BEYOND BINARY: GENDERQUEER AS CRITICAL GENDER KIND

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We want to know what gender is. But metaphysical approaches to this question have focused on the binary gender kinds *men* and *women*. By overlooking those who identify outside of the binary—the group I call 'genderqueer'—we are left without tools for understanding these new and quickly growing gender identifications. This metaphysical gap in turn creates a conceptual lacuna that contributes to systematic misunderstanding of genderqueer persons. In this paper, I argue that to better understand genderqueer identities, we must recognize a new type of gender kind: *critical gender kinds*, or kinds whose members collectively destabilize one or more pieces of dominant gender ideology. After developing a model of critical gender kinds, I suggest that *genderqueer* is best modeled as a critical gender kind that destabilizes the 'binary axis', or the piece of dominant gender ideology that says that the only possible genders are the binary, discrete, exclusive, and exhaustive kinds *men* and *women*.

1. Introduction

Dissatisfaction with strict binary gender systems is nothing new.[1] Nor is the creation of language, modes of expression, or body modifications aimed at transgressing this binary. What is new is the proliferation of widespread and legitimized conversations surrounding this dissatisfaction.[2] Just in the last ten years, web searches for 'genderqueer' and 'nonbinary' have grown by a magnitude of at least ten times.[3] Merriam-Webster's dictionary added both terms, the Associated Press Stylebook embraces 'they' as a singular gender neutral pronoun, and highly visible popular publications such as *Teen Vogue* and *The New York Times* have run articles exploring the concept of identifying outside the gen-

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1. Many cultures do not have dominant binary gender systems, such as the Bugis of Indonesia and Native American Great Plains tribes.
2. See, e.g., White et al. (2018, 244) for empirical evidence supporting this claim.
3. Data source: Google Trends (www.google.com/trends).

der binary.[4] Facebook offers its over 2.4 billion users more than fifty terms to self-describe their genders. In 2007, Oregon became the first state to offer nonbinary gender markers on government identification, with ever more municipalities and states following suit.[5] In sum, and to quote the singer Miley Cyrus, who identitifies as genderfluid, "[Nonbinary identity] is not a trend. It's just that now it's acceptable to discuss it".[6]

Despite this ever growing public awareness, nonbinary gender identities have been an afterthought within philosophy of gender, and especially metaphysical discussions of gender.[7] The central phenomenon under consideration has been the binary genders *men* and *women*.[8] Narrowing the target phenomenon in this way generates two problems—one metaphysical and the other political.

First, by overlooking nonbinary identities, existing metaphysical approaches to gender are insufficient for capturing persons who reject (exclusive) categorization as either men or women (see §3). This creates a gap of metaphysical explanation and understanding. For example, what is the relationship between gender neutral language and being nonbinary? Or between androgyny and being nonbinary? What (if anything) unifies the vast variety of nonbinary identifications? Is there anything more to being nonbinary than calling oneself by a nonbinary

label? These questions are metaphysically significant, but the theories on offer provide no answers.

Second, without the resources for understanding nonbinary gender identities, we sustain a conceptual lacuna surrounding nonbinary persons. This lacuna does not only reflect a gap in philosophical understanding; it contributes to a hermeneutical injustice that arises from the failure to spread and charitably analyze the concepts and practices underlying nonbinary classifications.[9] In the wake of this conceptual silence, misunderstandings (both blatant and subtle) arise in droves—misunderstandings that undermine recognition and respect of nonbinary persons.[10]

These two problems can be ameliorated by an account of *genderqueer* as what I call a 'critical gender kind', or a kind whose members collectively destabilize one or more elements of dominant gender ideology. *Genderqueer*, on my proposed model, is a category whose members collectively destabilize the **binary axis**, or the idea that the only possible genders are the exclusive and exhaustive kinds *men* and *women*.[11] Moreover, they do so based on felt or desired gender categorization that conflicts with this binary. I unpack this proposal in §4.

