotypes**, so with the coming generations **people are going to be more open to things.**

Why do think that nowadays there are more people who are coming out and identifying themselves differently than how they were born?

I think because it's becoming a really known thing now. People consider it as a trend. That "oh it's a trend to be gay now", and I think more people try to explore it because of that to fit in, but some who have been in the closet for years, it's a relief for them to see it being more common and accepted.

Do you think there will ever be a point where people in this society will be more open to gender identity?

The younger generation, yes probably definitely, but we still have generations to go. There was an event, Scrapfest which happened recently. I told my girlfriend that I wanted to go, I wanted to be a part of it, and the amount of things she said to be, that "oh those people are scary, it's not right you should not be a part of that".

Can you briefly explain what was the Scrapfest festival?

I think it was for people who are just themselves. It was just a platform for all the queer people to just be themselves for a little amount of time and have no restrictions. But people started calling it a "crapfest". I read a comment that "iss tarhan ki cheezayn horahi hai aur log bombs masjidon mai phenk rahay hain". And it was very weird for me, even if people are a certain way they shouldn't be a target for getting killed.

I wanted to come back to this that you said your girlfriend was against this festival, what was her view of it?

She thought like how most people do, that it's a brainwashing thing and they completely change your mind about things. It's just like everything I like and prefer, she is against it.

Can you talk a bit about that?

We've argued many times just because she wouldn't hold my hand around people, because "oh they'll think we're together" and she does not want people to think that. We do argue over that a lot, but at this point I can't do much about it. If she's not okay with it how can I force her to do something, so I need to make peace with it.

Have you had any internalized homophobia?

No I have not, I've always been very accepting about myself but for her it's completely different. She never knew much about it, and when she did get to know, she did not want to associate with it, and now she completely does not associate with anything. She's okay with the fact that we're together, but there's nothing more to it that she wants, no labels nothing.

If you're okay with answering this, I wanted to ask how do you see your future and your relationship in the future?

I am willing to go to **even extreme lengths to be with her**, but we did have a conversation together and she said that she's going to stop being with me the way she is now at one point because of Islam, **because Islam doesn't allow it**, and apparently she "**can't keep sinning on her life**" but **it's not a sin to me**, and it's something that is very unsettling because I know for a fact that **whatever we have right now is just temporary**, and even though it's a lot more deeper for me, and it is for her too, but she's not willing to take it that far. For the longest time **I didn't even believe in Islam**. But she did change that about me, and I did start believing in certain things, not all of them, but in that manner, we are very different. She's still **very conservative about things**. She thinks she's never going to tell anyone about us, it's me who tells people and then they find out, but she doesn't mention it to anyone.

What role has religion played in your life?

It has ruined a lot of things for me, because I know that **I was born a Muslim, and it restricts me a lot**, so I was never really very high on religion. **I feel like it boxed me in.**

Do you still feel that way about religion?

Yes, and that's why I don't really practice it anymore. I mean I am a Muslim, I associate as one, but **I am not a practicing Muslim.**

So you feel like religion has made you feel like you're not a good person?

Yea that too because **I have a twin who used to be bisexual**, and now she's not, and constantly I am hearing things from her that **"oh I'm going to go to hell for this"**, from my twin sister who used to be bisexual, and now she's straight. I do hear a lot of things from her that "oh I'm a sinner, I'm going to be going to hell for this, there's no way that I'll ever be forgiven", which eventually does have an effect on me, because if Islam is true, if everything about it is true, then **maybe I will go to hell, which is unsettling** but I really don't care.

Since you mentioned you have a twin sister, can I ask about your relationship with her?
Can you just talk a bit about how has your relationship with her changed.

It has been very toxic. We are not good to each other and for each other, because she's the type of person **who will bring me down** if something goes wrong with her, and constantly **I'm living in the fear** that she's going to tell my mom about my girlfriend and I, she's going to tell her everything. I haven't told my mom about my girlfriend yet, she just knows that I like girls, but doesn't know anything about my girlfriend. But **my twin is not a good person.** She's really not. I wish she was, but she's the type of person who's going to commit a sin and if someone else does it, she's going to judge them for it.

So you said that she was bisexual and then she changed, can you explain how that happened?

felt judged
by family,
esp. her
sister.

-Living in
fear

I think she was in school when she started liking a girl and then, I think how the girl was to her made her change the view she had about herself, because that girl was not accepting about her, she was not good to her, and then she obviously changed her direction towards it. For the longest time I've heard this from her that "oh you need to start praying, you need to clean your heart, because I've cleaned mine". I guess now she's back on the same stuff, with a guy not a girl. That's the thing with most people, they will bring Islam thoray time k liye, sar pay char ha dayngay, aur phir phirseey bhool jayengay. Sab ka apna apna Islam bana hua hai, jo cheez jiskay saath sahi fit hoti hai, that sits right with them, they're going to prefer that, they're going to preach about that, they will accept it, but baki cheezayn they won't. In this society, Islam bi har aik k liye different tareekay sey mold hua hai.

If you didn't have this restriction of living in this society, or if you lived somewhere outside, how would you be living?

I would be living by myself. If considering my current girlfriend, I'd probably be living with her, and I would openly tell people about it, because with Islam you always get restricted that you cannot talk about the person you love, you can't just say it to people, so if I was living somewhere outside, things would be a lot easier. I wouldn't be arguing with her everyday.

So you know how in our society, marriage is considered a really big thing. Girls are supposed to get married earlier. Has that been something that you have to face?

It's been forced on me. My amma is ready to get be engaged off to some dude, and I don't know how to explain it to her that I do need help for it, because I just cannot stand guys because of what happened. There is no way I can marry one. And I don't know how to tell my mom that because if I do, my sister's house is going to get ruined because she's married and she has 2 kids. Marriage is something that, some girls are going to be very happy that "oh we're getting married", but for me it's never been something of happiness and in my society, zada tar issiliye jaldi shaadi kartay hain so that the burden gets off in the family. Because again, how things are changing so rapidly, how society used to be before, that relationships weren't considered that much, itna common nahi hota tha, some families do want that hamari beti iss cheezon mai na paray, bas jaldi shaadi hojaye. My parents are like that, and both of my sisters got married when they were either 26 or 27, and I don't know why my mom is so keen on getting me married at 19. Thankfully my abba is on my side, he doesn't let that happen.

Since your family is so keen on getting you married, how will you deal with this?

I can either find a guy for myself who's gay, I can get married to him, he can have his own life and I can have mine, and my parents don't have to know. I've always been on the front of adopting a child rather than giving birth. So if that really happens, that's what I'm going to do, find a gay guy, it's easier now.

Participant feels extremely traumatized by her past SA.

Since marriage has such a gender-based role, would you ever want to get married to your partner?

I would choose to live with her and not get married.

If there were no expectations of gender or any gender roles, how would this society be right now?

I think it would be chaotic. Because again, we as humans, we always need some rules or regulations, or some restrictions to believe in. Because if there was nothing, we would be doing anything and everything, and it would be chaotic.

Can you explain more in depth how it would be chaotic?

Har cheez ka aik nizam hota hai. Everything exists for a reason, everything that's here is here for a reason. If God exists, then these rules are here for a reason. In my opinion, I think the rules are here so that we have more structure and a proper plan to follow or not to follow.

Is there anything you would like to add to this interview, whether about your experience or anything that you feel?

I wish people around me were more open and understanding about things. Some are. Some of my friends, they're just into it for the sake of it. They don't really associate with anything.

How did you feel throughout this interview? Is there anything that made you feel uncomfortable?

No it was not uncomfortable at all. It was unsettling thora sa at one point, but baad mai it got better, and I eased into it. I think so it was a good experience.

Is there anything that you learned from this interview, or about yourself?

I am a lot more confident than how people think. I've been pushed down a lot, and after this I did realize that oh nahi there are certain things that I am more persistent about and I won't talk about it anymore, why, because people don't listen. I don't need to prove myself.

Okay. Thank you so much for this interview. All of this information will be kept anonymous. If there's anything that you would like to be removed, you can tell me.

No there's nothing. Thank you.

- ★ Relationships ≠ Gender
- Perception of gender by partner
- Marrying opposite gender

Codes

- Respect my principles
- I am androgynous
- Unsettling
- Wouldn't hold my hand
- No labels
- Extreme lengths
- Can't stand guys.

- ★ Erasing concept of Gender
- Following proper structure
- Chaos due to no rules

Codes

- Chaotic • Rules + regulations
- Restrictions • Everything exists for a reason.
- Structure + plan.
- Proper plan to follow.

Themes + coding

★ = major
- = minor

★ Mental Health

- school life
- losing friends
- Not being accepted by family.

Codes

- school life not good / ~~awful~~
- Toll on mental health
- No close friends
- Lonely user
- Very homo/hobiz
- Threatened
- Bisexual twi
- Going to hell
- Very toxic
- I'm living in fear

★ Gender Fluidity

- Not associating w/ single gender.
- Realizing gender identity
- Feeling masc. or fem.
- Spectrum of gender

Codes

- Androgenous person
- Fluid about gender
- Part of growing up
- Gender binary

★ Childhood Experiences

- Tomboy as a kid
- Associate w/ diff. genders
- Treatment by parents
- Relationship w/ siblings
- Sexual abuse

Codes

- short hair
- Tomboy kid
- Treated as a boy
- Don't associate as girl.
- It's all in my head

★ Societal Expectations

- How friends viewed gender identity
- Conservative society
- Appearing diff. from norm

Codes

- Certain rules
- Judged for it.
- Forcing religion
- Can't be myself
- Diff. from the norm

★ Masculine & Feminine Energies

- What is considered masculine
- " " feminine

Codes

- Femininity linked w/ softness
- Confident about yourself
- Meek + naive

★ Perception of Gender by Society

- Misidentifying gender
- Stereotypes of gender

Codes

- People are shallow
- Perceive me as feminine
- Respect pronouns
- Typical stereotypes
- Brainwashing

★ Influence of Religion

- Role of religion in relationships
- Following rules based on religion.
- Feeling restricted

Codes

- I am Muslim - Islam doesn't allow it.
- Can't keep sinning. • Not a sin.
- Didn't believe in Allah
- Ruined a lot of things for me
- Born a Muslim. • Restricts me.
- Boxed me in. • Not a practicing Muslim.
- Getting restricted
- Things would be easier

Observation: Interview was about 30 min. b/c participant took some time to open up. It was a bit difficult to build rapport. Participant did not want to go into detail about religion or her relationship. Appearance of participant was tomboyish, w/ above shoulder hair but not a boy cut.

Transcription 2 (Person B)

My name is Alizey Mobasshar, and I am currently a Semester 8 Bachelors student in Kinnaird College for Women University. I am doing this study is to investigate the phenomenon of gender identity and gender expression in individuals living in Lahore. All your personal data gathered in the study will be used with your consent. Your privacy will be protected, and interview will remain anonymous.

How would you like to be referred to, what are your pronouns?

She/her

Where are you from?

Lahore, Pakistan

How long have you lived here?

All my life.

How old are you?

I'm 20.

Where did you get your education from?

Other than Kinnaird, Kids Kampus near my house.

So how has your experience been in school and in Kinnaird?

Very different. My school experience was very different from Kinnaird, because I think I got to know about gender identity and stuff like that when I came to college. Before that I wasn't really sure about these kinds of things, or if things existed in this manner.

Do you feel like since you came here to Kinnaird, you got to know more about gender?

Yes.

So moving on to the main questions, what do you previously know about the term gender identity?

Well it's about how people express themselves as, or identify as.

And what do you know about the term gender expression?

I didn't know much until recently, because I wasn't really... I never thought that this community really existed. But now I do know that how people express themselves and how they identify as.

So you said that that when you came here (in Kinnaird) that's how you got to know more. Can you explain how that happened, or through which people or how you got to know more (about gender identity and expression)

Well obviously there are a lot of different people here, in Kinnaird. Everyone has their own ideas and stuff like that. Meeting new people and socializing with them opened up that gateway to you know people that do identify as a different gender.

Do you think that gender identity and gender expression can be similar?

Umm I'm not sure about that.

Well do you think they have to be different from each other?

Right now I don't think so, personally. But everyone has their own ideas, again.

So when did you first start to learn about gender?

I think during the last year in school, 10th grade, that's when somebody else said something and I was like "I'm not, you know familiar with that", because somebody referred to me as... that you know. So that's when I got to know that oh there are certain people.

Okay so I just want to explain a bit about the terms. Gender identity is what you identify as. You can identify as male or female or whatever you prefer. And gender expression is how you outwardly present yourself to other people. So you said that people in your past, people referred to you a certain way. Can you please explain a bit about that?

Well I think that because of how... or the things I liked or a certain way I used to do things, it wasn't the conventional way. Which is why, you know people referred to me as more masculine rather than feminine.

If you feel comfortable, can you go into detail about what were the things people thought made you different?

Like not wearing makeup. Not wearing feminine clothes, or like Eastern clothes like Pakistani clothes the way other girls dress up, I don't do that. Wearing makeup or just other general interests such as you know like sports and stuff like that. Maybe that's why... you know obviously in our school it was a co-education but the girls and boys were in different sections. It was an all-girls class, so being, you know, that way... the only one who never wears makeup, doesn't indulge in other girlish activities, that's what made them more... like think about me as more masculine.

And when it comes to the people that you are around, what kind of people would you say you associate yourself with?

I have made a lot of friends especially after coming to Kinnaird. I don't really care if a person identifies as something or other. It's just, I think... I don't know how to explain this but it's just the human that I look for, that oh if this person is compatible with how I am or not. So that's how it's been.

Hmm okay. So you said that that when you were younger, you didn't really act like how most girls usually act. Do you think that the way society views gender roles has affected the way that you act? Do you believe that you have to follow certain rules?

Yea. Yea absolutely because you know being a girl I cannot always express myself like a guy, since you know there are certain rules that society has that I have to follow. Like wearing a dupatta, stuff like that. Going out alone, things like... since being in Pakistan, and being raised up in a Pakistani household, these are the things that I have to follow, even though I don't want to.

Okay, so can you talk a bit about your background, like your family and your relationship with your family, and how it has affected your mindset.

Well I think that, ever since, like... I've... I only have a brother, so... and my father was the oldest between his siblings, so me and my brother were the only children around. So that really affected me as who I am because that is why I never got into the girly stuff. My mother never really forced me to wear frocks and stuff like that. She was always neutral with the both of us, and... yea that is why I am how I am right now. She wanted me to do everything that I wanted. She never stopped me, never really cared if I wore clothes a certain way or played outside, so yea which is why I am how I am right now. I only had a brother. I never had the girly influence around me, at home at least, which is why I never really got into those sorts of things.

Do you think that if you had, like a sister, or more female friends, or like you said in your family if you had a more girlish influence would it change things?

Yea, even my mother says that. She wishes that she had pushed me to do girly stuff, and I do believe that if I had an older sister instead of a brother, things would have been different. Because I was influenced by my brother. If he was a girl than probably yea things would have been different.

So you said that there are certain things you have to follow even though you don't want to. Does it make you feel a certain way when you have to do something which you don't feel comfortable with?

Yea you know, wearing certain clothes, when I don't want, obviously it's an uncomfortable feeling for me as who I am. It's like the complete opposite of me.

Can you explain a bit that how are you expected to behave because of your gender?

Because of my gender in this society I'm expected to behave like all the other girls around me, you know I'm expected to wear makeup or dress a certain way or behave a certain way.

Okay, so now I want to move onto the main questions. First I want to ask how many genders do you believe there are?

Two.

Okay, has this been something that you have always believed?

Yea, I have.

Do you have other people around you who have different opinions of this?

Yea I do. Many people around me who have kind of, different views. Many people closer to me who have different views, but I respect them and their views.

Okay so I want to ask you that why do you believe there are only two genders?

Well, being a Muslim, obviously there are certain things which are set for us, and I am someone who practices my religion, so that is why I do only believe there are two genders.

Is it alright if I talk a bit about religion?

Yea sure.

Has religion been something that you have always been close to?

Yes.

And has it affected the way that you define yourself and view yourself?

Yea it has stopped me to do certain things, because obviously there are certain rules that we have to follow. So yea it has affected me and the way I am or the way I do things.

Do you sometimes wish that these rules didn't exist?

Some of them, yes. Obviously I am a human and I think certain way, so yea there are certain things I do wish that "oh this was different" or "oh I wish this didn't exist" or "I wish this wasn't a rule I had to follow".

So religion has played a major role in your life.

Yea it has, it has.

Actually I want to ask that, since you're a religious person, what are the things that you strongly believe in, related to your gender and things that you can't do.

Well...now the world we are living in, it is easy to change your gender. Like biologically and things like that. So I have decided not to do that since you know it's not allowed in our religion, and yea it's one of the things that has affected me as a person, because I have to

follow...because I believe in my religion, that is why I choose to. It's not that I think it makes me uncomfortable or anything. Since I am okay with it, so, yea I think that I am okay with the choices I have made, according to my religion.

Okay. So actually I want to ask about something you brought up. Since religion doesn't allow you to change your gender, that's why you don't. But if this restriction did not exist, would you be comfortable being a girl or would you want to change?

I would want to change. If it was allowed, I would have changed. But since it's not, that is the sole reason why I haven't done it yet.

Okay, alright. So what qualities or traits do you associate with different genders? Since you said there are only males or females, what qualities do you associate with them?

I think most of my qualities or interest I would say are based on the male gender, because I, you know, I'm really into sports, and gaming, and things like that. I know it's not, you know now things have changed, the stereotypical ways of "only boys will do this or only girls will do that". So... yea, I think those traits, some of those, like the way I am, or the way I do things, like even in sports and gaming and stuff like that, and my personal interests, or the things around me.

So you said that you mostly only have masculine interests right?

Yea.

I just want to ask from your point of view, what do you consider to be a masculine person, and what do you consider to be a feminine person, regardless of gender?

Well around us obviously there are stereotypical things that, like I said only boys will do that or only girls will do that. I do not personally believe that, because I am a girl, and I do those things, and I want those stereotypes to be over with because I want other girls to indulge in that, since I have girl friends all around, I don't really have that much boys who are my friends, which is why I want girls to think that "oh they can do this too", you know.

Makeup is one of the things that makes a person really feminine in our world, at least right now. And when it comes to masculinity, then again I think there is a certain way of dressing up and things like that, you know the outside look of a person, that's what really gives off the masculine or feminine energy of a person. Like if you're wearing makeup or dressing a certain way.

Do you think that it's more socially acceptable for females to be masculine than it is for males to be feminine?

I don't think it's acceptable either way, because the society just instantly ticks them off that "oh she's being masculine" or "he's being feminine", so at least in our society it's still not acceptable that a person is acting the other way around.

You said that it's not acceptable in our society for people to act different than how they're supposed to. Have you previously seen people who have been discriminated against or have you personally faced any discrimination regarding this?

Yea absolutely, because you know, since people around us, in our homes and relatives even, they don't really get how things are for me or for others around me, so obviously I am constantly hearing "oh **you're not acting like a girl**", "**you're not acting like other girls around you**", and things like that.

Okay. I want to ask that how did you understand gender? Since growing up, how has your viewpoint changed about gender?

Well for the longest time I didn't think there was anyone like me, because as I said I didn't know that this community existed. I only came to know about it later on, in 10th grade. And when I came here in Kinnaird, I got to know more people who were, you know very into the community. And I think that's how I got to know, **through social media** obviously, I got know that oh such people do exist, or oh there are certain people who associate themselves a certain way.

Have you always felt comfortable with yourself, or has it changed throughout?

Uh I think, well, you do change as you grow up and your ideas change such as who you are yourself, and yea I think I have changed a lot since I was in school and my first year here, second year and now I'm in university. Every year I think I do change as a person, and how I think of myself.

Hmm okay. So next I want to talk about the topic of relationships. How do you view relationships?

I think... relationships I don't think they are a bad thing. Because knowing a person as who you associate with in a romantic way is a good thing you know, you need someone you can really feel like "oh they're your person", no matter who that is. But **there are certain relationships that can get toxic, either they're too sexually involved** and things like that. So that is wrong, I do consider that wrong. I don't consider a relationship as a whole a wrong thing if the two people really do care about each other or are you know sincere with each other. Right now in our world I don't think there are much relationships like that, like genuine relationships, people who actually care about each other. **Some people are just doing it for the trend, or to look good.** But that's not how it should be.

Do you think that your gender identity affects your relationship, and affects who you're attracted to?

Yea it does obviously it's a difficult thing living in a Muslim society and our society especially, a Pakistani society, **it is a difficult thing to find the person who can really**

understand how you are, or how you think about certain things. So yea it does have effects of how you interact with people.

Hm okay. So you said that religion puts certain restrictions on things you can and can't do, if these rules did not exist at all, where would you be right now?