My model has many implications, and no doubt will inspire as many worries. Like most philosophical theories, mine is probably wrong. But I believe it is closer to the truth than analytic philosophers have come so far, if only because we have had little to say about non-

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4. "genderqueer" & "nonbinary" (2018), Sopelsa (2017), Papisova (2016), Greenberg (2017).

5. As of the time of writing, there are sixteen states offering nonbinary gender markers, plus New York City and the District of Columbia.

6. Quoted in Steinmetz (2017).

7. See, e.g., Haslanger (2012),Jenkins (2016), Sveindottír (2011), and Barnes (forthcoming). Even discussions of gender that purport to be trans inclusive typically overlook the experiences and concepts underlying genderqueer identity. See, e.g., Bettcher (2009, 2013), Jenkins (2016), Briggs & George (2016), and McKitrick (2015). This is especially striking given that 29% of respondents to the 2015 United States Transgender Survey self-identified as genderqueer. See James et al. (2016, 44). Philosophy is not alone in this oversight. See Salamon (2010, 95) for a similar criticism of Women's Studies.

8. Though see Dembroff & Wodak (2018) and Dembroff (2018) as exceptions. Note that, throughout this paper, I use italics to mark social kinds, and use single quotes to mark terms, e.g., *genderqueer* and 'genderqueer'.

9. Hermeneutical injustice, as defined in Fricker (2007, 1), occurs "when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences'.' More extended notions of hermeneutical injustice are explored in Medina (2012) and Appiah (1994), which include cases (such as white ignorance) when a gap in the collective interpretive resources regarding an oppressed group perpetuates the social disadvantage of that group. I take it that the lacuna at issue concerning nonbinary kinds manifests in both ways.

10. Using Fraser's (1998) account, this might be understood in terms of access to participatory parity, or the conditions needed to interact with others as peers in social and political settings.

11. I use the word 'model' intentionally. Following Paul (2012), I endorse a method of metaphysics focused on building theoretical models for certain explanatory purposes, rather than constructing (real) definitions.

binary identifications. What's more, it is clear that this theorizing is overdue: Even empirical social research on trans identities frequently lumps together trans binary and genderqueer persons, making it difficult to use this data to explain why, for example, genderqueer persons overall face heightened discrimination and psychological distress compared to trans binary persons, and also differ with respect to attitudes toward medical interventions such as hormone therapy.[12] If I am right—or even close to it—this heterogeneity should come as no surprise, since *genderqueer* conjoins persons who are extremely diverse across self-understanding and gender presentation (among other things).

2. Terminology & Methodology

'Genderqueer' was first coined in the 1990s by trans activist Riki Wilchins in an attempt to describe those who were both queer with respect to their sexuality and "the kind of gendertrash society rejected" with respect to their gender intelligibility in public spaces.[13] Since then, use has shifted away from mere description and toward identity: In particular, it often functions as an umbrella term for a range of gender identities outside of the binary.[14] I will use the term in keeping with this recent shift, but my primary concern is not with articulating the true meaning of 'genderqueer', but rather with modeling a gender phenomenon that has been ignored in analytic philosophy.[15]

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12. See Rimes et al. (2019), Galupo et al. (2018, 5), Bradford et al. (2018, 8), and Warren et al. (2016). Following Heyes (2003), cf. Stryker (1994), I use 'trans' to refer to the "multiple forms of sex and gender crossing and mixing that are taken by their practitioners to be significant life projects". I use 'trans binary' to refer to persons who are trans but identify exclusively within the male/female binary.

13. Wilchins (2017), 80.

14. Ibid.

15. Here I sympathize with Kusalik's (2010, 56) lack of "fascination" with the semantics of 'genderqueer'. That said, I also agree with Cohen (2005, 34) that social identities are "important to one's survival", and think that, for this reason, it is important to provide substantive models of groups associated with particular identity labels.

My analysis relies heavily on personal testimony from genderqueer persons. This is not only because there is a scant amount of academic research about genderqueer persons, but also because I share the familiar feminist commitment to begin theorizing from the perspective of the marginalized. That said, I distinguish between two kinds of testimony. The first concerns genderqueer individuals' intuitions about paradigm or uncontested examples of persons who do not identify exclusively as men or as women. The second concerns these individuals' views about metaphysical questions concerning what, more generally, it means to be genderqueer. I rely on the first kind of testimony and not the second. Substantive metaphysical questions about *genderqueer* deserve careful analysis in just the same way that *women* and *men* have been given careful metaphysical analysis. In this, I follow Bettcher (2014) in relying on persons' first-person authority over their own gender, while simultaneously allowing for substantive disagreement about the underlying metaphysics. My central concern, in other words, is locating general concepts that helpfully frame genderqueer identity— in particular, the concepts that structure commonality among the language, aesthetic expressions, values, and actions found among those who (within contemporary Western societies) identify as neither solely male nor female.

Notably, I am not primarily concerned with how genderqueer persons are understood within dominant contexts, which typically have either no understanding or a distorted understanding of nonbinary persons. Rather, I focus on the practices and concepts surrounding *genderqueer* within trans-friendly communities, and especially by genderqueer persons themselves. Here, I again follow Bettcher (2013, 235), who argues that assuming dominant gender meanings and concepts is a "bad place" to start feminist theorizing, as it "effectively yield[s] political ground from the very beginning".

Finally, and relatedly, throughout this paper, I refer to *genderqueer* as a gender kind. My reader might wonder why I do so: Why take *genderqueer* to be a *gender* kind, rather than some other sort of social kind? I cannot offer a complete argument for my answer here. The

abbreviated argument, however, is that—along with Elizabeth Barnes (forthcoming)—I do not think that we should approach the metaphysics of gender by looking for kinds that correspond one-to-one with the gender terms we use to describe individuals (e.g., 'woman', 'man'). The terminological taxonomy of gender classification need not, and I think does not, align with the most useful metaphysical taxonomy of gender kinds. Rather, I approach the project of metaphysical inquiry into gender kinds as the project of inquiring into the kinds that reinforce or resist hierarchical, male-dominant social systems. *Genderqueer*, as I'll argue in what follows, is one such kind. For this reason, while I incorporate testimony from those who do use the label 'genderqueer', I do not take it that the kind I call *genderqueer* is one that contains all and only those who identify themselves using the label 'genderqueer'. My focus, rather, is on using this testimony and other evidence to get a clearer picture of what, if anything, best characterizes the group of persons who do not exclusively identify as men or as women.

3. First Attempts

Within popular culture, most proposed definitions of *genderqueer* fall into one of two camps. On one approach, someone is genderqueer because they have certain *external* features—typically, because they are androgynous, gender fluid, or otherwise violate gender norms. On another approach, someone is genderqueer because of a particular *internal* feature—namely, self-identification—leaving open what, exactly, it might mean to identify outside of the binary.

It is instructive to note that most available metaphysical analyses of gender also take one of these two approaches.[16] On externalist approaches, someone's gender is determined by social factors that are *external* to them: for example, being perceived as androgynous or other-

wise gender non-conforming. In contrast, internalist approaches focus on articulating more concretely what it means to identify with a particular gender. On these accounts, someone's gender is determined not by how they are perceived by others, but rather by whatever internal features (e.g., self-understanding, behavioral dispositions) constitute their gender identity.[17]

I argue that neither an externalist nor internalist approach will provide a satisfactory account of *genderqueer*. Both misclassify paradigm cases of genderqueer (and non-genderqueer) individuals. Examining closely why this is the case is instructive. Not only will it clear the ground for my own proposal, but it also provides an opportunity to examine these paradigm cases, as well as genderqueer persons' testimony concerning their own identities. Such testimony illuminates both why externalist and internalist approaches fall short, as well as why *genderqueer* is helpfully understood as a critical gender kind.