I think... hmm... I would be like more open about some things to people, because obviously if that's acceptable, I won't be scared of how people will judge me, or my partner in certain way. So yea I would be more comfortable with myself. I won't have to be you know scared of things, or think about that "oh if someone gets to know this they're gonna judge me" or they'll be certain consequences for that.

Okay, so coming back to your gender identity, if someone misidentifies your gender, how do you feel?

Um it makes me uncomfortable, because I don't want people to assume that "oh she's a certain way", which people do nowadays a lot, even the people closest to me, they even do that. They just think and assume because of the way I look, or because of the way I am, or because of the way I do certain things. So yea that's pretty uncomfortable.

Can you talk a bit about how people close to you make you feel bad and uncomfortable about how you identify. So can you explain what are the things that they do or say?

Well it's mostly just truly based on assumption, as I said how I look, and not thinking of me as a person who I actually am, they just assume things solely based on how I look or how I act. Like "oh she looks like this, she's this, she's gonna do this", they just assume that I'm gonna do a certain thing even though that's totally the opposite of what I'm thinking of what I'm actually doing.

So do you feel the need to clarify yourself and tell them that no this is not who I am.

Sometimes I do but sometimes I don't justify myself because then again they won't truly understand me. Because if they're assuming things about me, they already don't understand how I am, So yea I don't think they deserve to be clarified to.

Okay, so it alright if I talk a bit more about relationships?

Yea sure.

So are you currently in a relationship?

Yes.

And how has that affected your view of yourself? Are there any problems that have come up?

Uh... I don't think there are problems, I just think that sometimes we have to understand that we are two different people with different views of things and we just have to respect each

other in that way. It does change my view of things a lot of times obviously, but yea it's been good so far because I know that we're two different people, with different views, and I have to respect their view no matter what.

Do you think the way someone is raised can affect their gender identity?

Yea obviously because talking about my experience, it's been that way. Because I was raised a certain way. I was not stopped from doing things a certain way, so that is how I became who I am right now. Because of my brother and because of the way things were around my house, more masculine energy and things like that, so it does affect a person growing up.

When you think about your future, what do you envision for yourself?

Well I do have very ambitious goals. About my relationship, there are certain things that I want to do, as in my career before I settle in with someone, no matter who they are, a guy or a girl, but yea there are certain things that I want to do. Like being single, I don't want to be in a relationship or bound by someone, because there are certain things that you have to look after if you're committed to someone, so there are some things that, in the next 10 to 15 years I want to do before I properly settle in with someone.

So you said that in our society there are certain rules to follow, and one of those rules is marriage, especially in Pakistani society, and since being a girl, most girls are usually expected to get married in their 20s, what is your opinion about that?

If I'm talking about myself, I don't believe that you have to get married in your early 20s or before you're 30. But obviously in our society there's this thing, but thankfully my mom she doesn't really force me, she's never really talked about that. She wants me to settle myself first, which is a good thing and I am grateful for that because she understands me in that way that I have to do certain things in my career first, rather than just marrying a guy and settling in and just doing nothing. So yea I do believe people should, especially girls should have a career or something that tells them who they are, and they should have a mark in their career before they settle in. They should be independent first and then they should marry. Because jumping off into a marriage first in your early 20s when you're growing up, getting to know about the world, that does end up right for everyone. It's a really difficult job to do.

Yes, because you know mostly in our society the view is that you should be tied down early and have a family and everything. Do you think 10 years from now, that is something you want for yourself? Having a family and getting married to a guy?

As I said, it's not my priority, I do want to push myself to do certain things, like my career first, there's like a list I want to do before I get married, and I do believe that when I'm done with those things and I think that "oh okay now I'm settled to a point where I will be okay marrying someone", only then I will tie myself down that way.

Okay, I can understand that. So next I want to ask you what you think a world would look like without gender or gender roles, any expectations or the concept of gender?

I think the world would be a better place for a lot of people, and people would feel more comfortable to express themselves how they want to express themselves without thinking how they will be judged by the society.

Do you think that it would change the discrimination people face?

Obviously it would because people won't have the fear in themselves to express themselves. Because most of the times people you know hide who they truly are because of the fear that they will be discriminated a certain way or they will be judged a certain way.

Lastly, is there anything you would like to add to this interview?

I think people have different views and people will think a certain way. It really depends on where you live. And in our society there's this thing that people will be judged a certain way. I mean people are even judged if they are being "normal" according to our society, you know being a girl the way a girl should be or being a guy the way a guy should be, even then they are judged when they do certain things. So I think people who express themselves or identity themselves differently are judged even more. There's this stamp over them that "oh they are bad, they are people who want bad for everyone around them". Even if you want someone to change, we can do it with love and respect, while respecting the other person. So if that can change, it would really change the entire way people look at gender identity. Instead of being hateful, you can make the other person understand, you can be calm about it. You don't have to shout at someone or be angry at someone if they are acting a certain way. Just try to make them understand you and try to understand them. That's the only way how we can overcome this entire discrimination.

Thank you so much for saying that. Since this is almost the end of the interview, I just want to end with a couple of closing questions.

Yea sure.

So how did you feel throughout this interview? Is there anything that made you feel uncomfortable or hesitant to talk about?

Um I wasn't really uncomfortable but there are certain things that I am hesitant to mention because you know I don't want to offend anyone because everyone has different views, so yea I wasn't really uncomfortable. It went really smoothly.

So lastly, what do you think you learning during this interview?

I think I do know and am aware of how different people express themselves, and but there are certain terms I am still getting used to, such as gender identity and gender expression

which you said are different things. Before I did not really understand how they were different from each other, so yea I have learned that.

Alright, thank you so much for doing this interview.

You're welcome.

Themes + Coding

△ = Major
• = Minor

△ Outside appearance and perception of gender

- Clothing style
- Physical appearance
- General interests
- Misidentifying gender

Codes

- Makeup • Feminine clothes
- Pakistani clothes • sports
- Gaming • conventional

△ Gender-Based Rules

- Pakistani household
- Restrictions

Codes

- Certain rules
- Going out alone
- Wearing dupatta

△ Environment Affects gender

- How a person is raised
- Treatment growing up.
- Amount of siblings

Codes

- girly stuff • Neutral
- girly influence

△ Expectation of Society

- How girls are supposed to behave.
- How girls are supposed to look

Codes

- Uncomfortable feeling
- Complete opposit
- Weave makeup
- Dress a certain way

△ Influence of Religion

- Certain rules
- Being Muslim
- Changing gender

Codes

- Muslim • 2 genders • Rules
- "If it was allowed, I would have changed (my gender)".

△ Masculine + Feminine Energies

- What makes someone masc.
- " " fem.

Codes

- Makeup • Outside look
- Masc. or Fem. energies
- Way of dressing

△ Erasing concept of gender

- No gender roles or expectations
- No discrimination

Codes

- More comfortable
- Judged by society
- Fear of discrimination.

Observation: Participant was open and easy to talk to. Did not express discomfort and talked clearly. Appearance was a mix of feminine and masculine traits. Had a boy cut but wore makeup and used she/her.

Transcription 3 (Person C)

So my name is Alizey Mobassar and I'm currently a Semester 8 Bachelor student in Kinnaird College for Women. The purpose of this study is to investigate the phenomenon of gender identity and gender expression in individuals living in Lahore. All of your personal data gathered in the study will be used with your consent, your privacy will be protected, and the results will be accurately represented. If there's anything that you don't feel comfortable talking about, you can let me know. Your name is not going to be included. Okay.

So firstly, I want to start with some basic questions. How would you like to be referred to like, what are your pronouns?

She/her.

Where are you from?

I am from Jhelum basically, my father is from Jhelum. Currently I'm living in Lahore.

How long have you lived here?

It's been two years since I've been in Lahore.

Okay, and how old are you?

I'm 19.

Where did you get your education from?

I got my education from multiple places since I am from an Army background. Murree, Bahawalpur, Lahore currently.

So would you like to talk about your experiences in school? How was your school life like?

My school life was fine. It was okay. It was like a regular school life nothing too special about it.

Okay. So let's move on to the opening questions. So what do you previously know about the term gender identity?

Gender identity, in my opinion, is when people feel they have to change their identity as to what they feel. So for example, if a person feels that he is a woman, he would refer to himself as a she. So that's basically what I feel about gender identity.

And what do you know about the term gender expression?

Gender expression, I'm actually not familiar with it, gender expression and gender identity seems similar to me.

So you don't feel like there's a difference between gender identity and gender expression?

If I think about it, I think gender expression would be how open you are about your gender instead of gender identity, so yea.

Okay. Do you feel that you personally relate to this term?

Yeah, I can relate to this, to some extent. There was a time when I was a bit doubtful about some certain things, including my sexuality, but that was kind of like, a phase. So, um, I'm over that now. I can't really explain it.

Is it okay is I ask what did you mean by when you said that it was a phase? Was it during a certain time period?

Yea it was a certain time period after which I kind of grew out of it like you do in life. But yeah, so like, that was just for a momentary time.

So during that time, how did you like, think of yourself?

Uhh, well I was doubtful about myself, because I felt like I didn't really know myself anymore. Because everything felt new. And it felt weird. It kind of felt really weird for me, because I was... I've never had any trouble before with my sexuality or anything in life. That was a first for me. And it was a bit... it was very hard.

Did you have people around at that time that you could talk to about this?

Uh no, I kind of hated myself for a year or so more than a year. And after that when the pressure got really immense, that's when I had to open up to my family that I was facing problems and stuff like that.

Okay, so you mentioned your family, right that you opened up to them. So can you explain, how did you talk to them, what did you talk to them about?

I talked to them about how I was... I didn't... Yeah, so basically what I did was I didn't talk directly to them because I was afraid about what they were going to think of me because when we are living in this society and our religion it's not really a good thing to have troubles with your sexuality. So I told my sister and she told my parents that I was having troubles and they knew They knew, but they were waiting for me to open up to them. And they were very supportive of me in the sense that they wanted to help me and they were like, okay, we're going to help you with this and all of that. So that's how it was out there. They were chill with it.

They were fine with it?

They were fine with the fact that I was having troubles. I wasn't changing my sexuality. But they were willing to help me. So in that sense, they were supportive. They weren't like, "oh my gosh, ye kia kar rahi ho".

Okay, so what were your first memories learning about gender?

My first memories learning about gender would be in sixth grade. Up to sixth grade, I used to think of boys and girls just kind of like equals. But I got to sixth grade, I realized that there were romantic relationships happening between the girls in my grade and the guys in my grade. So that's when I kind of felt that, okay, I'm growing up. And this is, this is how the world works.

So when you saw other people your age getting in relationships, did you feel like you had to also be a part of it? Like, did you feel like maybe there was some pressure?

No, I didn't feel the need to have one. But it did kind of, I kind of felt a bit shocked by it. Because up till then I was kind of avoiding the fact that this actually happens.

You mean relationship between guys and girls or between just girls?

Guys and girls, and even girls and girls, so it was both when I was in sixth grade.

So during that time, when you saw your peers getting in relationships, did you like anyone? Or did you have any attraction?

I did not. I wasn't attracted to anyone.

So when was the first time that you did feel attracted to someone?

I was in seventh grade when I first felt attracted to someone. It was a guy in my class, but that was just like a crush or something.

You didn't pursue it?

No, I did not. I did not do anything about it.

Okay. Um, so when you got out of your school time, when you came into college in your university, did your experiences change?

Hmm not really. I kind of stayed the same. Even if I liked someone, I wouldn't really tell them, I didn't really experience a lot of stuff happening. It was just going smoothly. I did experience some stuff here, in university. And that's when I was having troubles with my sexuality and all that. So that was new for me and seeing that there are a lot of homosexuals in here and all that, so that was kind of a new for me. I mean I'd heard of homosexuals, but I hadn't seen them or interacted with them. It didn't exist in my life.

Okay, it didn't exist until up to the point of university?

Yea

So is your university gender based? Like, is it one gender? Or does it have male and females?

Yea it's one gender.

Do you feel that going into a one gender university affects your perception? Do you think that your experiences in one gender university would be different if you had went to a co-ed university?

Yeah, it would be pretty different. Because in my current university, it's an all-girls university. But there's a lot of sexual tension I feel like between the students, in certain groups and all that. But when you're in a co-ed university, it feels more natural. That's just my opinion.

So you said that there's more tension, right? Do you have anything that you can refer to, an example, or have you experienced this?

Like, for example, when I was having troubles with my sexuality, it was about being attracted to another person with the same gender as me. And according to, well being a religious person, I know that it was not right. So that of course increased my anxiety. So that's what I mean when I say that there are a lot of tensions.

So, you talked about religion, right? You said you're a religious person. So does religion play a role in how you view yourself? And your actions?

Yeah, it does play a role in how I view myself, because in my beliefs, what I am should be according to rules given to me by my God. So yeah, I think of myself like "yea I have to do this and I have to do that".

You feel like you have to follow certain rules?

Yea, I have to, I have to follow certain rules.

Okay, and let's say if you didn't have religion, if you didn't follow a religion, how would that be different for you?

I would do all of the things that I'm not allowed to right now. But also there are certain disadvantages to that, if I do all the things that my religion does not allow me to do currently, I would feel certain anxiety, and depression. And most probably I would not be alive right now. Definitely I would not be alive right now.

So you said that, without religion, you would engage in everything that you feel like you cannot right now, but it would cause you depression? how do you think that it would be worse for you? How would it cause you to be depressed?

How would it cause me to be depressed? Because you can only be successful if you follow your God successfully. If I do not have a religion, I do not have a purpose. It might not seem

• Felt guilty about her attraction b/c of religious beliefs.

• sees religion as a grounding force in her life, that gives meaning.

• Is very strict on her religious beliefs.

that immense to you right now, or anyone listening to this, but actually, it does have a really, really big influence on your life when you do not have a religion. And I've actually experienced that. When during this one year, I was having troubles with myself, unintentionally I was just being distanced from God. Unintentionally, it wasn't intentional. But during the time I was facing depression and anxiety, that's when I realized that, no, I need to find God, that's important for me.

Do you feel like religion has been a positive influence for you?

It has helped me a lot throughout my life.

And since there are things that you want, but you cannot do because of religion, do you feel like that affects your mental health?

Umm, that affects my mental health, but in a positive way, because my mentality becomes more like, "when the time comes I'll get it". I know, I'll get it because mai kisi sey kam nahi hun. So that's what my mentality becomes when I know that certain things are not permissible.

So it doesn't hold you back?

Yeah, it doesn't really hold me back from achieving my goals. It does not decrease my love for God.

So now I want to ask you about, certain roles that people are expected to follow? Do you believe that in our society, males and females have certain roles, which they have to follow based on their gender?

Yes, certain roles to some extent, like for example, a man, it's his responsibility to run the house, it's not the woman's responsibility to run the house as in when I say earning, I'm talking about financial issues. So the man of the house has to earn and he has to feed his family and the woman, she is allowed to have equal rights definitely, but in certain cases, she is supposed to be a bit, like a level down from the men because that's important in our society and according to our religion.

So when it comes to yourself, do you think that you are expected to behave in a certain way because of your gender?

Yea to some extent, like for example, my dressing is sometimes criticized by certain people, you know, sometimes in a light hearted way, but they do think that I dress like a boy and all that so, yeah, so there I am expected to dress more like a woman, wear long shirts and you know, wear jewelry and earrings and stuff like that, in that sense. Yeah.

And how do you feel because these expectations, do you feel like you have to follow them you have to fit into that?

• Has very typical views of how men & women should be.

I sometimes do feel that but other times, I feel like I should be on the right path rather than trying to make other people happy. I should try to focus on what makes me happy. But it has to be the right thing.

So when it comes to your dressing and the way that you look, you don't feel like it's something bad or wrong.

Yea I don't feel like it is. I'm not showing my skin, or excessive skin or anything like that, so yea I think that's fine for me.

Alright, so, now I want to move on to the main questions. How many genders do you believe there are?

I believe there are just two genders.

Okay. Do you have other like people around you who believe differently than you?

Not anyone I know of. But there are people, I don't know any personally.

So do you have this viewpoint because of religion? Or is it your personal belief?

It's my personal belief.

And what qualities or traits do you associate with these genders?

The male has to be strong physically, a little bit mentally, yes. But that's not a standard that should be kept. It of course, varies with every person who has a different mental health. But yeah, when I think of male, I think of a strong kind of person. And I think as a female, I, you know, think of a strong willed person, but also with the softer side.

And have you seen people who don't fit into these categories, regardless of their gender?

Yea I've seen people, certain people who would not fit into this category.

So I want to come to the topic of femininity and masculinity, like regardless of gender, when you think of masculinity first, what do you think of not based off of gender?

Well when I think of masculinity, I think, it might be a big negative but it's my view, someone egoistic and with the you know "oh mai ye kar sakta hun". When I think of masculinity, that's kind of what I think. And when I think of femininity, I think of a person who is soft hearted, kind, gentle and strong.

So usually, masculinity is mostly associated with males and femininity is associated with females. So let's say that roles were reversed. If you see a feminine male or a masculine female, how would you think of them? Like what characteristics would make them a feminine man or a masculine woman?

• Believes people who want to change their gender are forcing it and it's not natural.

Umm, if I see a masculine woman or a feminine man I wouldn't judge them because it's who they are. It's how they want to express themselves if they're doing it naturally, if it's natural, but they're forcing it then that's not okay. Like if a man wants to bake for example. Kehtay hain mard ho ghar k kaam nahi karnay chahiye, but if he wants to cook and he wants to do certain womanly stuff, he is allowed to do that. He should do that. Yeah, but dressing, if he wants to dress up as a woman, that's a bit you know, not okay. Because that feels forced. That's not him. And the same is the case with a woman. If a woman wants to, she wants to be a fighter or go into the army, or she wants to learn how to defend herself and stuff like that. These are considered as masculine traits. If she wants to do that that's totally fine.

Okay, so, in our generation, there are a lot of people who like for example, there is a male but he dresses as a female. Would you consider that as something that is natural, like if he identifies as a male but he still dresses feminine?

If he identifies as a male but still dresses feminine? Umm, just to some extent, to some extent, not a lot. If he looks like a woman, completely with long hair and all that makeup and all that then I feel that that's not natural. That's some thing that has been planted in his brain, and that's something he has kind of let take over his mind and body. So that's not natural, it might not be intentional, but it's not natural either.

So you feel like, if someone wants to change their gender, that is not based on their biological characteristic, it's because of their influences that they've been in, their environment?

I feel like it is very heavily based on the environment. If someone is a man who wants to become a woman, then most of it is the effect of the moment that he is living in. And the kind of interaction he has with people. Because if you think about it, if for example there is a kid in the wild alone without any interaction with other humans or any social media interaction, anything. He would grow up to be the same gender as he is. He won't just become a woman.

So you feel like environment has a big influence?

It does, it does have a very big influence.

And have you seen that with people around you or with anyone that you know?

Well it has happened to me when I was facing that issue with my sexuality, I was surrounded by a lot of women and since I had been restricted from males in my life, that kind of also led to that issue.

You said that you were mostly surrounded by women, right? And you were having trouble with your gender or your sexuality?

My sexuality. But in the middle also my gender, I kind of wanted to become a man.

• Believes environment plays a major role in how someone expresses themselves.

And why do you feel like you wanted to change your gender, if you were surrounded by mostly females?

I wanted to change my gender because I wanted to **gain the affection of someone I liked**, who was the same gender as me. So that's why I wanted to change my gender.

And now do you still have similar feelings? Not about changing your gender, but about liking someone of your own gender?

No, I do not have any feelings anymore.

Okay, so another question that I wanted to ask was that do you think it's more socially acceptable for females to be masculine than it is for males to be feminine?

Yeah, in our society, it is **socially acceptable** for females to be more masculine than males being feminine.

Why do you think that is?

I actually don't know why that is. I haven't really caught up with that. But for some reason it is. **Men are considered to be perfect** and they're not supposed to be feminine. But if a woman is **a bit masculine**, people are like "oh okay, **it's her choice**" and all that. So, maybe that I don't know. I don't really know about why.

Okay, so, coming to the topic of societal expectations, and your family, you know, how in our society, marriage is considered like an integral part of a woman's life, and even a man's life. But however, females are expected to get married earlier, because they're females, and they have to, like, you know, carry on the family. So, do you feel like this applies to you as well?

No, it does not apply to me. Because it is my belief and my family's belief that the first thing I need to focus on is my career. I need to build my own life first. And after that comes marriage and all that. So there's no pressure on me and my family does not support young age marriages.

Do you feel like that is going to be a part of your life in the future? Do you want to get married?

Yea I do want to get married, but not right now, I want to build my career first. I want to later in life, yeah, definitely. I would get married because I want a partner. I want someone to share my life.

Alright, do you believe in the gender binary?