3.1 An Externalist Approach

External theories of gender, sometimes also called *social position* theories—focus on gender as a social structure that advantages or disadvantages individuals according to the collective norms, expectations, and stereotypes surrounding the features that an individual is perceived to have. Externalist theories have been proposed or defended by Haslanger (2012), Barnes (forthcoming), Witt (2011), and Sveinsdottír (2011), among others.[18] There are many potential ways to spell out

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16. I here focus on constructionist accounts of gender, setting aside biological essentialism. Even if one is a biological essentialist, though, it is hopefully obvious that this approach will not suffice to analyze *genderqueer*. While some intersex persons are genderqueer, being intersex is neither sufficient nor necessary for being genderqueer. See, e.g., Weiss (2018).

17. As Barnes (forthcoming) notes, while these are the main approaches, some theories fall outside this taxonomy, such as Stoljar (2011), Briggs & George (2-16), and Bach (2012).
18. Theodore Bach (2012) defends a view of gender on which genders are "natural kinds with historical essences"—a view that is difficult to place within the external/internalist taxonomy. On Bach's view, to be, e.g., a woman is to be molded by conscious and unconscious social mechanisms into a reproduction of historical exemplars of women so as to perform the social function corresponding to women. On Bach's view, then, someone might be a trans man and yet—according to Bach's analysis—be "construed as a woman" (260). Moreover, given that *man* and *woman* are the only kinds into which one can be socialized (within Western cultures), all genderqueer persons (who have been socialized

what external social factors determine an individual's gender. For my purposes, the details of various externalist accounts are not centrally important. What is important, rather, is to see a trend among all of them: namely, that membership in a given gender kind is based solely on factors that are *external* to any given individual—e.g., social roles, perception, or treatment.[19]

In light of this, what would be the best externalist approach to *genderqueer*? Whatever it is, it must highlight only features that are *external* to genderqueer persons, while also capturing paradigm cases of those identifying outside the binary, as these persons are understood within trans-friendly communities.

The most common—and, I think, plausible—externalist approach to *genderqueer* focuses on someone's perceived relation to gender norms and roles, and especially to masculine and feminine gender presentation. Indeed, a brief foray into popular media might suggest that someone is genderqueer because they "[do] things that are outside of the norm of their actual or perceived gender identity", or because they "express a combination of masculinity and femininity, or neither, in their gender expression".[20] A similar idea is echoed by popular articles, books, and visual media that equivocate between or constantly associate being nonbinary with androgyny or gender non-conformity.[21] Admittedly, this thinking is reinforced by the observation that many genderqueer persons fit this description: It is common for persons who identify outside the binary to adopt an aesthetic that defies gender expectations—often, one that is androgynous or is fluid between masculine and feminine elements.[22] Add to this that other behaviors of-

ten associated with nonbinary persons also break gender norms, such as using gender neutral pronouns or refusing classification as either 'straight' or 'gay'.[23] With these considerations, it might seem that the best way to analyze *genderqueer* will be something like the following:

Genderqueer (externalist): *Genderqueer* is the category of persons who either
(i) are reliably perceived as attempting to not exclusively adopt either a feminized or masculinized gender expression;
or
(ii) cannot be reliably coded as having either a male or female body.[24]

In other words, on this proposal, someone is *genderqueer* in a context just in case they are perceived as *transgressing* binary norms of gender expression—for example, by adopting a gender fluid or agender aesthetic—or their body is perceived as *androgynous*, where this is understood as one's body being unreadable as male or female.

Despite the many merits of this approach, I think it falls short of a successful account of *genderqueer*. Examining why sheds light on why, I think, any externalist approach will be dissatisfactory. While many genderqueer persons *do* meet the above proposed condition, two further things are true. First, these persons often describe their androgyny or rejection of traditional gender aesthetic norms as an *expression*

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as either women or men) will not be represented within Bach's analysis.
19. I here flag an observation that, within the majority of philosophical theories of gender, a question about kind constitution (e.g., What constitutes the kinds *women* and *men*?) is assumed to deflate into a question about membership conditions (e.g., What are the membership conditions for the kinds *women* and *men*?). As I discuss in §4, I think this assumption is false.
20. See Clements (2017) and the entry for "Genderqueer" on Wikipedia.
21. See, e.g., Dowling (2017), Ferguson (2017), and Petrow (2016).
22. See the Instagram hashtag "#thisiswhatnblookslike".

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23. For more evidence on the connection between trans identifications and violating heteronormative gender expectations and roles, see Diamond & Butterworth (2008) and Green (2004). See also Nagoshi et al. (2012, 405), in which participants took their sexual orientation to be "dynamically related" to their gender identity, suggesting that being nonbinary often rules out, for these persons, being either 'straight' or 'gay'.
24. These descriptions bear similarity to Barnes's (forthcoming) description of the 'gender outlier' and 'gender confounder'. Barnes, who is sympathetic to Sally Haslanger's (2012) picture on which gender is a hierarchical system that socially positions persons in different ways based on their perceived features, describes gender outliers and confounders as those who are systematically subordinated due to being perceived (respectively) as attempting to switch between binary gender roles or as androgynous.

but not the totality of being genderqueer, emphasizing in addition an affective or political orientation toward the gender binary. When asked to describe their experience of being genderqueer, in fact, there is repeated and explicit rejection of the idea that being genderqueer is solely based on gender presentation or on others' perceptions. In their article, "This Is What Gender-Nonbinary People Look Like", trans activist Meridith Talusan asked genderqueer persons to describe their experience of identifying outside of the gender binary. While answers varied in their details, a common theme emerged: The category *genderqueer* is not reducible to a group of persons who are perceived in a particular way. One interviewee, Rowan Keeney, put this bluntly:

> My expression and my socialization falls on the femme side, but *being nonbinary is not about what is perceived of me*. Nonbinary is the liberation from the need to make myself smaller to fit into preconceived ideas of who and what I am.[25]

Keeney's point is independently reiterated by other genderqueer persons, who express that "there is no one way to be nonbinary", that "name, pronouns, and presentation does not define [a nonbinary individual's] gender", and that genderqueer persons "have all types of gender presentations", "identify as feminine and masculine to different degrees", and "don't need to look or act or be a certain way to be nonbinary".[26] Suzannah Weiss, a writer for Teen Vogue who identifies as both genderqueer and a woman, is particularly explicit on this point:

> Many people seem to believe you need an androgynous style to be non-binary, creating the assumption that I and other nonbinary people who wear women's clothes must be women...but you can't tell how someone identifies based on what they look like...[27]

These statements and many others suggest that *genderqueer*'s extension reaches only to those who are perceived to fall outside of binary gender roles or to have an androgynous presentation.

Complementing this point is a second observation: namely, that the externalist approach would also overextend. Many individuals who do *not* identify as and would not be considered genderqueer either defy binary gender roles or are perceived as androgynous.[28] Butch lesbians, queens, cross-dressing men and women, trans men and women who do not blend as cisgender, and the variety of men and women whose bodies and presentations are androgynous are but a few examples of this. As Lori Watson, examining shared experiences between gender nonconforming persons, trans and not, writes:

> Trans women and I share an especially acute problem: we both want our gender to be seen as a way of being a woman...who doesn't have to offer up her bona fides to the world anytime someone is confused, perplexed or unsettled when they perceive our gender and sex as incongruous or ambiguous.[29]

In short, genderqueer persons do not have a monopoly on being perceived as violating gender roles, much less on androgyny: Plenty of non-genderqueer men and women share in this experience.[30]

While taking *genderqueer* as non-reducible to any particular social perceptions may seem initially odd, it comes into better focus when we take seriously that being genderqueer is not so much about rejecting femininity and masculinity *de re*, but rather rejecting the idea that concepts of femininity and masculinity are always appropriate for interpreting or evaluating an individual's affect, behavior, or aesthetic.[31]

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25. Talusan (2017), emphasis added.
26. Talusan (2017), Weiss (2018).
27. Weiss (2018).