Yeah, I do believe in gender binary. I do believe that **there are just two genders, male and female. There isn't an in between.**

Okay when it comes to yourself, how do you understand your own gender, if you had to explain to someone else?

I'm a female, I would straight up just tell them that I'm a female. And if I dress a bit masculine, I'm not even overly masculine, I wear makeup, but not like, I'm not 100% feminine, but I'm not very masculine. So I would just, I'm just like, I'm a female. That's what I'm saying.

If someone misidentifies your gender, what feelings come up?

I don't really, I wouldn't really think much about it. I wouldn't really care about that. Because I know I'm a female, and that's all that matters.

And have you faced any discrimination due to the way you express yourself or the way you look?

No I haven't really faced any discrimination in my life.

Do you think that the way a person is raised can affect their gender identity?

Yes, I do believe that the environment in which they're raised in kind of does affect their identity.

How would the world look like if there was no gender?

There'd be a lot of chaos. I feel like there's a lot of confusion around and if there are no genders like, who are we if there aren't any genders? Who are we supposed to be with? It feels absurd. A bit absurd. If there are no genders, there isn't really a different point of femininity or masculinity, kind of feels weird.

Do you feel like there needs to be rules in order for us to function as a society?

Yea, there's a need to have to rules in our society, to some extent, definitely. You cannot run a country, you cannot run a society if there are no rules at all, that will be destruction of the whole society.

On the topic of religion, you said that you are a religious person, and you have certain you know, rules that you have to follow. But in the future, let's say that you, you feel attraction towards someone and you cannot pursue that because of your religion. Do you feel like that's something that's possible?

It might happen, I don't know. But I will definitely put my religion first. Because I've done that before I put my religion first. And that's what matters to me the most. If I do have confusion about that, I would consult my family about it and if they are supportive of me, they will definitely help me and then I'd try to stabilize myself, or something like that. So yeah, I think I'd be able to cope up with if that happens, but my religion comes first.

And previously, you mentioned that your mental health was affected, right? So during that time period, how did you feel?

During that time, I was in a lot of depression. I had, I still have depression, and I still have panic attacks and I am on medication currently. So that's how it's been. It has taken a toll on me. But it is also at the same time a learning process. I am thinking of this as learning, new experience and that how I'm supposed to cope up with certain challenges and suffering.

So now you feel like you are doing better than you were before?

I am learning I can say I'm doing better I am in the process of getting better. So yeah.

Is there anything that you would like to add to this on, you know, your personal experience on this topic? It could be anything.

I think that in our society this thing has kind of gotten a bit out of hand, like considering Aurat March, Aurat March is fine as long as you're talking about equal rights. But when it comes to women being overly masculine, women trying to change their gender, that to me is not okay, that's kind of bending the laws of nature that does not seem natural. So I feel like society kind of needs to think about who they are and what they're supposed to be.

Since you brought up Aurat March, do you think it's something that will help the society?

The thing is, feminism has been given a bad name, bad reputation. Again like I said, if we're talking about equal rights, it applies to certain areas, like when a male is give 10,000 rupees for doing a job, and a woman is doing the same job, but for less money, that does not sit right with me. That is called asking for equal rights. That's okay with me. But if a woman says I won't do any cooking in the house, I won't be raising children, I'm just going to do what I want to do, and not cover myself, that is not okay. That's bending the laws of nature and also going against religion, because in our religion you're supposed to cover yourself to a certain extent, and if you're not doing that, then you are rejecting your religion.

So you feel like there are certain rules of nature people have to follow?

Yea. Yea there are certain rules of nature. Even if you look at animals, the female tends to the kids. So we know that biology says that women are supposed to care for the children, ghar k kaam karna and all that.

So you know how in some places, same gender marriage is legalized. If two males or two females want to raise children, do you think they should be allowed to do that?

Yea they can raise children, they should be allowed to raise children, I don't think they shouldn't be allowed to.

Do you feel like that child will be influenced by the environment?

Umm, no I've realized that if same sex couples are raising children, they are not really that affected by the gender identification issues and all that.

Alright, lastly, I want to ask some closing questions. How did you feel during this interview?

It was nice, it was interesting. I realized it got a bit controversial in the middle, but I kind of wanted to clarify my view about certain aspects.

Is there anything that made you feel uncomfortable?

Not really.

What did you learn after this interview?

I feel a bit more strongly about my thoughts and opinions. I know what my opinions are.

Okay, thank you so much. If there's anything you want me to take out from this interview you can let me know.

Thank you.

Themes and Coding

★ = Major
- = minor

★ Mental Health and Gender Identity

- problems w/ gender
- problems w/ sexuality
- influence of family

Codes:

- a phase
- grew out of it
- hated myself
- pressure got immense
- I was afraid
- Troubles w/ sexuality
- Lot of depression
- Taken a toll on me
- Challenges & suffering

★ Society and Gender

- how gender identity is viewed
- diff. bet. genders
- societal roles
- clothing affects perception

Codes

- change their identity
- refer himself as she
- felt a bit shocked
- Lot of homosexuals
- Didn't exist in my life.
- All-girls uni.
- Man has to earn & feed.
- "I dress like a boy"
- Clothing is criticized.
- Expected to dress like a woman
- Trying to make others happy.

★ Religion and Gender

- Religious expectation
- No purpose w/o religion.
- Positive influence

Codes

- religious person
- ↑ anxiety
- Rules given by god
- Follow certain rules
- Feel anxiety & depression
- "I would not be alive right now"
- Distanced from god.
- "I need to find god"
- Helped me a lot
- Doesn't hold me back.
- Put my religious first.

★ Femininity & Masculinity

- What is considered feminine
- " " "masculine
- Natural vs. Unnatural
- How fem + masc. are judged.
- Gender binary
- Misidentifying gender
- Feminism and = rights

Codes

- Just 2 genders
- Strong physically & mentally
- Egoistic
- Soft-hearted, gentle, kind
- Naturally
- Dress up as a woman
- Forced
- Masculine traits
- Not natural
- Planted in brain
- Take over his mind & body.
- Men are considered perfect
- No in-between
- Overly masculine
- Bending laws of nature
- Going against nature

★ Environmental Influences on Gender

- How the environment plays a role in gender identity
- Being surrounded by one gender

Codes

- Heavily based on environ.
- Won't just become a woman.

- Factory renewed my sexuality.

- Surrounded by a lot of women.
- Restricted from males.
- "I wanted to become a man!"
- Gain the affection of someone.

★ Erasing the Concept of Gender

- No sense of direction or rules
- Destruction of society

Codes

- Lot of chaos
- Lot of confusion
- Bit absurd
- Diff. point of fem + masc.
- Feels weird
- Cannot run society w/ rules
- Destruction of society

Observation: Participant was very talkative, and seemed passionate about their opinions. Interview was almost an hour long. Participant had a masculine presentation, w/ a boy cut and male clothing.

Transcription 4 (Person D)

My name is Alizey Mobasshar and I'm currently a Semester 8 Bachelor student in Kinnaird College for Women. The purpose of this study is to investigate the phenomenon of gender identity and gender expression in individuals living in Lahore. All of your personal data will be used with your consent, and your privacy will be protected. Your results are going to be accurately represented. So, I just want to start with a couple of basic questions first. So how would you like to be referred to like, what are your preferred pronouns?

So I identify as gender fluid, so my preferred pronouns are They/Them, but I'm also honestly okay with like, He or She as well.

Okay. And where are you from?

I'm from Lahore.

Okay, and how long have you lived here?

I've lived here my whole life. 22 years.

Okay. And how old are you?

22. About 23 years old.

Alright, and where did you get your education from?

I did my schooling from Lahore Grammar School. I did my intermediate from Kinnaird College and I'm doing my bachelor's from GCU.

Okay, so I want to ask you, how was your experience in school and in college?

School was a little bit traumatic, but that was more because it was a private school. So there was a lot of pressure and competition and stuff like that. Kinnaird was more comfortable for me. It was very comfortable for me because it was an all-women's college. And so I had a lot of safe space and was very, like, accepting and welcoming in that manner. And with GCU with my university, it's been-it's been kind of fluctuated, there are some people that I have that are, you know, very, very safe and who I can be very comfortable with. And then there are others who are, you know, not as welcoming.

Okay, so you said that you identify as gender fluid, right. Have you had any experiences really related to that in your college or university times? Like any discrimination that you face?

Yeah, tons because, I mean, my gender expression is also very different than women and the way that women dress, obviously, so like, I am tomboyish I have short hair, I cut my hair

• Blurring the line

• Feels judged by most people.

when I started university. And I cut it like very short, like it was a boy cut. And I dress like usually in Western clothes. And even with like Eastern clothes it's mostly like kurtas and stuff. And I don't, I don't wear makeup, I usually don't like, you know, dress up in a feminine manner during family events and stuff like that, then I'm forced by my mother to dress up in a feminine manner. I use public transport as well. And I'm often like, around in public areas so I hear comments. People have wondered, like, out loud, they ask you like, "are you a boy or are you a girl?" And there's a lot of like harassment, you know, stuff as well, where people are just not comfortable because they don't understand. Stuff like that, and the jokes among friends and acquaintances as well. Some comments from teachers regarding my gender expression as well.

So, you mentioned about your family, your mother that sometimes she makes you have to do things that you don't really want to. So is it okay, if I ask more questions about your relationship with your family?

Yeah, yeah. Of course.

So being a non-binary person, does that affect the relationship and closeness you have with your family?

Sometimes yes, I think because obviously they don't know that I identify in any manner that isn't a girl. They just think oh han she just sometimes you know, dresses up like a boy. I was very tomboyish in my childhood as well. Like doing sports and stuff and not really being enamored with anything feminine. So they're used to it, but it's still like I'm reaching that age now where my mother will always, you know, bug me about like "ab baal lambay karlo, ab chotay na karo". Like, my dad is very cool with it in the sense that he actually treats me like one of his sons. So he actually likes that I don't wear makeup. And whenever I do, he actually gets mad at that and he gets upset at that like "ye kiu kar rahi ho". So it's a very, you know, dichotomous situation, my sister as well, you know, will sometimes speak like "ab tm sariyan pehnna shuru kardo for events". Because I usually wear a suit. And so because of that, because this is a part of myself that I can't really share with them, there's often like backlash whether I dress masculine, or whether it was feminine, someone is upset about it. So it usually does keep me away from my family, I try to like, you know, not let it get in the way too much.

Okay, so I want to move on to the opening questions. So coming to the term gender identity, what do you previously know or associate with the term gender identity?

So I think gender identity is obviously different than gender expression, I think when you're talking about gender identity, it, you know, talks more about whether you identify as a man or a woman, a trans person, non-binary, gender fluid, like, it's a lot more like labels that are attached to it. And your identity is mostly what you feel with regards to your body as well.

★ = Major Theme
- = Minor Theme

- * Mental Health + Gender Identity**
- exp. at school
 - treatment from friends + peers
 - Pressure of fitting in.

- codes:**
- little bit traumatic
 - pressure + competition
 - safe space
 - self-esteem
 - Body image
 - Isolating

That's how I perceive it to be like, you know, the **kind of organs you have and if you're comfortable with them** or not, and stuff like that. So I think that's what gender identity is.

And what do you associate with the term gender expression?

I think gender expression is a little bit different in that it's simply for me personally, it's simply **how you look**, it's **how you dress**, it's how you, you know, **appear to society**. So I've seen, you know, people who identify as women, but they like to dress up in suits. And, you know, **they like dressing masculine and stuff, but they still identify as a woman**. Similarly, I've seen **men who identify as men, but they dress more feminine, they like doing makeup, they wear nail polish** and stuff. So I think gender expression is simply how you want to appear and how you want to look to society.

Okay, so when it comes to yourself, do you have any association, any personal association with these terms, like the way that you identify or the way that you express yourself?

Yeah, I mean, I think I, when **I was a teenager, I started reading up a lot more on gender identity and just gender in general**. And plus I'm a debater, so I have a lot of knowledge about the philosophy of gender and stuff like that. But for me, personally, I've just like, my gender identity, like I said, is gender fluid. And I identify it that way. Because there are certain moments, there are certain days where I do **feel more feminine**, and then there are days where I **feel more masculine**. And so **I don't like to box myself**. And similarly for my gender expression as well. Like, I may not like doing full face makeup, but I like wearing nail polish times. I like wearing earrings, sometimes. Some days, I wouldn't want to dress in a kurta but other days, I feel more comfortable dressing in a suit or jeans and stuff like that.

So you're saying that, you know, some days you can wake up and feel either more masculine or feminine. So on those days, would you want to, like be referred to in a different way?

It's kind of complicated, because even like right now with my pronouns, I don't really impose them on anyone, even my friends. There are some friends that I have **who are very very conscious**. And they do refer to me as **they/them on all days**, because **they think that's more inclusive**, but then I have other friends **who don't really understand the concept of pronouns**. So they will always refer to me with female pronouns. So it's mostly that no matter how I feel, because I know that people around me are **not that aware and conscious**, I **don't really impose any pronouns** on them, they can refer to me anyway that they want.

Okay, so, um, I want to ask you that, you know, growing up what were the first memories that you learned about gender, like when you realize that, you know, people have to be a certain way people have to dress a certain way or that you have to look a certain way. When did that like sort of start?

- * Gender Fluidity**
- expression of gender through appearance.
 - Masc. or Fem.
 - Gender + sexuality
 - Gender binary

- codes:**
- identify as gender fluid
 - Rambugish, short hair/day cut
 - Didn't wear makeup
 - The kind of organs you have
 - Appear to society
 - Box myself
 - Wearing nail polish + earrings

cont. →

- Blurring the lines
- Certain boundaries
- Breaking them
- Sexuality is diff.
- More masc. presenting

- Attracted to tomboyish look.
- Identity as bisexual.
- Lot of overlap.
- Bleeds into the way
- Play w/ gender

- Present as fem.
- Have to be straight.
- Present as masc.
- Typical stereotypes
- Masc. + fem clothing

I think it was pretty early on like around the ages of like seven or eight, because I, from a very young age, I've had the habit of like, Urdu mai bhi I use male pronouns for myself like "mai ye kar raha tha" ya "mai ye kha raha tha" or something like that. And earlier on, within my family, everyone got used to it. But the older that I started getting it, like if I would go to school, and I will use male pronouns for myself, I would have like my classmates, my friends be like, "oh, why do you refer to yourself like that you're a girl", and even younger cousins, you know, very, very young cousins, in this age, if they see, or they hear me referring to myself in male pronouns in Urdu, they question me, and they laugh about it and stuff like that. So it was at a very young age that I was being told that I have to dress more feminine and stuff.

Do you believe that there are certain roles people have are expected to follow based on the way they look or their gender?

Yeah, absolutely. I think from a young age I saw that, like, if you're a girl, then you have to, you know, like, dress feminine, but also like, there's a kind of behavior that you have to adopt, where you have to be soft spoken and too aggressive. People don't really like that. I was an aggressive child so people didn't really like that. And you can't be very competitive, and you have to be submissive and stuff like that. So from a young age, I did feel, you know, these demarcations that exist in society based on gender roles.

So how did you like, you know, since you were expected to fit in the certain criteria, and in a certain box, how did you, like feel about these expectations? And how did they affect you mentally?

Oh I hated them. And I think mentally, like, they affected me in the way of like, my self-esteem, and my body image that I had of myself. Because, like, when I started going into adolescence, you know, and puberty and stuff, and there were people around me and all of sudden there were like boys who are starting to like me, and they want me to look a certain way. And you know, people were expecting these things of me, and I didn't really feel comfortable with that. So it just really messed with the way that I looked, I started, you know, dressing more girly, because there was just so much so much questioning from people. And I hated answering to them all the time, because I was a child, and I didn't really understand the nuances of it myself. I just feel like, well, this is how I feel comfortable, but I don't know how to explain it to you. So I'd rather just appease you than dress a different way.

So you actually, like, you know, went against what you felt and you like, tried to do what everyone else around you was doing?

Yep, for a while, definitely like, especially at the ages of like, 12, 13, when most of my female friends were starting to, like, get into makeup and stuff like that. And, you know, like, boys ko please karnay wali mentality, so I definitely felt pressured in my school as

- Traditionally desr clothing
- Personality also plays a role.
- Kind of interests
- Femininity is weak

- Face backlash
- Seen as strong
- Going into binary
- Validate identity
- Very restricting
- Give into roles

- Have to be macho.
- Women who are femine it.
- Speak more like a man
- Mix of both

- Perception of Society + Gender
- Judgement from people
- Gender-based rules in society
- Judgement from family

Codes:

- Dresses up like a boy
- Harassment
- Jokes among friends
- Keeps me away from family

• They / them
probably

well, because a lot of attention was given to me. So I felt a lot of pressure to be more feminine and to not be so aggressive or to appear a certain way.

So during that ages of 12, to 13, right, you said? You said that your friends, they were starting to you know, like, get more into boys and makeup and all of that. Did you feel like you also had to get into this and like have these similar interests?

Yeah, I definitely felt the pressure that I had to conform. And as a child, it was very difficult to separate what were my own feelings and what were the feelings that people were pushing on to me. That was quite difficult, but then eventually, when I did get away from those friends or that circle, you know, I started isolating myself a lot. So the more time I would spend on my own and be alone uss mai phir I started realizing I'm just not comfortable with this stuff, so I'm just not gonna do it. Like, I reached a point where I was like, I don't really care.

So you said that it was difficult to separate what you actually wanted from what people expected of you, right? Can you just explain a bit about, you know, how you actually felt compared to how society wanted you to be, and how that was different.

Yeah, so like, I mean, like I mentioned, like, even at that age, like there were some things that were considered feminine that I did like, so for example, I did like wearing nail polish I did, like, you know, wearing earrings or something like that, like, not really heavy ones that girls usually wear. But just like, you know, certain stuff that was feminine, I did like it. But it started blurring the lines when everyone who would be like forcing me to go a step further. And they'd be like, "well, if you like that, then, you know, you have to do the other stuff as well", "now you have to wear full makeup", or "you have to, you know, just be very feminine". And if there are like functions that are coming around, you have to like wear lehngas or like, you know, stuff like that. And then I just didn't feel comfortable with that. For me, I knew that there were certain boundaries with my gender expression that I had, I didn't like breaking them and if I do, then I don't like it. Like, I don't like wearing heels. But I was, you know, expected to wear heels if I was dressing feminine, because that completed the look. And that completed the expectations that they had of me.

So you felt like you had to fit every single thing that you know, your friends and your peers were also doing as well.

Yeah, it's like there are these checkboxes that you have, there's a whole list of things that you have to do. And if you don't do all of them, then you're not really fulfilling that role. And you're still like incomplete.

So now have things changed for you significantly, like has your mindset changed?

Yeah, for sure. I mean, I still have the pressure from society, as well as my family, especially now that I'm older and you know, "becoming more of a woman", and stuff like that. So

- Very conscious
- They're less than
- Laugh about it.
- Soft - spoken
- Too aggressive

- Competitive
- Submissive
- Demarcates that exist in society
- Expected to wear heels

- Completed the look.
- Checkboxes
- Fulfilling the role.
- Still incomplete
- People can judge
- Lot more liberal



- Open minded community
- People who are welcoming
- People question
- Clash w/ Society
- Distancing myself

- Feel frustrated
- I am a little disappointed
- Lot of oppression tied to gender
- Find humor in it
- Gets too depressing

there's definitely a lot more pressure now. But because I read a lot about gender, and I've, you know, experimented myself in like, you know, in my own time, like, what are actually the things that I like, and what are the things that I don't, so I'm a lot more sure, in my own gender expression and my own identity. So that helps a lot in taking a stand for myself as well. Like even, like I mentioned, like, whenever my mother tells me that I have to grow my hair out now, because you know, I can't have them short anymore, I'm still able to take a stand and be like, "this is how I like it and this is how I'm gonna keep it".

Okay so since I talked about how society has these expectations of women, have these expectations sort of played a role in your life?

Yeah, definitely. I mean, they've significantly changed the way that I want to pursue my future, or my education or my profession and stuff like that, like, earlier I had these goals of maybe I want to do CSS and stuff like that, but then I realized that that would require me to stay in the country. And I know that I can't fully be myself if I am in this country, where there's always certain expectations, and especially now that I'm growing older, I know, there's, you know, talk of me getting married and stuff as well. I'm just not comfortable with that. Especially with regards to my gender, because I know that no one is going to be as accepting of it. Like, you know, in-laws and even like the partner that you have, they're not going to be very accepting. So I just don't see myself getting married and the way that that shapes my future is that I just want to get away from this country and get away from my family, even though I love them, but I just don't see myself being around them.

Okay, so moving on to the main questions. I want to ask you that has your gender identity and gender expression played a role in the people you attract or the people you're attracted to? It could be either like, you know, romantically or friends, your friends circle.