28. For empirical discussion, see Bradford, et al. (2018).
29. Watson (2015).
30. A further, normative worry arises for taking *genderqueer* in terms of androgyny in particular: For many body sizes and shapes, androgyny is difficult if not impossible to access. Persons in this position would be simply barred from access to *genderqueer*.
31. See, e.g., Weiss (2018), who writes that being genderqueer, for them, means "reject[ing] the whole concept of gender".

That is, according to genderqueer persons, being genderqueer need not be about refusing clothing, behaviors, speech, affect, or roles that typically would be read as feminine, masculine, or any combination of the two. Rather, it often concerns rejecting the binary at a conceptual level—that is, rejecting the idea that their way of being in the world should always be understood via the binary and oppositional concepts of 'feminine' and 'masculine'.[32] In an interview with The Washington Post, 18-year-old Kelsey Beckham, who identifies as nonbinary, states:

> I don't want to be a girl wearing boy's clothes, nor do I want to be a girl who presents as a boy... I just want to be a person who is recognized as a person. That's how I'm most comfortable. *I'm just a person wearing people clothes...*[33]

The bold assertion of being "just a person wearing people clothes" strikes at the heart of any attempt to analyze *genderqueer* solely in terms of external perceptions. Genderqueer persons differ widely with respect to their assigned sex, perceived sex, and whether or not they function within traditionally masculinized or feminized gender roles. If anything holds them in common with respect to gender presentation, it is only a general rejection of having their presentation interpreted through a binary lens.[34] But I will get to this in §4.

3.2 An Internalist Approach

If looking only to external features will not provide an adequate analysis of *genderqueer*, what about looking to internal features? Perhaps

an internalist approach, or an approach on which *genderqueer* is understood as a group of persons with particular psychological features, has more promise. In favor of this approach, it at least appears to align nicely with what is by far the most common popular definition of being genderqueer as identifying as genderqueer.[35] If we assume 'identification' is best understood as a wholly internal feature—i.e., a psychological state that an individual can be in without any external manifestations—then an internalist approach to *genderqueer* would be on the right track. I'll propose in §4 that we should prefer a different, political model of *genderqueer*. But let's examine the merits of an internalist account.

The first and most important question for an internalist approach to genderqueer is *what* internal features we are referring to when we talk about 'gender identity'. Since the concept of gender identity–and in particular, genderqueer identity–is used to determine the extension of *genderqueer*, it is crucial to understand what genderqueer identity would amount to. What's more, as Jenkins (2018) points out, the most common 'folk' definition of gender identity–"a sense of oneself as a man, woman, or some other gender"–does not appear promising. Jenkins writes:

> [M]any people who use the language of gender identity hold...the view that gender terms such as 'man' and 'woman' ought to be understood in terms of gender identity: [e.g....] ...to be a woman *is* to identify as a woman (or, to have a female gender identity)... The combination of this view with the folk definition of gender identity gives rise to a circularity: someone who asks what it means to say that a certain person 'has a female gender identity' will be told that it means that that person has a sense of herself 'as a woman'—but if the questioner then asks

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32. For example, Weiss (2018) quotes Kelley Cantrell as saying, "I wish that people wouldn't automatically use she/her pronouns just because of how I present... They need to stop gendering people's presentations". As Naomi Scheman pointed out to me, the plea to end gendering based on presentation is important, as it reveals a political stance that—intentionally or not—has implications for *everyone's* gender.