Yeah, I think with regards to like, friends that I attract and friends that I'm attracted to, I look for people who are more open minded and also understand the nuances of gender and even if they don't understand it they're at least accepting of it. People who don't, I don't get along with them in, like, platonic capacity. I don't, you know, get along with people who are too religious or too conservative, and stuff like that. I still will have discussions with people like that, but I don't really hang out with them or anything. With regards to like romantic partners, um so the thing is, like, personally, I know that differentiation for me gender and sexualities, my sexuality is also different. So I know that that plays a role into the fact that, you know, sometimes I may be attracted to a different gender, or the same gender, and stuff like that. But my gender, like the way that people are attracted to me is very different as well, because I'll have, you know, women who are attracted to me, because I'm more masculine presenting, and there are women who are attracted to that. And then there are also

- ★ Environment + Gender
- Childhood effect on gender
 - Treatment by parents
 - Changing surroundings

- Codes
- Tomboyish
 - Liked doing sports
 - Disobedient situations
 - Fully be myself
 - I'm just not comfortable
 - Certain households
 - More like sons
 - Feel as a woman

- Env. plays a huge role.
- Shapes the way.
- Revered by the world

- ★ Religion + Gender
- Not following organized religion.
- Religious expectations from family

Calley

- Occasional spiritual person.
- Distant from religion

men who, even though in the beginning, they might be attracted to the tomboyish look I have, but eventually, they'll ask me to change that. So it's definitely a struggle with that.

Okay, so you mentioned that your sexuality is different than, like, gender identity. So can you just go in depth about what you mean by that?

Yes, I mean, my sexual orientation is that I identify as bisexual. And my gender identity is obviously gender fluid. So there's a lot of overlap in things like, with regards to my sexual orientation, I am more attracted to women who are like very feminine. With men, I'm honestly not that attracted to most of them. But like, you know, it's still like, I know that I am attracted to some men. And it's just a weird, like, you know, thing to balance where I know that sometimes my gender expression or my gender identity bleeds into the way that I am also sexually attracted to people. So like, I don't really see myself attracted to other people who are non-binary or gender fluid. Like I normally don't feel that attraction to women who present themselves as masculine. But I will feel attracted to women who present themselves as feminine. With men, I will feel more attracted to men who are sometimes you know, they like to play with gender. I don't really like those really, you know, toxic, macho men, but I also don't like very feminine men either.

Okay. So you said that you, like, you don't feel attracted to masculine girls, right?

I feel attracted to girls who are feminine.

Okay, so when it comes to genders. how many genders do you believe there are?

Okay, so like personally, I've read that there are several genders. I don't know if I believe in all of them. But I do believe the majority of like, you know, like, I do believe that transgenders is a valid identity. I believe non binary people are valid, I believe, like gender fluid people are valid. And that just men and woman, that binary is also something that is valid to me. But then there are some like I've read about, like some quite ostentatious identities. I believe all gender identities but the point at which people start to mix up their sexual orientation with their gender identity, that's where it gets messy for me and where I'm like, okay I don't know if that's completely valid.

What do you mean like when people mix their identity with their sexuality? Like can you give an example?

Yeah, so like, for example, I know people who, they identify as like, you know, aromantic and stuff like that. And of course, that's, those are their feelings, but then it's like, I've seen some types of women who present themselves as very, very feminine, they believe that they have to be straight. And I've also seen women who present themselves as very, very masculine, they believe that they have to be gay. So, you know, it's that when their sexual orientation gets mixed up with the way that they express themselves through their gender, that's when I'm like, okay, that doesn't really make sense. Like you can be, you know, a

- certain ideas
- cover myself
- follow my duties
- can't be friends w/ boys.

- feel tied up
- feel antagonistic
- key things
- Humanistic values
- Higher power

- Not atheist
- Natured spirituality

- ★ Erasing Concept of Gender
- How gender affects society
 - Accepting + Peaceful
 - Stereotypes + expectations

- What role you have to fulfill.
- Slightly better

feminine presenting woman, and you can, you know, be a lesbian, you can be a masculine presenting woman, and you can be straight as well, I don't think it really matters.

Okay, so what qualities or traits would you say you associate with different genders? Like, for example, if you see someone as masculine or feminine, what traits would make them masculine or feminine?

This is a difficult question to answer because I don't like to, you know, subscribe to the typical stereotypes that we have about gender roles, and gender expression. Because, you know, most people think that having short hair on a girl means that, you know, she has to be masculine. I don't think that short hair is only what you have to have in order to be a masculine woman. But like, and then again, I do sometimes fall into the traps of those traits, like, okay, if you dress like, you know, in jeans and wear more masculine clothing, if you don't wear makeup, if you don't, like, wear a lot of jewelry, if you don't like that, that would be more masculine in my head. And if you are someone who wears a lot of makeup, or wears a lot of like feminine clothing, so like traditional desi clothing as well, that is considered feminine. I think personality also plays a role in the traits that you have. So like the kind of interests that you have, like I've seen some women who are just not interested in politics or economy at all. And, unfortunately, that is a trait that in my head is considered more masculine. Like if you are into politics or into, you know, economy and stuff like that you are kind of like, masculine and stuff.

Okay. Do you believe that it's more socially acceptable for females to be seen as masculine than it is for males to be seen as feminine?

Yeah, yeah, I think so. Because I think, generally, femininity is something weak. When men are more feminine, they are seen as weak, and unfortunately, I don't want to say this, but like, "oh ye to na mard hai" you know, just really bad slurs like that. And they definitely face more backlash from their peers if they dress more feminine, as compared to a woman who if she dresses masculine, she's seen as strong, even though she also obviously, you know, they also probably face a lot of backlash as well. And, you know, comments and stuff, but I think since masculinity is, like, associated with strength, and being strong, and femininity is considered more weak, that definitely plays a role into how people treat you.

Okay. So do believe in the gender binary?

It's something that I question a lot. Because, I mean, since I've read a lot about the stuff and I've seen, like people from all walks of life, I think that, you know, for example, for trans individuals, like if there's a trans woman, for her giving into that binary of being more feminine is very, very important in order to validate her own identity. But if you apply that same binary to someone who is, you know, gender fluid or non-binary, I think it can be very, very triggering for them. So I think binaries are very circumstantial, like it depends on their circumstance. There's some situations where binary can help an individual, but there are

certain situations where binaries are actually very, very restricting for them. It's something I question a lot, I'm not sure about it.

Actually, can you just explain like, how can it help or harm an individual?

Yea like I said, I mean, you know, there are certain women, where they are more like, they fit into that, you know, binary of very, very stereotypical female roles, and they feel more comfortable about themselves. But then there are certain women when they are asked to, you know, fit in those roles of stereotypically what a woman should be, they feel very very harmed by it, for example, for myself, like, when I'm expected in my house, like, I have to do certain things, like I have to be the one that cooks or cleans, or, you know, does the "womanly work", that to me feels very very nonsensical. But I know that, like I mentioned, with some of my trans friends that I have, some trans women, who want you know, to be more feminine and give in to those roles, like they want to wear makeup, they always want to, like, look very feminine, act very feminine, behave in a very feminine way, give in to those submissive roles in relationships as well. And even with like the trans men who I'm friends with, they want to grow out beards, and they feel like they have to be very macho, and like, you know, like, present their masculinity in a very obvious manner in order to validate their identity. Like that, I think is something that becomes valid. But for example, for people who are gender fluid or non-binary, they don't really like those binaries, they don't want those roles. And even so, like, you know, women who are more feminist, they don't think that they often have to fit into those roles. So for them as well, breaking that binary down is very important. And if you don't, then it's harmful for them. So that's how I see differences.

Okay, I understand. So when it comes to yourself, if you have to explain your gender, how would you describe yourself and your gender?

It's very difficult, because I haven't done it as I kind of tried to stay away from having to explain it, whatever people assume I just let them go with it. But I think if I had to I would just be like, you know, I'm, like, I'm a person. Some days, I'm going to feel more like a woman some days, I'm going to feel more like a man. Some days is going to be a mix of both, you know, yeah. I think I'm just a blob. A blob of all genders.

How did you come to understand your gender?

I think the main, like, prominent thing that helped me understand my gender was social media. But not like, you know, Instagram, it was more Tumblr. I was on Tumblr a lot and that's a space, which is very very comfortable. And there's a lot of discussions and even interactions with individuals and stuff like that. And then other than that, I think it was media, like a lot of TV shows that I watched a lot of films that I've watched where people were not, you know, sticking to one binary. I think that helped a lot. And then I think the least helpful thing with regards to understanding my gender was the socialization that I did

• Understood their identity through social media interactions.

in real life. Because, you know, most of the people I met, weren't, you know, **they didn't even understand they didn't even think gender was an important issue.** It was a very specific, like, group of people that I've met who themselves were trying to understand their gender identity and through them I was able to somewhat you know, find out about other dynamics which I didn't know of.

Actually, can you explain a bit more like about what is Tumblr and how did that influence you?

Right, so Tumblr is a social media platform. On Tumblr, no one really cares how many followers you have, you can't even see how many followers a person has, you don't really care about the likes or anything. For every person, their Tumblr account is like their journal, but it's their specific like, you know, a mishmash of their journal and their Pinterest, and, you know, their Reddits, where they just, you know, they talk about themselves, they talk about different experiences that they've had, they fangirl over things, they develop certain aesthetics and stuff like that. So in that regard, it's a very, very open space, and you can find people from different spectrums of like, you know, sexuality, gender, political opinions, all of that stuff. Like it's a very globalized community where no one really judges you. And there is no expectation to be a certain way. Most people on Tumblr aren't even like, they don't really post pictures of themselves or anything. They just like, have long passages and essays and discourses that people will engage in, and stuff like that.

So you feel like it provided you with a safe space to be yourself.

Yeah, definitely. Because, you know, I was **very anonymous on Tumblr,** not one of my friends knew, and I've **interacted with people from all like different areas** of the world, like from US, UK, you know, even Scandinavian countries and stuff like that. So it was those interactions with these very, very different people who were **more progressive** and who weren't **bogged down by religious expectations** and stuff like that. Interacting with them and listening to their conversations definitely helped me understand a lot more about gender and sexuality.

So since up till now you have, like, a pretty good understanding of, you know, gender identity and gender expression, how does this play a role into like, your goals for the future? You mentioned that you don't want to live in Pakistan, because, you know, of certain things. But can you go more into detail about, like, your future aspects, your future goals?

Yeah, so I mean, I don't know how much of a role my gender has played into it. But like, earlier, **my goals definitely changed a lot, because I didn't think that I could express myself.** But I've gotten to a point where **I'm really, really comfortable with myself.** And it's more about the interests that I have that I want to pursue, right. So like me going abroad. Earlier, it was like, I would get into any degree that I could just so that I could get abroad. But now I

decided that I want to pursue theater. Theater is a space that definitely allows for a lot more, you know, gender expression and stuff like that. So there's that element as well. But it's also just that I'm really really interested in theater. And, you know, like, I also think that when picking countries where I could go, I also definitely look into countries that I think would be more accepting. I don't want to get stuck in a country that would be similar to Pakistan. So that I think definitely plays a role into it. But like, you know, because I do debates as well and I'm a debater, that has, like, also played a role into it as well like, my future goals have changed. I feel like because I've built a lot of skills as a public speaker, that is something I could I could do as well. But I know that public speaking would require me to also present an image that people could judge easily and be okay with. Yeah, so that's like something that now I don't want to do anymore.

So you mentioned that, like, you are a debater, right, and you said that you don't really want to pursue it because in the future, you won't be able to present yourself in the way that you want. So can you just explained like being a debater in Pakistan, how has your experience been? Like with different people, how have people perceived you as a public speaker?

So the way the debating community in Pakistan has progressed is that it's now a lot more liberal in the sense that now it's more accepting if you are open minded, and if you aren't conservative, like there used to be a time when debating community within Pakistan was very conservative, and having liberal, you know, ideologies actually got you a lot of backlash, but it significantly changed like now I know that when I go to debate on events talking openly about gender and sexuality, and even, like, obscure, you know, topics is actually readily accepted by people around me. And I've met a lot of, you know, people who are welcoming, and even in debate tournaments, the policy has changed within like how, every person before they start their speeches, they can choose to tell what pronouns they prefer, and stuff like that. And so I think it's been definitely a more open space, it's only that with regards to the institution that I'm from, so like, the debating society of GCU has still, you know, a lot of people who are conservative, and one of the reasons why I stopped, you know, even wanting to pursue public speaking as a profession, is because I received a lot of backlash in my own institution. I wasn't given any, you know, medals, or any power of authority or anything, like an office position, because I did dress more tomboyish, and my adviser believed that that's not an image you want to give off. So therefore, you know, there was a lot of backlash with regards to that because I have short hair, and because I dress more masculine, and people question those things, and they clash with the society. So they didn't really give me any positions there or any medals there, even though I have done achievements. But I left that society. And now I'm just, you know, distancing myself from that space.

So if someone misidentifies your gender, how do you feel about that?

Yeah, so like, if they're doing it purposefully, and I have had friends, you know, especially within debating society, like certain men who don't believe in pronouns, and who think that there are bigger issues in the world, I've had full blown, like arguments and fights with them, and, you know, trying to explain to them why pronouns are important, why gender identity is important. And so with them, if someone is aware of gender it's importance and they still misidentify me, in that regard, I do get angry, and I feel very, very frustrated. But if it's someone who's just doing it by mistake, and they're not even aware that they're doing it, then I'm just like, I'm a little disappointed. I'm not exactly surprised. So I don't really say anything or feel too much about it.

Okay, so do you think that the way a person is raised can affect their gender identity? They because of their surroundings, their environment, or just the way that they were brought up?

Yeah, I think like, I don't, I don't have like a very strong opinion on this, because for me, I've met certain people whose gender identity or their at least their gender expression definitely did change because of the way that they were brought up. Like, there are certain households that I know where even in my own like extended family where the girls, if they're treated more like sons, they do start to behave in that manner. But that doesn't really change the way that they you know, feel as a woman as well. But I definitely do think that environment plays a huge role. Like, it shapes the way that you look at yourself, it shapes the way that you want to then be perceived by the world and stuff.

Okay, is it alright if I talk a bit about the topic of religion?

Yeah, sure.

So would you say that you consider yourself as a religious person?

I think I consider myself as a occasional spiritual person. I don't believe in organized religions or even Islam or Christianity or, you know, the holy books and stuff like that. I don't believe in the, you know, image of God or priests, what they preach about, but I do think that there is a higher power. And I do think that there is certain spiritual like, stuff, I just don't know if I believe in organized religion.

So you know, in our society, it's mostly Islam is considered the main religion that's followed by everyone and people usually you know, have, like certain rules or regulations that they feel they have to fit into, certain things that they can or can't do. So, I was going to ask you that whether you feel tied down by these, you know, roles that you might be expected to follow.

Yeah, definitely. I mean, I think that is a huge reason why I got very, very distant from religion because my family is like, they're all Muslim. And they're quite, you know, religious in that manner of like, you know, they have certain ideas of what religion teaches you, and

they want you to be that way. Like, my mother expects me to follow all my religious duties, like namaz, Quran, roza, all of that. And then in addition to that, she will ask me to cover myself up. So like, hijab and burkha, you know, and with my father as well there's that idea that, there's some stuff that you can do, and other stuff is like, you know, really wrong, like you can't be friends with boys and you can't be too close with them. Like, the concept of mehram and na mehram. So like I definitely feel very very tied up by it. It's a huge reason why, you know, I feel antagonistic towards religion and Islam.

So you said that you don't really have like, one certain religion that you're leaning towards, rather, you identify more with a spiritual outlook, right, I just wanted to ask, can you go a bit into detail about how you identify with that?

So I think like, because I've read a lot about religion as well, you know, like, up till a certain age so like, when I was seven or eight, I think it appealed to me a lot. Because it was just like, you know, I gravitated towards those key things of like being kind and being loving and being patient and stuff like that, like humanistic values. But now that I'm older, and I'm learning more about it, I think the way that I identify, the closest thing that I can say is like agnostic, like, you know, I'm not totally atheist, I don't think that there is no God. But I do think that you know, there is a higher power, it doesn't necessarily have to be like, the way that people teach you about Allah. I don't subscribe to that. But I think I am agnostic in that I do believe in higher power and like, you know, nature and spirituality.

Okay, so I want to ask that what would a world look like without gender? Like gender roles and expectations? How do you think that the world would be if we didn't have that?

I think it will be much more accepting and peaceful place. Because if you erase gender completely, then it's more that you see everyone according to if they're human or not. You know, like, it comes back down to the kind of species that you are rather than if you're a man or a woman or stuff like that. And then if you erase gender, it also erases, you know, stereotypes and expectations and, you know, pressure of like, what role you have to fulfill. I think, in that sense it would be more accepting, but, I mean, there's other stuff. There's other issues like race issues and class issues, so I don't think it would be the perfect world, just slightly better.

Okay, so lastly, is there anything else that you would like to add to the interview? Like any thoughts or any anything you want?

Yeah, so I think that you know, gender even though it's a very serious topic again, you know, there's a lot of oppression tied to it. I think the older that I've grown and the more experiences that I've had in society, I've also learned to kind of play with it and to find humor in it. Because, like, for example, there was an instance, I was in Metro, and I had short hair, I had a hat on, I had a mask on, and I was in a light jacket and I was fully dressed

like a boy. And I was standing in the area that is designated for women, with these bunch of, you know, aunties and girls who were staring at me constantly trying to figure out if I'm a man or a woman, and I just found it hilarious. And then I, you know, how men kind of fix their crotch area, I did that, and they all got so scandalized and they looked away instantly, and I laughed to myself. I've started to find a lot of humor, and it's so funny to me that people get so confused. Yeah, if you play with them, and if you like, try to make light of this, I think it definitely helps with the struggle of gender in a country like Pakistan, otherwise it gets too depressing.

So how did you feel about this interview?

I think it was a very nice, very cathartic I think.

Is there anything that made you feel uncomfortable throughout the session? Like anything that you want me to erase or removed from this interview?

No, I think the questions were quite relevant. You know, they were phrased, like, quite politically correct, in a manner, so I don't think there's anything to be erased.

Okay, and what do you think you learned after this interview, like about yourself, or just in general?

I think I, with regards to myself, I learned I didn't realize how comfortable I was with my gender. And, you know, it's just made me reflect a lot on the things that I have struggled through, but I have overcome them. So in that regard, it was very nice. And I think generally, I just, it's really nice for me to know that there are, you know, studies or like, research that has been done into this. I think it's critically important. So with regards to that I'm really happy about that.

Okay, thank you so much for giving me time for this interview. Your privacy is going to be protected and your name is not going to be included.

Yeah, thank you so much.

Observation: Participant was open and expressive about thoughts. Did not hesitate at any ques. Participant had a typically feminine look with makeup but said she can feel differently and change her appearance accordingly.

Transcription 5 (Person E)

Hello, good afternoon. My name is Alizey Mobasshar. I'm currently a Semester 8 Bachelor student in Kinnaird College for Women. The purpose of this study is to investigate the phenomenon of gender identity and gender expression in individuals living in Lahore. All the personal data gathered in this study will be used with your consent, your privacy will be protected and the results will be accurately represented. So firstly, I just want to start with a couple of basic questions. How would you like to be referred to? Like what are your preferred pronouns?

My preferred pronouns are **she/they**, and I would like to be referred to as **they or her**, that's fine.

Okay, and where are you from?

I'm from Lahore.

Okay, and how long have you lived here?

Actually, I was born and raised in Saudi Arabia, but I moved to Lahore in 2020, so I have been here for like, almost three years.

Okay. And how old are you?

I am 21.

Where did you get your education from?

Oh I went to Pakistan International School in Jeddah. And right now I'm studying in Kinnaird College for Women University in Lahore.

Okay, and how has your experience been in your school time, and your current student life?

So my experience in school has not been like, you know, very amazing, because I was a very, I was a very shy and quiet kid, when I was in, like, you know, middle school, and I got **bullied a lot**, for different reasons. But when I like, when I was in grade nine, **I came out publicly to my, to my friends**, and then it just went to the entire school. **Everyone knew that I was into girls**. And after that, **I did get bullied for this reason**. My school experience was like, not very amazing. It was like with **a lot of ups and downs**. But I would not like to change anything about it. It had to be the way it has been, I guess. My university experience has been better because, well, it's still wasn't very good, but it has been very good comparatively because I found you know, better people around me. And **I also made peace**

(cont. themes + coding here)

Perception of

Society + Gender
- Roles of masculinity + femininity

- Forced to look acceptable.
- More representation of gender in educational institutes.
- USA as a society

with myself and with my sexuality and with my gender identity. So I'm at the stage where other people's opinions and the things that they say don't really affect me as much.