33. Hesse (2014), my emphasis.

34. See also "Gender Can Be Both Liberating And Stifling At The Same Time", a video by Howell (2018), in which one interviewee comments, "Just because I put on lipstick doesn't mean I am one thing or the other, because someone decided a piece of paint 'belonged' to a gender".

35. The language of 'gender identity' as a determiner of one's gender—and, in particular, of being genderqueer, is standard within trans-friendly contexts. See Weiss (2018) and Talusan (2017), as well as genderqueer networking platforms such as http://genderqueer.me or http://beyondthebinary.co.uk.

what a 'woman' is, they will be told that a woman is 'a person with a female gender identity'.[36]

Jenkins's point about 'woman' similarly applies to 'genderqueer'. The combination of two popular notions—that being genderqueer is identifying as genderqueer, and identifying as genderqueer is being genderqueer—leaves us in a hopeless and unhelpful circularity. Whatever it means to identify as genderqueer–if indeed this is the basis for understanding the category *genderqueer*, must be something substantive.

Within analytic philosophy, a few internalist proposals have emerged with more substantive notions of gender identity.[37] At first, this substantive internalism might seem to worryingly essentialize gender by pointing to a mysterious, innate sense of one's own gender that exists independently of external social factors. But in fact, philosophical accounts of gender identity avoid this worry: Gender identity, on these accounts, *is* internal, but it is based on internal ways of relating to societies' gender norms, structures, and interpretive guides.[38] One one approach, defended by Jennifer McKitrick (2015), someone's gender in a given context is determined by their *behavioral dispositions*, given how those behaviors—if manifested—would be socially interpreted. In a given context, McKitrick argues, someone who is disposed to behave in ways that others would take to be indicative of a woman, has a woman's gender identity (and so, is a woman) in that context.[39] Like

McKitrick, Jenkins's (2016, 2018) account of gender identity emphasizes an individual's relationship to external gender norms. Jenkins proposes a 'norm relevance' account, on which an individual's gender identity is determined by what gender-specific norms they experience as relevant to them.[40] That is, for example, someone has a female gender identity—and so is a woman—on this account if they experience norms associated with women in their social context as relevant to them. Moreover, norm relevance can take on a variety of forms. A female gender identity for one person may amount to feeling like others should refer to her with feminine pronouns and a certain name, whereas for someone else, it may amount to having the sense that her physical features ought to be a certain way—e.g., ought to include a vulva, and not a penis.[41]

Gender identities, on both approaches, have personal and social elements: They are personal insofar as they concern internal dispositions or senses of norm relevance, but social insofar as these dispositions or senses must relate to norms or behaviors that are externally, socially associated with a certain gender group.[42] Both McKitrick's and Jenkins's approaches could be applied to 'genderqueer identity'. In fact, Jenkins explicitly proposes one such application: someone is genderqueer iff they do not consider the norms socially associated with men, nor the norms socially associated with women, to be relevant to them.[43] To illustrate, Jenkins uses the example of a building that contains only men's and women's toilets. Someone who is nonbinary, because they

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36. Jenkins (2018, 714).
37. On Bettcher's (2009, 2013) view, a person's gender is based on existential self-identification, which I understood as based on who one "takes themself to be, really", and is bound up with one's "reasons for acting". Depending on the interpretation of Bettcher's view, it either runs into many of the same concerns I raise for McKitrick's (2015) and Jenkins's (2016) accounts when applied to *genderqueer*, or else is a view related to, but more individualistic and less political than, the positive account I offer in §4.
38. See, e.g., McKitrick (2015, 2580) for an explicit rejection of the essentialism worry.
39. The precise formulation of this idea is as follows: "x is gender G iff x has (sufficiently many, sufficiently strong) dispositions D1...Dn to behave in ways B1...Bn in situations S1...Sn, and the relevant social group considers behaving