Okay, so when you said that you made peace with yourself? What did you mean by that?

Well back in school, I had a really prolonged state of denial where I was going back and forth back and forth with my identity, but it took me some time like right now I have entirely made peace with the fact that I am the way I am.

So how did you come to terms with your identity, how did you understand that you know, you can be okay with it and with yourself?

So I had like I grew up in a very religious family and a very religious country obviously, it's very obvious that Saudi Arabia was like, very religious like doing this doing that not doing this not doing that, they all had their morals very straight. So they had their morals straight and I was not straight. I also had those morals, but after some time, I was like, oh, this is not right I should not be feeling this way. I prayed a lot, I prayed a lot to be normal. I tried to you know distance myself from, from the things that I assumed were making me feel like this. I hated myself for a really long time. I prayed for God to change me and make me feel like everyone else. But I soon realized that it was a waste of time and it was just something which was a part of me and it cannot be changed. And I should just stop hating myself for it and just accept it.

So, previously you mentioned that you went through bullying in your school time, because of how you identified, so is it alright, if I ask more about your experience related to that?

Yea sure.

Okay. So, as a non-binary person, were you targeted in a certain way? Or were you discriminated in a certain way?

So in school I did not come out as a non-binary person, at that time, I just came out as bisexual. Because I was still, you know, not so sure about things. And I was like, okay, that's like, that's, like, easier for me, if I just, you know, say that I'm bisexual. And if I say that to myself, as well, that it's okay. I hope you understand what I mean by that. I was just out as a bisexual person, but I still got, like, you know, a lot of hate and discrimination, especially from my close friends. Like, the other people were still more accepting towards the fact that I was bisexual, instead of, you know, compared to my old friends, who literally had like, huge, huge fights with me over this topic.

You said your friends had fights with you about the topic of gender?

No no, it was over sexuality.

Codes

- How system has been built
- Play a male / fem role
- Male representation
- Play a stronger or weaker role depending on code.
- Very messed up.
- Appearance or personality
- Strong sub
- Weak or feminine
- Play the womanly role.
- Tammyish



- Pretty looking or has pretty face.
- It's unacceptable
- Slur words
- Disrespectful
- Unacceptable
- Born in a female body
- Act masculine
- Distressful
- Born in male body
- Diff. to express themselves.
- Unbelievable measures
- Express themselves
- More knowledge + exposure
- Still not safe
- Need to be careful
- Measure our steps

Okay, and how did that affect you?

It did not change the way I saw things, I just realized that yes, there are going to be you know, very close people who are not going to accept me the way I am. And I will have to face this situation or similar situations a lot in the future as well. So it did not make me question myself or hate myself even more. At that time. I was like, you know, it is what it is. So yeah. They have to accept it and if they cannot accept me for who I am, then I might as well remove them from my life, and that's what I did.

So since moving to Lahore, how have things changed for you?

It has not changed very drastically because there are still a lot of questionable things around me, and I cannot do much about them. But majorly the thing that has changed is that I have found more people from my community, more people more like me, around me. So it's like, you know, it's nice to talk from experience. And I mean, I know that it's not going to change the fact that we get treated a certain way, but it feels nice to know that, you know, there are other people like you who are there to support you. And I also have some faculty members who are very supportive and accept me for who I am. Even if the people my age don't accept me like that, there are some faculty members who do, and it's really nice, it feels amazing, that you know, I feel like I can be myself.

Okay. So, moving on to the opening questions, what do you previously know about the term gender identity?

So I had this friend who was born trans, so I do have some knowledge about you know, genders and how they work, but my exposure to gender fluidity and non-binary and all the other non-conforming gender you know, identities, it was, it was not like, you know, I wasn't used to them. It has not been a really long time. But I do know about them.

How would you say that you came to know about it first, like what are your first memories learning about gender?

So my first memory of exposure to the differences in genders other than the binary system was, was, again, this friend that I mentioned earlier. It was a, it was a family friend of ours, and I came to know about, about her that she was born with... she was, she was biologically trans. So at that time, I was like, I guess I was six or seven. And it was like, very confusing for me to wrap my head around the concept. But then I you know, asked questions to my parents and the people around me and they, you know, explain stuff to me. They didn't go too much into the details, but they did say something's very like censored. So that was my first understanding of how, you know, transsexuality works.

Okay, and what about the term gender expression? What do you know about that?

- Not feel threatened
- Threatening situation
- Be prepared for the consequences
- Environment + Gender
- Having trans friend
- Learning towards masculine rep. codes
- Born trans (biologically)
- Very confusing for me
- Trans activists

- Did not let her wear fem clothes.
- Play fem. games / toys.
- Craved masc. representation.
- "I want what they're getting?"
- Used to play all the boys games.
- Power games
- Be like my brothers.
- Dress more masculine.
- Feel more comfortable in myself.
- From up to realize diff. identity.

I think, for me, gender expression is however, like a person wants to identify as, it's how they feel, it's how they see themselves, and it's how they want to be seen. So it can be, it can be anything for anyone.

Do you think that gender identity and gender expression can be separate from each other?

I think they coexist side by side because that's just how I think they work.

When it comes to you, how do you associate these terms with yourself?

I don't really label by gender identity. I mean, I don't know if that's like a right way to put it out. But I don't really pay much mind to these terms. I am who I am.

Do believe that there are certain roles that people are expected to follow based on their gender or the way that they look?

Oh definitely, but that's how the system has been built. That's just how it works. Like a lot of people expect someone who looks more masculine to play more masculine role no matter how they identify as sometimes even if like, you know tomboys or lesbians who have a more masc representation, they are expected to conform to the more masculine role in the relationship, but I think that's not right, we shouldn't assume these things. Even in gay relationships you know, they are expected to play a stronger or weaker role depending on how they look. It's very messed up. And this thing, also exists in hetero relationships, and I think that's something we all need to think about, gender roles and association that it has with appearance or persona. Like if someone has a strong aura, or they appear to be more masculine, they are supposed to be doing more masculine stuff. And someone who appears weak or feminine, they should play the womanly role, that's just the view of society. So I think that there's a lot that we all need to work on.

So you said that you know, in relationships and also in general, if a person looks a certain way, they're expected to behave, according to that. How are you expected to behave because of your gender and how do you feel about these expectations?

For me, a lot of times, in my past relationships, some things that have happened is that my partners either see me as someone very feminine, or someone very masculine, and they expect me to play a certain role, and if I, you know, dress a different way or I act a different way, they are very surprised because they don't expect me to be that way. But as a non-binary person, I don't have to fit in a certain role, like feminine or masculine or any other role. I just want to be myself. And for me, my partners have always expressed discomfort sometimes and sometimes some degree of confusion and disgust in response to that, like oh now why is she being so masculine now, or why is she being so feminine, and most of them have never even used my proper pronouns for me. So I think that, you know, It's especially difficult for non-binary people, when they're subjected to certain gender roles, and they're

• Felt like she couldn't be herself w/ previous partners

- ★ Religion & Gender
- Growing up in religious environment
- Affect on Mental Health.

- Codey:
- Grew up in a religious family + country.
- "I prayed a lot to be normal."
- Distance myself

- Waste of time
- A part of me that cannot be changed.

★ Erasing concept of gender
 - necessity of gender roles

codes:

- we need gender identities
- certain amt. of order

• Doesn't have to be limited to the binary.

like oh we don't even identify as a certain gender and now you expect us to act like that, which is very confusing.

So you mentioned that, in the past, your partners have, you know, expressed, like you said, confusion and disgust about the way that you express yourself. So can you just talk about your experience with that, and how it has affected you?

So when I was dating this one person, she was a tomboy, and every time I would wear something which was not so feminine, they would be like, go change it, or oh I don't like this, I don't like when you dress like this. It just made me feel like I could not be myself around her, and if I was being masculine, she would not like me, or she would not find me attractive. And because of that I had to be this very feminine girl around her all the time, and it didn't make feel good about myself. I felt like I had to change not just my look, but my identity as well. Because for me, the way I look is the way I identify. So, for me, I'm a very self-expressive person. And I like to dress the way I want people to perceive me, like, you know, how I feel. I dress the way I feel. So if I have to dress a certain way, it's not just about me changing my outfit, it's about me changing how I am as a person.

So do you feel like you still have to fit into a certain you know, look, or category in order to get people to like you?

Honestly, at this point it's not even about if people like me or not, that's fine if they don't like me. And it's fine if they don't like what I'm wearing, or how I express myself. But the thing that has changed now is that my current partner, she is very supportive of me, and she was not very familiar with these terms and with the non-binary system, but she wanted to learn about it more and she makes me feel good about myself. Either way, she likes if I express myself differently in any way. Like I know that whatever I do, she will still like that. And, I think that this is the thing, which makes me feel happy and good about myself around my partner. And about other people, it does not really matter how they see me or how they perceive me or what image they have of me in their mind.

I'm glad to hear that. So I want to know how many genders do you believe exist?

I don't know really, I mean, can you count rice? No right? So it's similar, like I know that some people will disagree and be like no there's just two or three, male, female, transgender. But that's, that's not it. They're like, you can identify as whoever you want to identify as. You can identify as, whatever you feel, and no one has the right to come and tell you that you're just making things up at some point. Because everything is made up. And I think we are also allowed to make some things up, if that makes us feel pretty cool and nice.

So do you think this viewpoint of yours has been influenced by society or by the environment that you live in?

I think that this viewpoint of mine has definitely been influenced by some trans activists, and I really admire those people for speaking up and for educating the rest of us as well.

So when it comes to you know, since you mentioned that there are infinite number of genders, what qualities or traits would you associate with different genders?

Uhh I would not like to associate anything to any gender, because honestly me as a person, I do not associate even bodies or qualities or appearances, with gender. Like if I see someone, I would not just assume that oh this might be their gender, I just see them as a person, and until and unless they come and tell me that their gender is this one or that their pronouns are these, only then I would I have a perception of them in my head, that this person is female, or male or whatever.

So you wouldn't really look at someone and judge their appearance and be like, oh, they are masculine or feminine?

No I would not. Like, well I mean masculinity and femininity those are just energies and auras, they are very visible. Like you can tell that this person has a masculine energy or a feminine energy, but you would not say that this person has a masculine energy, so they have to be a guy or a man or someone who identifies as a he or they. But yea, energies and sexualities are different things as well.

What would you consider as masculinity? And what do you consider as femininity regardless of gender, or the body?

I think masculinity is all about being secure in yourself. Being confident. I think it's very trivializing. Commonly, we do perceive these things as masculine, and for femininity we think, you know, having that motherly nature to yourself, being nurturing, and being that type of, you know, having that type of comfortable, energy to yourself, that people feel safe around you. I think that's femininity for me.

Do you think that it's more socially acceptable for females to be masculine than it is for males to be feminine?

Definitely, definitely. Because especially in our society, I mean, I'm just going to talk about our society. So in our society, it's you know, it's still acceptable to have daughters who have short hair or who are very, you know, tomboyish, because you can just, you know, make them wear feminine clothes sometimes and it will still look feminine. You can just, you know, hide the fact that they're a very tomboyish girl from your other relatives, and mostly our parents are okay with that as long as we look pretty even with short hair, it's fine. And then you can be masculine when you're by yourself. So I think they are okay with that because they feel like oh, she just doesn't like wearing makeup, she doesn't have girly interests. Those are the types of things that come to their mind. That's what they think in that case. But if someone who is born a male, is feminine, or acts feminine or is pretty looking or

• Unacceptable for men to be feminine b/c they are judged too harshly.
Femininity seen as weak

has a pretty face, even that is unacceptable. They're like, oh, why is he so pretty, they use slur words for them, which is very disrespectful and God forbid if a person who is born a male starts wearing makeup or you know tries on his sister's clothes. So I think it's very very unacceptable for people who are born a male to act feminine or be feminine in this society. It's very unacceptable for the people around us.

So, have you personally experienced this, or have you seen other people around you go through some sort of discrimination because of the way that they identify?

So, for people who are born in a female body and then acting masculine, the biggest concern that they face from their family who has been, you know, "grow out your hair" and you know, just a little bit of argument over that, which is also very you know, distressful. But for, for people born in a male body, it is very difficult for them to express themselves and from the people around me, I have seen that they go through unbelievable measures just to you know, express themselves even for a very short time.

Can you explain more about like, what did you mean, when you said they go through like, unbelievable measures.

Like you know, sometimes they run away from their houses, and then sometimes they just, you know, speak out and I'd say times of night just go be at places where they can be themselves, like that, like, we do have some underground places like that, which we should not talk about, but there are places. And, obviously, it is very, you know, life threatening for them, but they do that just because they want to express themselves and be themselves for a few moments. And I have seen people like, let's go back to the example of my trans friend, even though she was born a transsexual, before her family put her through the transition, they did not let her wear any feminine clothes, they didn't let her you know, play feminine games or play with feminine toys or, or anything. And she did want to do those things. But they didn't let her do that. And even during the transition period, they did not let anyone see her, they did not let her go out anywhere. They kept her in the house away from everyone, because they were ashamed of their daughter, which is very sad.

Okay, do you believe in the gender binary?

Umm obviously I cannot believe in the gender binary. But people who do, it's good for them simpler for them. I think the people who do believe in gender binary, they just want to have like, you know, the easier way out. It's like one plus one is two. And that's it. We don't want to do the rest of the maths. They just refuse to use their brain, they just refuse to get into the complicated situation, and the complicated possibilities. And I don't believe in gender binary, I think it's very, it's very, you know, it's very restricting. It's like, you know, the society wants to control us. So they're like, okay, this is male this is female, act this way act that way don't do anything else. Because if you do anything else that would be wrong, and I don't believe that.

Okay. So when it comes to your yourself, how would you describe your gender to someone if they did not understand?

For me, I just say that I am what I am. I'm not a girl I'm not a boy, I'm just me, I'm not this or that.

Okay, and how did you come to understand your gender? You know, like since growing up most people, they just associated with male or female. So how did you come to understand yourself?

For me, I have always had a leaning towards, like, you know, a part of me really craved for masculine representation. And when my brothers used to buy clothes, I was like, I want similar clothes. I didn't want to buy frocks and all of the pretty stuff and all the dresses, I used to cry that I want what they're getting. And I used to play all the boys games on PlayStation and all the boys game with the boys. I used to play soccer with my brothers' friends. And I used to go cycling everyday, with my brothers. I used to watch wrestling, I used to wrestle with my brothers. And I was always like, you know, very big on, you know, power games. So, I've always had the thing inside me, I've always wanted to dress more masculine and just, you know, be like my brothers. And after some time, I just, I realized that it's not a big deal, I want to wear it, I can wear it. If I want to buy masculine stuff I can buy masculine stuff, I can wear it. And I think, you know, slowly, when I started to comfortably dress the way I wanted, it was it just made me feel more comfortable in myself. And I realized that I don't want to identify as a sort of gender.

Okay, I understand that you said that, basically, because of the way that you grew up, that's how you realize that, you know, you don't really fit into either one category. Do you feel like your environment plays a big role in the way that you identify yourself?

I don't think so. But I do think that my environment did help me a lot in realizing it sooner. But I think, even if I grew up in a different environment, I would still be the way I am, because my environment did not make me feel this way, it just made me realize it.

So do you think that the way a person is raised can affect their gender identity?

I don't think so. Because, because I know a lot of people who come from a lot of different backgrounds, and they just grow up and realize their identity is different. So like backgrounds and environments don't really affect it, they just make it easier or difficult for you to realize that sometimes it just takes you longer to realize who you are if you're growing up in a different environment. And sometimes if you have been through certain situations and you grew up in a different environment, it just gets easier to make peace with yourself.

Okay. So if someone misidentifies your gender, how would you feel, like what feelings would come up for you?

I think this is the part where the society comes in. Because if someone misgenders me here, in Pakistan, I would feel bad, obviously. But I'm not really going to go into an argument about it. Because if I have explained it to them before and they still don't want to understand it, then there's not much I can do about it.

What do you think the world would look like without gender?

I think that to some certain degree we do need gender identities whether they are binary so I would not like to imagine a world without gender roles at all, because we do need some of it to an extent. Like to maintain a certain amount of order. But I also believe that we do need gender, but it does not have to be limited to the binary system. And that, like, yes, we do need it, but do we need just the binary? No we don't.

Okay. And lastly, is there anything else that you would like to add or talk about in this interview?

I would just like to add that, like, I know that it was completely unrealistic, but I wish that there would be more knowledge and exposure about different gender identities, like sexuality comes later, but I think gender identity comes above it. So I wish that there will be some education and exposure about gender identities in schools and colleges and, and like, you know, just in the younger generation, and also the older generation, but I think they do have to understand these terms, the way the younger generation does, but a lot of our, like, most of our generation does not even want to respect it. They don't even want to hear about it.

Okay, so going to the last a couple of questions, how did you feel about this interview?

Oh, that was very eye opening for me again. Because I feel like the beliefs that I had are not actually the beliefs of everyone. And I came to realize that afterwards. And for me, I'm like, mentally, I'm in a world that is unbothered by external energies. But, this just made me realize that there's so much that we all need to worry about and need to get out of, you know, the comfortable spaces in our head that we have created.

And is there anything that made you feel uncomfortable throughout this interview?

Not at all other than the realization, and the, you know, being face to face, again, with the fact that, that we are still not accepted.

So what do you think that you learned? After, you know, realizing all of these things?

The fact that we're still not very safe. And the society that we live in is not safe enough for us to express ourselves, and that we need to be careful. And we need to be, you know, we need to measure all our steps. And we need to take the right steps in the right direction for people to acknowledge us and for people to see us and not feel threatened. What I'm trying to say is that we do want to be seen, but we don't want to be seen in a way that would, you

know, put us in a threatening situation. But I think if people see us, it is going to be a threatening situation, regardless of what we do, or what we say or how we act or how we dress. So there needs to be a lot of thinking about how we can do that. How we can, you know, express ourselves. And also, you know, be prepared for the consequences that will come with it.

Do you feel like society still hasn't come to the point of you know, acceptance really?

Yeah, obviously, that's very, yeah.

Okay, thank you so much for doing this interview and taking out your time. Your privacy will be protected. And if there's anything that you want me to remove, you can let me know.

Okay. Thank you so much.

★ = Main Theme
- is minor

Themes + Coding

★ Mental Health and Gender Identity

- school experience
- bullying
- stage of denial
- point of acceptance

Codes

- "I got bullied a lot"
- Came out publicly to friends.
- Not very amazing
- lot of ups + downs
- Made peace w/ myself
- Prolonged state of denial.
- cannot be changed
- Stop hating myself
- Came out as bisexual
- Hate and discrimination
- I can be myself

★ Gender Fluidity

- Not labeling identity
- Experience in previous yrs
- Clothing + identity
- Multiple genders
- Masc. + Febr energies
- Gender binary
- Misgendering

Codes

- she / they
- "I am who I am"
- Play a certain role.
- Dress or act diff.
- Expressed discomfort
- Confusion and disgust
- Difficult for non-binary people
- Subjected to gender roles
- could not be myself around her
- Self-expressive person
- Dress the way I feel

- Changing how I am.
- Supportive of me
- Feel good about myself
- "You can identify w/ whatever you feel!"
- Every thing is made up.
- Not like to associate w/ gender.
- Energies + auras
- Masc or fem energy
- Nurturing and comforting.
- Motherly nature
- ppl feel safe around you
- cannot believe in binary.
- Easier way out
- Refuse to use their brains
- Complicated possibilities
- It's very restrictive
- Society wants to control us
- "I'm just me"
- I would feel bad.

Observation: Participant talked in a light and open tone. Did not feel closed off at all. Was willing to share & talk about all experiences. Appearance was entirely masculine. No feminine characteristics were apparent.

Transcription 6 (Person F)

My name is Alizey Mobassar and I'm currently a Semester eight Bachelor student in Kinnaird College for Women. The purpose of this study is to investigate the phenomenon of gender identity and gender expression in individuals living in Lahore. All of your personal data will be used with your consent, and your privacy will be protected and the results are going to be accurately represented. I just want to start with a couple of basic questions first. So how would you like to be referred to, what are your preferred pronouns?

He/Him

Where are you from?

I am from Lahore.

And how long have you lived here?

I've lived here since my childhood.

How old are you?

I'm 23, I'll turn 24 this year.

Where did you get your education from?

I did my FSc from Lahore, after that for university I moved to Islamabad.

Okay, so I want to ask a bit about your life in school and university, so how was your time growing up in school and how was your experience in your school life?

To be honest, I didn't have a great experience in school, I also didn't really have any idea about gender back then. I got bullied a lot as well, and you know, I was unable to make friends easily. People used to look down on me. It has gotten easier now in university comparatively.

So you said during your school like, you didn't really feel comfortable, and you mentioned bullying. Can you go more into detail about your experience with that?

Basically, during my school life, the friends that I had didn't really become friends with me directly. Me and my cousin were in the same class, so it was always like they would choose her over me. And I have often seen people making fun of me, and talking about me behind my back. The teachers also did a lot of favoritism and used to make fun of me.

So you said people talked about you behind your back, do you recall what type of things they used to say?

• Felt judged in school by teachers and peers.

(cont. of themes + codes)

- Masculinity & Femininity
- Masculinity is strength
- Femininity is sensitivity
- Masc + fem. according to appearance.
- Not believing in gender binary.

Codes

- Don't associate qualities or traits.
- Hide your true feelings.
- Strong, hard, like a robot.
- Intelligent, able to make decisions
- Soft hearted towards family

Honestly I don't remember exactly because it has been a long time since then, and I've tried to forget about all of it. I don't even care, I've tried to forget it.

Okay, so how would you say your university life has been compared to that?

University is much better. I changed universities twice. Before I used to be in FAST, and the environment there wasn't really that open and accepting. Initially when I cut my hair short, I got made fun of a lot over that. The environment there wasn't open at all, it was a very toxic place. Now I'm studying in TMUC Islamabad. The thing is there are a lot of students from rich backgrounds here, so they happen to be more liberal and open-minded. So they are more accepting here, but there are still some people who make fun here as well. I have to tolerate criticism and judgement here as well, but overall it's much better here. My teachers are also accepting.

Okay, I'm glad to hear that. You mentioned that when you cut your hair, you got to hear a lot of criticism, so can you explain why did you cut your hair, and what made you want to do that?

First of all, I just want to mention that I have never felt comfortable in my physical body, or with my appearance. Ever since I was young, I kept hearing this term that I was a 'tomboy', I don't act like a girl, I'm a 'khusra'. A lot of people used to say these sorts of things. And about my hair, it wasn't like I took a lot of time to think and contemplate over it, it was a very impulsive decision. I thought that I don't really have anything else to do, I might as well get my hair cut. Ever since that day, up till now, I've changed a lot. I've changed my dressing, the way I portray myself outside I've also changed that. I feel like a completely different person.

• Cut hair short to portray as more masculine.

You feel like a completely different person than before when you had long hair?

Yes. I don't even accept the previous me as myself.

Okay so, I will question you more about that later on, but first I want to talk about the terms gender identity. So, what do you previously know about the term gender identity, like what comes to your mind?

Gender identity, according to my knowledge, is the way you identify yourself. That can be aligned with your biological sex, but it can also be different. Male, female, transgender, there are more as well, but I don't really remember them. I identify as a transgender though, that is my identity.

So you identify as a trans man right?

Yes.

Okay. And what about the term gender expression? Do you think it's different or it has a different meaning?

- Perception of society + gender
- Expectation of family
- Playing a dual personality.
- Experiences related to gender

- Boundary w/ outside world.
- Femininity is about sensitivity.
- Judged based on clothing.
- Beard or moustache.
- Heavy shalwar kaez, doing makeup.



Cody

- Not taken seriously
- Male characteristics
- I identify as a man.
- Feminine characteristics.

- Used to look like a girl.
- Follow certain roles
- Still expect me to act as a girl.
- Not completely out.

- Mixed pronouns
- Affect me mentally
- Dual personality
- Act as a female
- Act as a male
- Learn to manage it.

According to me, gender expression is something like how you portray yourself outwardly in society. Like before, I was portraying myself as a girl, now I portray myself as a boy, that is gender expression I think.

So, do you think that these two terms have to be similar or are they like, completely different in your mind? Do you think they can overlap?

Yes, but it also depends from society to society. In our society, this thing is not taken that seriously to be honest. For example, if you are biologically a man, and you identify as a man, you should have male characteristics and be able to portray them. But when it comes to me, biologically I am not a man, but I identify as a man. But society and my family expect me to have feminine characteristics. I'm not like that.

So you said that biologically you are not male, so what would you say are your first memories learning about your gender? When did you come to realize that this is not who I really feel like?

To be honest with you, I did not grow up in such a household where this kind of thing was open and accepted. My family had very typical mindsets, like in Pakistani households. But as I grew up, I did my own research, and I got to know more. I realized my gender identity during lockdown. At that time, I did not know that I was a trans male, but I knew that I am not a lesbian. And one of my friends, she was a girl, she asked me if I would like to meet her friend, who was a trans man. And after the first meeting with him, I got to realize that, I am also like him. Before I did not know that this even exists.

So during lockdown you met someone who familiarized you with the term, and that's when you realized that, this is who I feel like.

Yes, because before that, I only knew that I don't feel like myself. I didn't know what is wrong with me.

So before you came to realize this about your gender, did you have to follow certain roles based on the way you look?

This happened to me a lot, and it still happens now. Even though I have completely transformed outwardly. If you see me for the first time, you won't be able to tell if I'm a girl or a boy. Usually at a first glance, everyone usually thinks of me as a 16-17-year-old boy. I look like a boy completely. Before when I used to look like a girl, I had to follow certain roles, and even now I still do at times. My family members still expect me to act like a girl.

So even now you are expected to behave like a girl by your family?

Yes, because my family doesn't know my identity, so they don't accept it.

And how do you feel about these expectations, does it affect you mentally?

- Family has no idea
- Don't accept it.
- Repressed my feelings.
- Act as female in front of them.
- Pressurized me.

- Faced a bit.
- Emotional blackmail.
- Firm on my stance.
- "I'm a transman".
- I feel bad.
- Had some bad experiences.
- Had to act like a female.

- "You're definitely a boy".
- Face these things often.
- I'm not totally out.
- Family doesn't believe it.
- Would cause a problem for me.

Trans man

Realized identity through another trans man.

Family is in denial of his identity.



- ★ Religion and Gender
- Strong religious views on gender.
- Religious views on attraction.
- Religion and gender binary

- Codes
- Attached to religious views.
 - No right to change it.
 - Not related to soul.
 - Firm on religious view.

- Exposed to more tech
- Look at things scientifically.

This definitely affects me a lot mentally, especially now. Before I didn't used to pay much mind to it, but now at times when I've just had enough, I have an outburst of anger, but I try to keep my feelings in control, because I want to be seen as a good person.

If someone misidentifies your gender, how do you feel about that?

I do get misidentified a lot by people, because I'm not completely out yet. Because of this people often used mixed pronouns for me, which does affect me a lot mentally. I have to play a dual personality. In front of some people I have to act as a female, in front of others I act as a male. This causes a lot of stress for me mentally. At one point it caused a lot of stress, but I've learned to manage it, because what else can I do about it. I can't really do anything.

What do you mean by saying you have to play a dual personality?

My family, including my relatives, have no idea about my gender identity. Obviously, a part of them must know, it's very obvious, but they still deny it. There are also some friends who don't accept it. I did tell them, I came out to them, but they didn't believe it. So now instead of cutting down those friendships, I've repressed my feelings in front of them. I have to act as a female in front of them.

Why do you feel like you have to portray yourself this way in front of these friends?

Actually, I am not the type of person to just cut someone off. I don't end friendships like this with anyone. And I would never end a friendship just because they are not accepting me, I'm not like that. I do try to maintain some distance with them, and not talk about it as much.

Okay, so you mentioned how your family doesn't really have any idea about your identity, do you think in the future you would come out to them?

Yes.

And at what point do you think you would want to do that?

I wanted to tell them this previous year actually, but there was some mishap and I couldn't really tell them. My plan isn't to sit them down and tell him. I want to tell them through my therapist.

Is it alright if I ask questions related to the therapist you mentioned?

Yes sure no problem.

So how long have you been going to a therapist?

I took therapy first in 2017, but I've changed therapists a lot of times.

Okay, and at what point did you feel that you needed to talk to a professional?

- ★ Discomfort w/ Appearance
- Feeling uncomfortable w/ physical body + appearance.
- Changing appearance to fit gender identity

- Codes
- Never felt comfortable.
 - Physical body.
 - I was a tomboy.
 - Impulsive decision to cut hair.
 - Changed my dressing.
 - Portray myself outside.

• Feels like he can't do much if others don't accept him.

• Acts as female in front of some friends of family

- Completely diff. person.
- Aligned w/ biological sex.
- Transgender.
- How you portray yourself.
- Completely transformed outwardly.

- Mental + physical distress.
- Used to be bulky.
- Weight started to reduce.
- Drastic weight loss.

Changed therapist b/c previous one did not help w/ issue.

In 2017, I had a lot of anger management issues, and I felt that I was depressed. I didn't like anything. I was in a very weird and low mindset. I only took one session from that therapist, but didn't continue because he was abroad and I didn't want to do online therapy. I changed therapist a long time after that. I started my first proper in-person sessions during 2020-2021, and that lasted almost a year. But I had to drop that therapist as well, because I went to her and specifically told her that I have a gender-related issue, and I want you to help me with that. But she straight up told me that "this is not my area of specialization". She was doing a lot of other types of therapy, but she backed off on this, saying that she didn't want to help related to this, so that's why I had to leave her. After that I changed therapist again, and the therapist that I have now, I am happy with her. She is very accepting.

Okay so, has your current therapist helped you overcome the issues that you faced with your gender and accepting your identity?

Yes, she has helped me a lot with this.

Can you explain how she helped you with it?

So the thing is, first of all, she accepts me. And when I told her all of my experiences in life in detail, she said "you have a man's soul". No one had ever said those kinds of things to me. It felt like she accepted the man inside me. The first time I started using these pronouns, it was in front of her. "You have a man's soul" (imp.)

She was the first person you started using He/Him pronouns with?

Yes.

Okay, and how did you come out to your friends after that?

So when I realized my identity, it was because of the trans man I mentioned. He helped me a lot in realizing my gender identity. He gave me advice and I followed it. I DM'd people on Instagram through photos, and confessed to them. There were almost 5-6 photos. There were some people who were accepting, but some also denied it completely.

So how long has it been since you've been using these pronouns?

Now it has been almost 1 year.

So you also mentioned that biologically, you are not a man. How does that make you feel? Does it cause you any mental distress?

This thing actually causes me both mental and physical distress.

How does it cause you distress, in what way would you say that it does?

Actually the thing is, towards the end of 2021, I used to be really bulky, and during that time, I really didn't like the way I looked. But after that, my weight started to reduce, and the entire previous year my weight has continued to drop. After July of last year, I had a

Used to feel insecure b/c of weight before

- Learning about own gender - wanting to live as a man.
- Identifying as a trans man
- Growing up as a tomboy.
- Being attracted to girls.
- Hurtful love life.

Codes

- Very typical mindsets.
- Did my own research.
- Friend who was a trans man.

- "I am also like him?"
- Didn't know what it's wrong w/ me.
- "You have a man's soul"
- Accepted the man inside me.

- Confused to them.
- Some were accepting
- Denied it completely
- Biological sex doesn't align w/ gender.

- Attracted to girls.
- Never clicked for me
- Mentally + physically attracted to them.

drastic weight loss. Now I am happy with my body. No one can really tell my gender now due to my body shape.

Actually are you familiar with the term gender dysphoria?

I heard of gender dysphoria from my trans friend, the one I had previously mentioned. I don't remember it exactly but I think it is when your biological sex doesn't align with your gender.

Okay so, being a trans man do you plan on getting any like hormone therapy or testosterone or top surgery in the future?

Um, the truth is, at times I really want to, but all these things are attached to my religious views. I believe that if I'm born this way, god made me this way. God gave me this body, I have no right to change it. I have to accept it, because the physical body is not related to the soul.

So you would call yourself a religious person?

I'm not a practicing religious person, but on my viewpoints I am.

So I wanted to ask you that since you mentioned you have a man's soul, how would you describe attraction for you?

So from the beginning, I have always been attracted to girls. I did try to get into a relationship with guys, but that never really clicked for me. I just couldn't do it. I can't even say 'I love you' to a man, I just can't say it. With girls, I am also physically attracted to them, and obviously mentally too. But the thing is, like I said I'm very firm on my religious viewpoints. I won't ever get into a physical relationship with a girl. I'm okay to the point of holding hands and hugging, but nothing more. If I ever come into a relationship, it will only be till that.

Has this ever happened with you in the past?

Well my love life has always been very complicated. The problem I have is that I always get attracted to straight girls. And in the past, this has happened with two girls who I fell in love with. And one of the girls is the one who I set up with one of my guy friends. So my love life has always been hurtful since the beginning. I did have a relationship with one girl, it was an emotional connection. It lasted about a month, and after that, she left. I would say it was a very toxic relationship. But now we are sort of good friends. We are still emotionally attached to each other, but no romantic feelings at all. My love life till now is basically zero to none. I don't know about the future though.

So you know how in our society, there is a big pressure of getting married at the right age. Would you say this has been something that you had to go through, dealing with this pressure?

- Love life has been hurtful.
- Very toxic relationship.
- Emotionally attached but no romantic feelings.
- Consider myself as a family man.

- Typical Pakistani weddings.
- "There's nothing here for us".
- Always been a tomboy.
- Gender is imp.

- Regulate who we are.
- Need to identify as something.
- Very confusing.

• Wants to change physical body but has religious views attached to it.

• Firm on religious views.

My family does pressurize me on the topic of marriage, but obviously they are not going to force me. They won't get me married until I want to, which obviously is not going to happen.

So you would say you are not really forced too much on this topic?

I am forced a bit. People do try to use emotional blackmail on me, but I am very firm on my stance.

So, in the future, can you talk a bit about your future plans, like do you want to stay here in Pakistan or do you plan to go abroad because of the struggles you have to face here?

Honestly, I would consider myself as a family man. I want to stay with my family. You know how typical Pakistani weddings are right? The man takes his bride to his home. That's the kind of wedding I want to have, and set up a family like that in Pakistan. But since this isn't really possible in Pakistan, I have to go abroad, because there's nothing here for us. I think that maybe someday I'll go abroad and set up my life over there.

So you plan to go abroad eventually, and set up a normal life over there?

Yes.

Okay, so coming back to gender, how many genders do you believe there are?

I only know of three main genders, male, female, and trans. I don't know about any other gender because this has been the extent of my research and I didn't go further into it.

Okay, and what qualities or traits do you associate with these genders?

According to me, I don't really associate qualities or traits to anyone. According to me, any person can be anything. You have to be accepting for everyone.

So what do you consider masculinity or femininity then, regardless of gender?

Well in my eyes, masculinity has some traits. In our society, masculinity is seen as being able to hide your true feelings. That's considered strong, and rigid, and kind of like a robot. But this is not real masculinity. In my eyes, masculinity is that when you actually have to be strong, you are, and you're rigid, and intelligent. You're able to make decisions even if you're in pain. And you're soft-hearted towards your family. You know where to draw the boundary, when it comes to the outside world, and your own life. When it comes to femininity, I don't really know how to describe it. It just feels like, it's just not really much.

So you're not really familiar with what femininity is?

Not really, it just seems like it's mostly about sensitivity.

• Wants to live a life
how a typical Pakistani
male does, w/ family.

What about the outer appearance, what do you think makes someone appear feminine or masculine?

One main thing is clothing. People judge a lot based on clothing. Other than that, in our society, people are also judged by their hair. Like if they have a beard or moustache. But when it comes to me, obviously I don't have a beard or moustache, which is why when people look at me they either think I'm a boy from 9th/10th class, or they say "you're a khusra". They don't consider me as a girl. And when it comes to femininity, it's you know very typical, like girls wearing shalwar kameez, getting ready and doing their makeup. And also the element of sensitivity is there.

Do you think it's more socially acceptable for females to be masculine, than it is for males to be feminine?

Hmm, in my eyes, both get equal hate. If someone wants to hate you, they will regardless if you are male or female.

Do you believe in the gender binary?

What is gender binary?

Like, it's a system of categorizing people. You know how binary means two, so gender binary is where you believe people either fall into one of two categories, which is male or female.

No, I don't believe in this.

Why do you feel this way?

Because, the world is so big and there are so many different kinds of people in the world we can't even imagine of. So how can it be that there are just these two genders in the world.

Do you think your religious viewpoint contradicts with this view?

Well, I do accept that there are some things which you only get to know of after a lot of research. In the old times, there wasn't this kind of research. You only got to see what was right there in front of you. The more technology you are exposed to, the more you get to learn about the world. So you have to look at things scientifically as well.

So you believe that people can identify in any which way?

Yes, because gender identity is linked with the person's mind, so it can be different for anyone. Every person has their own view which they believe to be true. If someone doesn't identify as male or female, but as a completely different gender, it could be that the justification they are giving is correct.

So when it comes to yourself, how would you describe your gender?

• Gender linked w/
mind not physical
body.

I would clearly say that I'm a trans man or I'm simply a man.
And what if they don't accept this, and say that, since you are not biologically a man, you can't be a real man, how would you feel?

I feel bad, to some extent, but then I think that I've already experienced so much of this in life. So many people have told me this, but I don't really bother much anymore. It does feel bad, but I don't pay much mind.

Can you talk a bit about your experience with discrimination based on your gender identity? What kind of things have people said, and how have they treated you?

People mostly call me 'khusra' a lot. I'm a photographer, I go to events for wedding photography. So at the events, at most of the places, people accept me, and think of me as 'cool'. But on the other hand, I've also had some bad experiences. One time, an aunty refused my entry. At that event, I had to act like a female, I had to go there and say that 'I'm a girl'. When I went to that aunty and told her I'm a girl, she was like "no, you're not a girl, you are definitely a boy". I have to face these sorts of things often. People come up to me and call me a khusra or deny who I am. If I'm going up to her and telling her that I'm a girl, she should accept it, but she didn't, so what can I do.

Why do you feel like you have to lie about your identity at such places? Since you identify as a trans man, why do you sometimes have to go and act like a girl?

Because I'm not totally out yet. If my family knows I'm out as a trans man, I would have no problem being myself everywhere I go, I would openly come out on my social media. But my family doesn't believe it. And I know if my family finds out from a third place, it would cause a problem for me.

So do you think the way a person is raised can affect their gender identity?

No.

You don't think environment plays a role in your gender and the way you identify?

No, because ever since I was young, I was raised in a very simple environment. I've always been a tomboy, ever since I was born. So how can I say that there has been an influence on me of any kind.

Alright, so lastly, what do you think a world would look like without gender?

Well, I don't think it would do much good. Since gender is important and we need it to regulate who we are. Even if you're not a male or female, you still need to identify as something, otherwise everything would be very confusing.

Okay. I think this is the end of the interview. I just want to ask you a couple of closing questions. So how did you feel about this interview?

• Has to act as female during events b/c family doesn't know his identity.
Tomboy since childhood.

I felt like it was something different. No one has really tried to ask this much in detail about my life. But it was nice because I got to express myself and tell someone who I really am. I felt like I got the chance to open up.

I'm glad to hear that. Is there anything that made you feel uncomfortable during the interview?

Not really, I was very comfortable with you, I normally wouldn't open up this much but I did today.

Okay, and what do you think you learned after this interview?

Well I got to know about gender identity more than I did before. I think it's important to be aware of these things, especially as a trans man.

That's true. Well thank you for giving your time to this interview. Once again I'd like to inform you that your privacy will be protected, and your name or personal details will be made anonymous. If there's anything you'd like me to remove, you can let me know.

Alright, thank you.

Themes + Coding

⊕ = Major
- = minor

⊕ Mental Health + Gender Identity

- Bullying in school
- Judgement due to appearance
- Not being accepted by close ones
- Going to therapy
- Gender linked w/ mind

Codes

- Not a good experience in school
- Not bullied a lot
- Unable to make friends easily.
- Look down on me.
- Choose her over me.
- Making fun of me.
- Talking behind my back.
- Lot of favoritism
- Teachers also make fun.

- Wasn't open and accepting.
- Cut my hair short.
- Very toxic place.
- Rich backgrounds.
- Liberal + open minded.
- Tolerate criticism and judgement.
- Family don't accept.
- Outburst of anger.
- Keep my feelings in control.
- Seen as a good person.
- Cut someone off.
- Not accepting of me.
- Maintain some distance.
- Anger might issue.
- Felt depressed.
- Weird + low minded.

- Changed therapists a lot.
- Gender related issue.
- She refused to help.
- Linked w/ mind.
- Different for everyone.

(Themes + coding continued from second page)

APPENDIX E

THEMATIC TABLES

Thematic Table (Person A)

Major Themes	Minor Themes	Codes	Supporting Statements
<p>Mental Health Affected by Surroundings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School life • Losing friends • Not being accepted by family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School life not good • Toll on mental health • Really awful • No close friends • Lonesome loser • Tried being myself • Never worked the way it should • Very homophobic • Threatened me • Bisexual twin • Going to hell • Very toxic • Bring me down • I'm living in fear • Not a good person 	<p>“My school life was not good because I realized a lot of things I went through a lot of things, and they did have a toll on my mental health, and last few years of my school life were really awful”</p> <p>“Now I don't think I have friends anymore”</p> <p>“I do not have close friends. It's just my girlfriend, and that's it. If I didn't have her in my life I would be a really lonesome loser”</p> <p>“I've tried being</p>

			<p>around people, I've tried being myself around people, but it just never worked the way it should have been"</p> <p>"My second sister is very homophobic, and I tried explaining things to her as well, but she threatened me"</p> <p>"I have a twin who used to be bisexual, and now she's not, and constantly I am hearing things from her that "oh I'm going to go to hell for this"</p> <p>"Maybe I will go to hell, which is unsettling"</p>
Gender Fluidity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not associating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Androgenous 	"I think of

	<p>with a single gender</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Realizing gender identity• Feeling masculine or feminine• Spectrum of gender	<p>person</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fluid about gender• Part of growing up• Open mind• Gender binary	<p>myself as an androgenous person. I do not associate being feminine or masculine. I feel fluid about my gender”</p> <p>“I think the spectrum is really wide. The way people say there are just 2, male and female, I do not agree with that. You can associate yourself as anything”</p> <p>“It just was a part of growing up I think, understanding things and having an open mind towards them”</p> <p>“Sometimes I might wake up and feel</p>
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			<p>feminine, or I might wake up and feel masculine. I don't believe in gender binary for myself"</p> <p>"I can act like a boy or act like a girl"</p>
<p>Childhood Experiences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being a tomboy as a kid • Associating with a different gender • Treatment by parents • Relationship with siblings • Sexual abuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short hair • Tomboy kid • I was treated as a boy • As a toddler, I was feminine • I don't associate as a girl • Confused at first • Weirder out • It's all in my head • Mold your mind • Explore yourself • They will change you 	<p>"When I was a child, my family used to consider me as a boy"</p> <p>"Since my childhood, that I've been associating with a different gender than I was born with"</p> <p>"The reason I don't associate as a girl is because something happened with a family member. It was sexual abuse, and that really changed</p>

			<p>things for me. I did not want to be close to that opposite gender in any way”</p> <p>“I openly told my elder sister that I like girls, she was confused at first”</p> <p>“And my amma, my mother, I told her that I feel this way and I can never ever look at guys the same way. I can be like one, but I can never like one. And she was weirded out at first, but she told me that, again, it’s all in my head and I will change”</p> <p>“If you’re around something for a really long time, it can mold your</p>
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			mind in a different way, but if you do explore yourself, do other things, obviously they will have an effect on you, and they will change you”
Societal Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How friends viewed gender identity • Conservative society • Appearing different from the norm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certain rules • Judged for it • Forcing religion • It’s all in my head • Conservative • Can’t be myself • Different from the norm 	<p>“I know there are rules, but I will not follow them. These rules do not hold me back”</p> <p>“Many people have judged me for it, like my friends in 1st year when I first told them about how I am as a person”</p> <p>“They started forcing religion on me”</p> <p>“If it was all in my head till now, I would have</p>

			<p>changed. It's hard to make people understand"</p> <p>"I can't exactly be myself while being here because the society we live in is very conservative"</p> <p>"If your appearance is different from the norm in any way, people will judge you for it. They will make things up just because you look a certain way"</p>
<p>Masculine and Feminine Energies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is considered masculine • What is considered feminine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Femininity linked with softness • Confident about yourself • Meek and naïve 	<p>"Femininity is considered to be linked with softness"</p> <p>"Masculinity is when you're confident about yourself, and you do not hold back</p>

			<p>in saying things”</p> <p>“Feminine energy is where you’re more meek and naïve”</p>
<p>Perception of Gender by Society</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misidentifying gender based on appearance • Stereotypes of gender • People are following a trend • Brainwashing by popular culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People are shallow • Perceive me as a feminine girl • Not a big deal • Respect my pronouns • Typical stereotypes • More open to things • Consider it as a trend • Common and accepted • Scrapfest Festival • Platform for queer people • Brainwashing 	<p>“Other people however, perceive me as a very feminine girl, which I have tried explaining, but people do not understand”</p> <p>“People are very shallow, they’re going to talk about the first thing the see, and not understand you or try to look deeper into the situation”</p> <p>“My pronouns are she/they, and I want people to respect that. If they do, I would appreciate that, but again, people think that it’s not</p>

			<p>a big deal”</p> <p>“It has been 2 constant years that I have been trying”</p> <p>“With every coming generation we’re leaving behind many typical stereotypes, so with the coming generations people are going to be more open to things”</p> <p>“I think because it’s becoming a really known thing now. People consider it as a trend”</p> <p>“I think it was for people who are just themselves. It was just a platform for all the queer people to just be</p>
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			<p>themselves for a little amount of time and have no restrictions”</p> <p>“She thought like how most people do, that it’s a brainwashing thing and they completely change your mind about things”</p>
Influence of Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of religion in relationships • Following rules based on religion • Feeling restricted by religion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am a Muslim • Islam doesn’t allow it • Can’t keep sinning • It’s not a sin • Temporary • Didn’t believe in Islam • Ruined a lot of things for me • I was born a Muslim • Restricts me • Boxed me in • Not a practicing Muslim 	<p>“She’s going to stop being with me the way she is now at one point because of Islam, because Islam doesn’t allow it, and apparently she “can’t keep sinning on her life” but it’s not a sin to me”</p> <p>“Whatever we have right now is just temporary”</p> <p>“For the longest</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get restricted • Things would be easier 	<p>time I didn't even believe in Islam"</p> <p>"It has ruined a lot of things for me, because I know that "I was born a Muslim, and it restricts me a lot, so I was never really very high on religion. I feel like it boxed me in"</p> <p>"With Islam you always get restricted that you cannot talk about the person you love, you can't just say it to people, so if I was living somewhere outside, things would be a lot easier"</p>
Relationships and Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of gender by partner • Marrying the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's in my head • Respect my pronouns 	<p>"Even my partner herself, she does not</p>

	<p>opposite gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was born a girl • I am androgenous • Unsettling • Argued over • Wouldn't hold my hand • I need to make peace with it • Does not associate • No labels • Extreme lengths • Forced on me (marriage) • Cannot stand guys • Find a gay guy • Adopting a child 	<p>respect my pronouns, and it is a hard thing, I try explaining it to her but she just says that it's in my head. She says that I was born a girl, so I am a girl"</p> <p>"She does not agree on the front that I am androgenous, which is unsettling and we've argued over that multiple times"</p> <p>"She wouldn't hold my hand around people"</p> <p>"At this point I can't do much about it. If she's not okay with it how can I force her to do something, so I need to make</p>
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			<p>peace with it”</p> <p>“She completely does not associate with anything. She’s okay with the fact that we’re together, but there’s nothing more to it that she wants, no labels”</p> <p>“I am willing to go to even extreme lengths to be with her”</p> <p>“I just cannot stand guys because of what happened. There is no way I can marry one”</p> <p>“I’ve always been on the front of adopting a child rather than giving birth. So if that really happens, that’s what I’m going</p>
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			to do, find a gay guy, it's easier now"
Erasing the Concept of Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following a proper structure • Chaos due to no rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chaotic • Rules and regulations • Restrictions • Everything exists for a reason • More structure • Proper plan to follow 	<p>"We always need some rules or regulations, or some restrictions to believe in"</p> <p>"The rules are here so that we have more structure and a proper plan to follow or not to follow"</p>

Thematic Table (Person B)

Major Themes	Minor Themes	Codes	Supporting Statements
<p>Outside Appearance Affects Perception of Gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clothing style • Physical appearance • General Interests • Misidentifying gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makeup • Feminine clothes • Eastern clothes • Pakistani clothes • Sports • Gaming • Conventional way of doing things 	<p>“the things I liked or a certain way I used to do things, it wasn’t the conventional way”</p> <p>“people referred to me as more masculine rather than feminine”</p> <p>“the way other girls dress up, I don’t do that”</p> <p>“the only one who never wears makeup, doesn’t indulge in other girlish activities”</p>

			<p>“Most of my qualities or interest I would say are based on the male gender, because I, you know, I’m really into sports, and gaming”</p> <p>“They just assume things solely based on how I look or how I act”</p> <p>“People who express themselves or identity themselves differently are judged even more. There’s this stamp over them”</p>
<p>Gender-Based Rules in Society</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pakistani Household • Girls have certain restrictions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certain rules • Going out alone • Wearing Dupatta 	<p>“Being a girl I cannot always express myself like, a</p>

			guy” “There are certain rules that society has that I have to follow”
Environmental Effects on Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How a person is raised • How a person is treated growing up • Amount of siblings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girly stuff • Neutral • Girly influence 	“I only have a brother” “I never got into the girly stuff. My mother never really forced me to wear frocks and stuff like that. She was always neutral” “She wanted me to do everything that I wanted. She never stopped me, never really cared if I wore clothes a certain way or played

			<p>outside”</p> <p>“I never had the girly influence around me”</p> <p>“If I had an older sister instead of a brother, things would have been different. Because I was influenced by my brother”</p> <p>“I was raised a certain way. I was not stopped from doing things a certain way, so that is how I became who I am right now”</p> <p>“Because of my brother and because of the way things were around my</p>
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			house, more masculine energy, so it does affect a person growing up”
Expectation of Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How girls are supposed to behave • How girls are supposed to look 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncomfortable feeling • Complete opposite • Wear makeup • Dress a certain way 	<p>“Wearing certain clothes, when I don’t want, obviously it’s an uncomfortable feeling for me as who I am. It’s like the complete opposite of me”</p> <p>“I’m expected to behave like all the other girls around me, you know I’m expected to wear makeup or dress a certain way or behave a certain way”</p>

			<p>I am constantly hearing “oh you’re not acting like a girl”, “you’re not acting like other girls around you”</p>
<p>Influence of Religion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following certain rules according to religion • Being a Muslim • Not wanting to follow certain rules • Changing gender in religion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muslim • Two genders • Certain rules 	<p>“Being a Muslim, obviously there are certain things which are set for us, and I am someone who practices my religion, so that is why I do only believe there are two genders”</p> <p>“Now the world we are living in, it is easy to change your gender. Like</p>

			<p>biologically and things like that. So I have decided not to do that since you know it's not allowed in our religion"</p> <p>"If it was allowed, I would have changed"</p> <p>"I won't be scared of how people will judge me, or my partner in certain way. So yea I would be more comfortable with myself. I won't have to be you know scared of things"</p>
Masculine and Feminine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What makes someone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makeup • Outside look 	"Makeup is one of the

<p>Energies</p>	<p>masculine</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What makes someone feminine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masculine or feminine energy • Way of dressing 	<p>things that makes a person really feminine in our world”</p> <p>“The outside look of a person, that’s what really gives off the masculine or feminine energy of a person”</p>
<p>Erasing the Concept of Gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No gender roles and expectations • No discrimination based on gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More comfortable • Judged by society • Fear of discrimination 	<p>“People would feel more comfortable to express themselves how they want to express themselves”</p> <p>“People won’t have the fear in themselves to express themselves”</p>

Thematic Table (Person C)

Major Themes	Minor Themes	Codes	Supporting Statements
Mental Health and Gender Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems with gender • Problems with sexuality • Influence of family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A bit doubtful • A phase • Grew out of it • Just for a momentary time • Hated myself • Pressure got really immense • Open up to my family • I was afraid • Troubles with your sexuality • Open up to them • Very supportive • Wanted to help me • A lot of depression • I still have depression • Taken a toll on me 	<p>“There was a time when I was a bit doubtful about some certain things, including my sexuality, but that was kind of like, a phase”</p> <p>“I kind of hated myself for a year or so more than a year”</p> <p>“I was afraid about what they were going to think of me because when we are living in this society and our religion it's not really a good thing to have troubles with your sexuality”</p> <p>“They were very supportive of me</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's a learning process • Certain challenges and suffering 	<p>in the sense that they wanted to help me”</p> <p>“I was in a lot of depression. I had, I still have depression, and I still have panic attacks and I am on medication currently. So that's how it's been. It has taken a toll on me.”</p> <p>“I am thinking of this as learning, new experience and that how I'm supposed to cope up with certain challenges and suffering”</p>
<p>Perception of Society and Gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How gender identity is viewed • How gender expression is viewed • Realizing differences between genders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change their identity • He is a woman • Refer to himself as she • How open you are about your gender 	<p>“Gender identity, in my opinion, is when people feel they have to change their identity as to what they feel”</p> <p>“I used to think of</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender and sexuality • Societal roles based on gender • How clothing affects perception of gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kind of like equals • Romantic relationships • This is how the world works • Felt a bit shocked • Avoiding the fact that this happens • New for me • A lot of homosexuals • Hadn't interacted with them • Didn't exist in my life • All-girls university • Co-ed feels more natural • To run the house • The man has to earn and feed • Allowed to have equal rights 	<p>boys and girls just kind of like equals”</p> <p>“That was new for me and seeing that there are a lot of homosexuals in here and all that”</p> <p>“I mean I'd heard of homosexuals, but I hadn't seen them or interacted with them. It didn't exist in my life”</p> <p>“When you're in a co-ed university, it feels more natural”</p> <p>“The man of the house has to earn and he has to feed his family”</p> <p>“the woman, she is allowed to have equal rights definitely, but in certain cases, she is supposed to be</p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A level down • According to society and religion • I dress like a boy • Clothing is criticized • Expected to dress like a woman • Trying to make other people happy • Focus on my happiness • It has to be the right thing • Not showing my skin 	<p>a bit, like a level down from the men because that's important in our society and according to our religion”</p> <p>“My dressing is sometimes criticized by certain people, you know, sometimes in a light hearted way, but they do think that I dress like a boy”</p> <p>“I feel like I should be on the right path rather than trying to make other people happy. I should try to focus on what makes me happy”</p>
Religion and Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious expectation of oneself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious person 	<p>“I was having troubles with my sexuality, it was</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No purpose without religion • Positive influence of religion in life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was not right • Increased my anxiety • According to rules given by god • I have to follow certain rules • Certain disadvantages • Feel certain anxiety and depression • I would not be alive • If you follow your god • Really big influence • Distanced from god • Facing depression and anxiety • I need to find god • Helped me a lot • Doesn't hold 	<p>about being attracted to another person with the same gender as me. And according to, well being a religious person, I know that it was not right”</p> <p>“What I am should be according to rules given to me by my God”</p> <p>“If I do all the things that my religion does not allow me to do currently, I would feel certain anxiety, and depression”</p> <p>“You can only be successful if you follow your God successfully”</p> <p>“I was having troubles with myself,</p>
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		<p>me back</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not decrease my love for god • Put my religion first 	<p>unintentionally I was just being distanced from God. But during the time I was facing depression and anxiety”</p>
<p>Femininity and Masculinity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is considered feminine • What is considered masculine • Natural vs unnatural expression • How femininity and masculinity are judged differently • Existence of gender binary • Misidentifying gender • Feminism and equal rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just two genders • Strong physically and mentally • Strong willed person • With a softer side • Someone egoistic • Soft hearted, kind, gentle • Who they are • Allowed to express themselves • Doing it naturally • Certain womanly stuff • Dress up as a woman 	<p>“When I think of male, I think of a strong kind of person. And I think as a female, I, you know, think of a strong willed person, but also with the softer side”</p> <p>“when I think of masculinity, I think, it might be a big negative but it's my view, someone egoistic”</p> <p>“When I think of femininity, I think of a person who is soft hearted, kind, gentle and strong”</p> <p>“If he wants to dress up as a</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That feels forced • That's not him • Masculine traits • Looks like a woman • That's not natural • Planted in his brain • Take over his mind and body • Not intentional, but not natural • Socially acceptable • Men are considered perfect • Just two genders • No in-between • I'm a female • Dress a bit masculine • Overly masculine • A bit out of 	<p>woman, that's a bit you know, not okay. Because that feels forced. That's not him"</p> <p>"If he looks like a woman, completely with long hair and all that makeup and all that then I feel that that's not natural. That's something that has been planted in his brain"</p> <p>"Men are considered to be perfect and they're not supposed to be feminine. But if a woman is a bit masculine, people are like "oh okay, it's her choice"</p> <p>"I do believe that there are just two genders, male and female. There isn't an in</p>
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		<p>hand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Equal rights• Women being overly masculine• Trying to change their gender• Bending the laws of nature• Won't do any cooking or raising children• Do what I want to do• Not cover myself• Going against religion• Certain rules of nature	<p>between.”</p> <p>“I'm a female, I would straight up just tell them that I'm a female.”</p> <p>“When it comes to women being overly masculine, women trying to change their gender, that to me is not okay, that's kind of bending the laws of nature that does not seem natural.”</p> <p>“If a woman says I won't do any cooking in the house, I won't be raising children, I'm just going to do what I want to do, and not cover myself, that is not okay. That's bending the laws of nature and also going against religion”</p>
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			<p>“We know that biology says that women are supposed to care for the children”</p>
<p>Environmental Influence on Gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the environment plays a role in gender identity • Being surrounded by one gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavily based on environment • The kind of interaction he has • He won't just become a woman • Facing issue with my sexuality • Surrounded by a lot of women • Restricted from males • I wanted to become a man • Gain the affection of someone 	<p>“If someone is a man who wants to become a woman, then most of it is the effect of the moment that he is living in. And the kind of interaction he has with people”</p> <p>“When I was facing that issue with my sexuality, I was surrounded by a lot of women and since I had been restricted from males in my life”</p> <p>“I wanted to change my gender because I wanted to gain the affection of someone I liked,</p>

			who was the same gender as me”
Erasing the Concept of Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No sense of direction or rules • Destruction of society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lot of chaos • Lot of confusion • Bit absurd • Different point of femininity and masculinity • Kind of feels weird • Need to have rules • Cannot run a society • Destruction of the whole society 	<p>“I feel like there's a lot of confusion around and if there are no genders”</p> <p>“It feels absurd. A bit absurd. If there are no genders, there isn't really a different point of femininity or masculinity, kind of feels weird”</p> <p>“You cannot run a society if there are no rules at all, that will be destruction of the whole society”</p>

Thematic Table (Person D)

Major Themes	Minor Themes	Codes	Supporting Statements
<p>Mental Health and Gender Identity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience at school • Treatment from friends and peers • Pressure of fitting in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little bit traumatic • Pressure and competition • All-women’s college • More comfortable • Safe space • Accepting and welcoming • Hated them • Self-esteem • Body image • Expecting these things • Didn’t feel comfortable • Hated answering • Felt a lot of pressure • Not to be aggressive • Had to conform • Separate my feelings 	<p>“School was a little bit traumatic, but that was more because it was a private school. So there was a lot of pressure and competition”</p> <p>“It was very comfortable for me because it was an all-women’s college. And so I had a lot of safe space and was very, like, accepting and welcoming in that manner”</p> <p>“People were expecting these things of me, and I didn't really feel</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pushing onto me • Started isolating 	<p>comfortable with that. So it just really messed with the way that I looked”</p> <p>“There was just so much so much questioning from people. And I hated answering to them all the time”</p> <p>“I felt a lot of pressure to be more feminine and to not be so aggressive”</p> <p>“I definitely felt the pressure that I had to conform”</p> <p>“I started isolating myself a lot”</p>
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expression of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify as 	“My gender

<p>Fluidity</p>	<p>gender through appearance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling masculine or feminine • Labels attached to identity • Gender and sexuality • Gender binary 	<p>gender fluid expression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very different • Tomboyish • Short hair • Boy cut • Western clothes • Don't wear makeup • Labels that are attached • Regards to your body • The kind of organs you have • How you look • How you dress • Appear to society • Feel more feminine • Feel more masculine • Box myself • Wearing nail polish • Wearing earrings • Blurring the lines • Certain boundaries 	<p>expression is also very different than women and the way that women dress, obviously, so like, I am tomboyish I have short hair”</p> <p>“Whether you identify as a man or a woman, a trans person, non-binary, gender fluid, like, it's a lot more like labels that are attached to it”</p> <p>“Your identity is mostly what you feel with regards to your body as well. That's how I perceive it to be like, you know, the kind</p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaking them • My sexuality is also different • More masculine presenting • Attracted to the tomboyish look • Identify as bisexual • A lot of overlap • Bleeds into the way that I am attracted to people • Play with gender • Toxic macho men • Several genders • Ostentatious identities • Mix up sexual orientation with gender identity • Gets messy • Present as feminine • Have to be straight • Present as masculine 	<p>of organs you have and if you're comfortable with them”</p> <p>“They like dressing masculine and stuff, but they still identify as a woman. I've seen men who identify as men, but they dress more feminine”</p> <p>“There are certain days where I do feel more feminine, and then there are days where I feel more masculine. And so I don't like to box myself”</p> <p>“Certain stuff that was feminine, I did</p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have to be gay • Subscribe to typical stereotypes • Masculine clothing • Feminine clothing • Traditional desi clothing • Personality also plays a role • Kind of interests • Not interested in politics or economy • Femininity is weak • Face backlash • Woman who dresses masculine is seen as strong • Giving into that binary • Validate identity • Very restricting • Stereotypical female roles • Harmed by it 	<p>like it. But it started blurring the lines when everyone who would be like forcing me to go a step further”</p> <p>“I knew that there were certain boundaries with my gender expression that I had, I didn’t like breaking them”</p> <p>“I may be attracted to a different gender, or the same gender”</p> <p>“There's a lot of overlap in things like, with regards to my sexual orientation, I am more</p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give in to those roles• Have to be very macho• Women who are feminist• Breaking that binary down• Feel more like a woman• Feel more like a man• Mix of both	<p>attracted to women who are like very feminine”</p> <p>“Sometimes my gender expression or my gender identity bleeds into the way that I am also sexually attracted to people”</p> <p>“I think binaries are very circumstantial, like it depends on their circumstance. There's some situations where binary can help an individual, but there are certain situations where binaries</p>
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			<p>are actually very, very restricting for them”</p> <p>“I'm going to feel more like a woman some days, I'm going to feel more like a man. Some days is going to be a mix of both”</p> <p>“I didn't think that I could express myself. But I've gotten to a point where I'm really comfortable with myself”</p>
Perception of Society and Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judgement from people • Gender-based rules in society • Judgement from family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dresses up like a boy • Harassment • Jokes among friends • I usually wear a suit • There's often 	<p>“They just think oh han she just sometimes you know, dresses up like a boy”</p> <p>“There's a lot of like</p>

		<p>backlash</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep me away from family • They/them • Very conscious • More inclusive • Don't understand concept of pronouns • They question me • Laugh about it • Soft-spoken • Too aggressive • Aggressive child • Competitive • Submissive • Demarcations that exist in society • Expected to wear heels • Completed the look • Checkboxes that you have • A whole list of things • Fulfilling that role 	<p>harassment, you know, stuff as well, where people are just not comfortable because they don't understand”</p> <p>“There's often like backlash whether I dress masculine, or whether it was feminine, someone is upset about it”</p> <p>“People around me are not that aware and conscious”</p> <p>“These demarcations that exist in society based on gender roles”</p> <p>“I was, you know, expected to</p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You're still incomplete • Pressure from society • I'm a debater • Present an image • People could easily judge • A lot more liberal • Open minded community • People who are welcoming • Choose to tell pronouns • Received a lot of backlash • People question those things • Clash with society • Distancing myself from that space • Bigger issues in the world • Feel frustrated • I am a little disappointed 	<p>wear heels if I was dressing feminine, because that completed the look. And that completed the expectations that they had”</p> <p>“Most of the people I met, weren't, you know, they didn't even understand they didn't even think gender was an important issue”</p> <p>“I know that public speaking would require me to also present an image that people could judge easily”</p> <p>“I did dress</p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lot of oppression tied to gender • To kind of play with it • Find humor in it • Gets too depressing 	<p>more tomboyish, and my adviser believed that that's not an image you want to give off”</p> <p>“Certain men who don't believe in pronouns, and who think that there are bigger issues in the world”</p>
<p>Environment and Gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childhood effect on gender • Treatment by parents • Changing surroundings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tomboyish • Liked doing sports • Like one of his sons • Dichotomous situation • Fully be myself • Certain expectations • I'm just not comfortable • Get away • Certain 	<p>“I was very tomboyish in my childhood as well. Like doing sports and stuff and not really being enamored with anything feminine”</p> <p>“He actually treats me like one of his</p>

		<p>households</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More like sons• Start to behave in that manner• Feel as a woman• Environment plays a huge role.• Shapes the way• Perceived by the world• Look at yourself	<p>sons”</p> <p>“I can't fully be myself if I am in this country”</p> <p>“I just want to get away from this country and get away from my family”</p> <p>“There are certain households that I know where even in my own like extended family where the girls, if they're treated more like sons, they do start to behave in that manner. But that doesn't really change the way that they you know, feel as a woman as</p>
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			<p>well”</p> <p>“Environment plays a huge role. Like, it shapes the way that you look at yourself, it shapes the way that you want to then be perceived by the world”</p>
<p>Religion and Gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not following organized religion • Religious expectations from family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occasional spiritual person • Distant from my religion • Certain ideas of what religion teaches • Cover myself • Follow my duties • Can't be friends with boys • Can't be close to them • Feel tied up • Feel antagonistic • Gravitated towards those key things 	<p>“I consider myself as a occasional spiritual person. I don't believe in organized religions”</p> <p>“My mother expects me to follow all my religious duties, like namaz, Quran, roza, all of that. And then in addition to that, she will</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humanistic values • There is a higher power • Not atheist • Nature and spirituality 	<p>ask me to cover myself up”</p> <p>“I definitely feel very very tied up by it. It's a huge reason why, you know, I feel antagonistic towards religion and Islam”</p> <p>“I gravitated towards those key things of like being kind and being loving and being patient and stuff like that, like humanistic values”</p>
Erasing the Concept of Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How gender affects our society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepting and peaceful place • According to if they're human • Stereotypes and 	<p>“it will be much more accepting and peaceful place. Because if you</p>

		<p>expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What role you have to fulfill• Slightly better	<p>erase gender completely, then it's more that you see everyone according to if they're human or not”</p> <p>“If you erase gender, it also erases, you know, stereotypes and expectations and, you know, pressure of like, what role you have to fulfill</p>
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Thematic Table (Person E)

Major Themes	Minor Themes	Codes	Supporting Statements
<p>Mental Health and Gender Identity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School experience and bullying • Stage of denial • Point of self-acceptance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I got bullied a lot • Came out publicly to my friends • Not very amazing • A lot of ups and downs • Made peace with myself • Prolonged state of denial • A part of me that cannot be changed • Stop hating myself and accept it • Just came out as bisexual • Not so sure about things • Easier for me • A lot of hate and discrimination • A lot of fights • A lot of 	<p>“Everyone knew that I was into girls. And after that, I did get bullied for this reason”</p> <p>“I also made peace with myself and with my sexuality and with my gender identity”</p> <p>“I soon realized that it was a waste of time and it was just something which was a part of me and it cannot be changed. And I should just stop hating myself for it and just accept it”</p> <p>“I was just out as a bisexual person,</p>

		<p>questionable things</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Found more people from my community • We get treated a certain way • I feel like I can be myself 	<p>but I still got, like, you know, a lot of hate and discrimination, especially from my close friends”</p> <p>“If they cannot accept me for who I am, then I might as well remove them from my life, and that’s what I did”</p> <p>“There are other people like you who are there to support you. And I also have some faculty members who are very supportive and accept me for who I am”</p>
<p>Gender Fluidity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not labeling identity • Experience in previous relationships • Clothing and identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pronouns are she/they • It can be anything for anyone • I am who I am • Play a certain 	<p>“Gender expression is however, like a person wants to identify as”</p> <p>“I don’t really label by gender</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple genders • Masculine and feminine energies • Belief in gender-binary • Misgendering identity 	<p>role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dress a different way or act a different way • They don't expect me to be that way • Expressed discomfort • Some degree of confusion and disgust • My proper pronouns • Difficult for non-binary people • Subjected to certain gender roles • Not so feminine • I could not be myself around her • Self-expressive person • Dress the way I feel • People to perceive me 	<p>identity”</p> <p>“My partners either see me as someone very feminine, or someone very masculine, and they expect me to play a certain role”</p> <p>“As a non-binary person, I don't have to fit in a certain role, like feminine or masculine or any other role. I just want to be myself”</p> <p>“It didn't make feel good about myself. I felt like I had to change not just my look, but my identity as well.”</p> <p>“The way I look is the way I identify. So, for me, I'm a very self-</p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing how I am as a person • Supportive of me • Feel good about myself • You can identify as whatever you feel • Everything is made up • Not like to associate anything with gender • Just see them as a person • Energies and auras which are visible • Masculine energy or a feminine energy • Being secure and confident is masculine • Being nurturing and comforting is feminine • Motherly nature 	<p>expressive person. And I like to dress the way I want people to perceive me, like, you know, how I feel. I dress the way I feel.”</p> <p>“She likes if I express myself differently in any way.”</p> <p>“I think that this is the thing, which makes me feel happy and good about myself around my partner”</p> <p>“Because everything is made up. And I think we are also allowed to make some things up, if that makes us feel pretty cool and nice”</p> <p>“I do not associate even bodies or</p>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People feel safe around you • Cannot believe in gender-binary • Simpler for them • Easier way out • Refuse to use their brains • Complicated possibilities • It's very restricting • Society wants to control us • I'm just me • I would feel bad • Not much I can do about it in Pakistan 	<p>qualities or appearances”</p> <p>“Masculinity and femininity those are just energies and auras, they are very visible”</p> <p>“masculinity is all about being secure in yourself. Being confident”</p> <p>“Having that motherly nature to yourself, being nurturing, and being that type of, you know, having that type of comfortable, energy to yourself, that people feel safe around you. I think that's femininity”</p> <p>“The society wants to control us. So they're like, Okay, this is male this is female, act</p>
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			<p>this way act that way don't do anything else.”</p> <p>“I just say that I am what I am. I’m not a girl I’m not a boy, I’m just me.”</p> <p>“If someone misgenders me here, in Pakistan, I would feel bad, obviously. But I'm not really going to go into an argument about it.”</p>
<p>Perception of Society and Gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles of masculinity and femininity • Femininity and masculinity in society • Forced to look acceptable • More representation of gender in educational institutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the system has been built • Play a more masculine role • Play a feminine role • We shouldn't assume these things • Masc representation • Play a stronger or weaker role 	<p>“A lot of people expect someone who looks more masculine to play more masculine role no matter how they identify”</p> <p>“Tomboys or lesbians who have a more masc representation, they are expected</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsafe as a society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depending on how they look • It's very messed up • Appearance or persona • Strong aura • Weak or feminine • Play the womanly role • Short hair • Tomboyish • Look pretty • Pretty looking or has a pretty face • It's unacceptable • They use slur words which is disrespectful • Unacceptable for the people around us • Born in a female body • Act masculine • Distressful • Born in a male body • Difficult to 	<p>to conform to the more masculine role in the relationship”</p> <p>“If someone has a strong aura, or they appear to be more masculine, they are supposed to be doing more masculine stuff. And someone who appears weak or feminine, they should play the womanly role”</p> <p>“You can just, you know, hide the fact that they're a very tomboyish girl from your other relatives, and mostly our parents are okay with that as long as we look pretty even with short hair, it's fine. And then you can be</p>
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		<p>express themselves</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go through unbelievable measures • Express themselves • Life threatening • Express themselves and be themselves for a few moments • More knowledge and exposure about different gender identities • Does not want to respect it • We're still not very safe • We need to be careful • Measure our steps • Not feel threatened • Threatening situation • Be prepared for 	<p>masculine when you're by yourself.”</p> <p>“It's very unacceptable for people who are born a male to act feminine or be feminine in this society”</p> <p>“I have seen that they go through unbelievable measures just to you know, express themselves even for a very short time”</p> <p>“I wish that there will be some education and exposure about gender identities in schools and colleges”</p> <p>“Most of our generation does not even want to respect it. They</p>
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		<p>the consequences</p>	<p>don't even want to hear about it"</p> <p>"The society that we live in is not safe enough for us to express ourselves, and that we need to be careful"</p>
<p>Environment and Gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a trans friend • Leaning towards masculine representation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Born trans • I wasn't used to them • Biologically trans • I was six or seven • Very confusing for me • Trans activists • Did not let her wear feminine clothes • Play feminine games or play with feminine toys • Craved for masculine representation • I want what 	<p>"She was biologically trans. So at that time, I was like, I guess I was six or seven. And it was like, very confusing for me to wrap my head around the concept"</p> <p>"I think that this viewpoint of mine has definitely been influenced by some trans activists"</p> <p>"They kept her in the house away from everyone, because they were ashamed of their</p>

		<p>they're getting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Used to play all the boys games• Power games• Be like my brothers• Dress more masculine• I want to wear it, I can wear it• Feel more comfortable in myself• Environment did not make me feel this way• Grow up and realize their identity is different• They just make it easier or difficult	<p>daughter, which is very sad”</p> <p>“A part of me really craved for masculine representation. And when my brothers used to buy clothes, I was like, I want similar clothes. I didn't want to buy frocks and all of the pretty stuff”</p> <p>“I've always wanted to dress more masculine and just, you know, be like my brothers”</p> <p>“I realized that I don't want to identify as a sort of gender”</p> <p>“My environment did not make me feel this way, it just made me realize it”</p>
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			<p>“Backgrounds and environments don't really affect it, they just make it easier or difficult”</p>
<p>Religion and Gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing up in a religious environment • Religion’s effect on mental health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grew up in a religious family and religious country • Prayed a lot to be normal • Distance myself • Waste of time • A part of me and cannot be changed 	<p>“So they had their morals straight and I was not straight”</p> <p>“I hated myself for a really long time. I prayed for God to change me and make me feel like everyone else”</p> <p>“I soon realized that it was a waste of time and it was just something which was a part of me and it cannot be changed”</p>
<p>Erasing the Concept of Gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Necessity of gender roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need gender identities • Certain amount of order 	<p>“We do need gender identities whether they are binary”</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does not have to be limited to the binary	“Like to maintain a certain amount of order. But I also believe that we do need gender, but it does not have to be limited to the binary system”
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Thematic Table (Person F)

Major Themes	Minor Themes	Codes	Supporting Statements
<p>Mental Health and Gender Identity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bullying in school • Judgement due to appearance • Not being accepted by close ones • Going to therapy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender linked with mind 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not a good experience in school • Got bullied a lot • Unable to make friends easily • Look down on me • Choose her over me • Making fun of me • Talking behind my back • Lot of favoritism • Teachers also made fun • Tried to forget it • Wasn't open and accepting • Cut my hair short • Made fun of • Very toxic place • Rich backgrounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I didn't have a great experience in school, I also didn't really have any idea about gender back then. I got bullied a lot as well” • “I have often seen people making fun of me, and talking about me behind my back. The teachers also did a lot of favoritism and used to make fun of me” • “The thing is there are a lot of students from rich backgrounds here, so they happen to be more liberal and

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More liberal and open-minded • More accepting • Tolerate criticism and judgement • They (family) don't accept it • Outburst of anger • Keep my feelings in control • Want to be seen as a good person • Cut someone off • Not accepting of me • Maintain some distance • Anger management issues • Felt depressed • Weird and low mindset • Changed therapists a lot • Gender-related 	<p>open-minded”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I would never end a friendship just because they are not accepting me, I’m not like that. I do try to maintain some distance with them” • “I had a lot of anger management issues, and I felt that I was depressed. I didn’t like anything. I was in a very weird and low mindset” • “I had to drop that therapist as well, because I went to her and specifically told her that I have a gender-related issue, and I want you to help me with that. But
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		<p>issue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She refused to help • Linked with mind • Different for everyone 	<p>she straight up told me that “this is not my area of specialization””</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Because gender identity is linked with the person’s mind, so it can be different for anyone”
Masculinity and Femininity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masculinity is strength • Femininity is sensitivity • Masculinity and femininity according to appearance • Not believing in gender-binary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don’t associate qualities or traits • Hide your true feelings • Strong • Rigid • Like a robot • Intelligent • Able to make decisions • Soft-hearted towards family • Where to draw the boundary with outside world and your life • Femininity is about sensitivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “According to me, any person can be anything. You have to be accepting for everyone” • “In my eyes, masculinity is that when you actually have to be strong, you are, and you’re rigid, and intelligent. You’re able to make decisions even if you’re in pain. And you’re soft-hearted towards your

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judged based on clothing • Judged by hair • Beard or moustache • Wearing shalwar kameez • Getting ready • Doing makeup • Element of sensitivity • Both get equal hate 	<p>family”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “obviously I don’t have a beard or moustache, which is why when people look at me they either think I’m a boy from 9th/10th class, or they say “you’re a khusra”. They don’t consider me as a girl”
<p>Perception of Society and Gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations of family • Playing a dual personality • Experiences related to gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not taken that seriously • Male characteristics • Identify as a man • Feminine characteristics • Used to look like a girl • Follow certain roles • Still expect me to act as a girl • Not completely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “biologically I am not a man, but I identify as a man. But society and my family expect me to have feminine characteristics. I’m not like that” • “Before when I used to look like a girl, I had to follow certain roles, and even now I still do at

		<p>out</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed pronouns • Affect me mentally • Dual personality • Act as a female • Act as a male • Learned to manage it • Family has no idea about my gender identity • Don't accept it • Didn't believe it • Repressed my feelings • Act as a female in front of them • Family pressurizes me • Forced a bit • Emotional blackmail • Very firm on my stance • I'm a trans man, or simply a man • I feel bad • Already experienced so 	<p>times. My family members still expect me to act like a girl"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I'm not completely out yet. Because of this people often used mixed pronouns for me, which does affect me a lot mentally. I have to play a dual personality" • "My family does pressurize me on the topic of marriage, but obviously they are not going to force me" • "People do try to use emotional blackmail on me, but I am very firm on my stance" • "People mostly call me 'khusra' a lot. I'm a
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		<p>much</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't pay much mind • People accept me • Had some bad experiences • Had to act like a female • "no, you're not a girl. You are definitely a boy" • Face these things often • I'm not totally out • My family doesn't believe it • Would cause a problem for me 	<p>photographer, I go to events for wedding photography. So at the events, at most of the places, people accept me, and think of me as 'cool'"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "People come up to me and call me a khusra or deny who I am"
Religion and Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong religious views on gender • Religious views on attraction • Religion and gender-binary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attached to religious views • No right to change it • Not related to soul • Firm on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I believe that if I'm born this way, god made me this way. God gave me this body, I have no right to

		<p>religious viewpoint</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many different people • Exposed to more technology • Look at things scientifically 	<p>change it. I have to accept it, because the physical body is not related to the soul”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I’m very firm on my religious viewpoints. I won’t ever get into a physical relationship with a girl” • “The world is so big and there are so many different kinds of people in the world we can’t even imagine of”
Discomfort with Appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling uncomfortable with physical body and appearance • Changing appearance to fit gender identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never felt comfortable • Physical body • My appearance • I was a tomboy • Impulsive decision to cut hair • Changed my dressing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Ever since I was young, I kept hearing this term that I was a ‘tomboy’, I don’t act like a girl, I’m a ‘khusra’” • “I’ve changed my dressing, the way I portray

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portray myself outside • Completely different person • Aligned with biological sex • Transgender • How you portray yourself outwardly • Completely transformed outwardly • Mental and physical distress • Used to be bulky • Weight started to reduce • Drastic weight loss 	<p>myself outside I've also changed that. I feel like a completely different person"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I identify as a transgender though, that is my identity" • "I was portraying myself as a girl, now I portray myself as a boy" • "If you see me for the first time, you won't be able to tell if I'm a girl or a boy. Usually at a first glance, everyone usually thinks of me as a 16-17-year-old boy. I look like a boy completely" • "Now I am happy with my body. No one can really tell
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			my gender now due to my body shape”
Learning about Own Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying as a trans man • Growing up as a tomboy • Being attracted to girls • Having a hurtful love life • Wanting to live as a man 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very typical mindsets • Did my own research • Friend who was a trans man • I am also like him • Didn’t know what is wrong with me • “You have a man’s soul” • Accepted the man inside me • Because of the trans man • Confessed to them • Some were accepting • Denied it completely • Biological sex doesn’t align with gender • Attracted to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “One of friends, she was a girl, she asked me if I would like to meet her friends, who was a trans man. And after the first meeting with him, I got to realize that, I am also like him” • “It felt like she accepted the man inside me. The first time I started using these pronouns, it was in front of her” • “I have always been attracted to girls. I did try to get into a relationship with guys, but that never really

		<p>girls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never clicked for me • Physically and mentally attracted to them • Love life has been hurtful • Very toxic relationship • Emotionally attached but no romantic feelings • Consider myself as a family man • Typical Pakistani weddings • There's nothing here for us • Simple environment • Always been a tomboy • Gender is important • Need it to regulate who we 	<p>clicked for me. I just couldn't do it. I can't even say 'I love you' to a man, I just can't say it"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "My love life has always been hurtful since the beginning. I did have a relationship with one girl, it was an emotional connection. It lasted about a month, and after that, she left. I would say it was a very toxic relationship" • "I have to go abroad, because there's nothing here for us. I think that maybe someday I'll go abroad and set up my life over there" • "Ever since I
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		<p>are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need to identify as something• Everything would be very confusing	<p>was young, I was raised in a very simple environment. I've always been a tomboy, ever since I was born"</p>
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APPENDIX F

PLAGIARISM REPORT



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