in ways B1...Bn in situations S1...Sn to be G". (McKitrick 2015, 2581).
40. Jenkins (2018).
41. Jenkins (2016, 413).
42. Jenkins (2016, 412). Jenkins here follows Haslanger, and understands gender groups on an externalist account.
43. Jenkins uses the term 'nonbinary' rather than genderqueer, and more formally puts this idea as follows: "S has a nonbinary gender identity iff S's internal 'map' is neither formed so as to guide someone marked as a woman through the social or material realities that are, in that context, characteristic of women as a class nor formed to guide someone classed as a man through the social or material realities that are, in that context, characteristic of men as a class." (Jenkins 2016, 411, fn 40). See also Jenkins (2018).

do not consider the norms governing social spaces for either men or women as relevant to them, may "have *all* toilets marked as uncomfortable places fraught with stress and danger".[44]

The first thing to notice is that Jenkins's norm relevancy approach to male and female gender identity differs dramatically from the approach to nonbinary gender identity. So long as someone considers *some* of the female-coded (or male-coded) norms as relevant to them, they have a female (or male) gender identity.[45] After all, the number of men and women who take *all* of the norms associated with men or women as relevant to them is likely few and far between. But notice that this feature is taken to immediately constrain the proposed definition of nonbinary (or, in my terms, genderqueer) identities: according to Jenkins, it cannot simply be the case that nonbinary persons do not take *some* or even *most* of the binary-coded norms as relevant to them. Rather, they must take *none* of those norms as relevant to them. Here, the definition begins to generate a serious worry.

Genderqueer persons frequently maintain, if only out of necessity, a sense of what binary-coded norms are relevant for them in spaces where there is no alternative to these norms. One initial place to see this is in the dual identities of some genderqueer persons; that is, those who do not *exclusively* identify as a man or as a woman, but who claim both a genderqueer *as well as* male and/or female identity. Testimony suggests that one common motivation for this dual identification is a recognition of the inescapability of binary norms: The gender norms applied by the state and other persons impact one's ability to move through the world. In our current society, saturated in exclusive, binary divisions, there is no possibility of never taking gender norms to be relevant to oneself. Public spaces, such as toilets and locker rooms, legal institutions, social clubs, language, and marketing, to name but a few places, are heavily gendered, and gendered not only according

to the binary, but in a way that leaves someone attempting to navigate these structure *no choice* but to pick a side. Moreover, because all (or nearly all) genderqueer persons were socialized as either men or women, and often are perceived as men or women, only self-applying the norms of "a person wearing people clothes" is not possible. Genderqueer persons who wish to navigate the world at all, much less safely, have no option but to see binary-norms as more or less relevant to them.[46]

Weiss (2018) captures this sentiment when explaining their decision to identify both as non-binary and as a woman.

> I personally identify as a non-binary woman... [T]o me, this identity acknowledges both that I don't have an innate identification with any gender and that I've been socialized as a woman.[47]

Weiss is not alone. In the same article, they interview 24-year-old Rey Noble, who also identifies as nonbinary and as a woman. According to Noble, this is to "acknowledge that she loves her female-coded body but doesn't always feel it accurately represents her".[48] Similarly, Laurie Penny, a UK-based journalist, articulates having distinct but compatible reasons for identifying as genderqueer and as a woman. "My identity is more complex than simply female or male," Penny writes, "but...I am a woman politically, because that's how people see me and that's how the state treats me".[49]

Weiss's, Noble's, and Penny's testimonies speak to the inescapable relevance of gender norms. At this point, someone might suggest that genderqueer identity perhaps is marked by a feeling of *discomfort* or *inauthenticity* with (complying with) those norms. But this dramatically over-generates: Many non-genderqueer men or women also feel discomfort and inauthenticity regarding the gender norms that they are

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44. Jenkins (2018). Emphasis in original.
45. Jenkins thinks that someone could have, for this reason, more than one gender identity in a given context.

46. Andler (2017) raises similar worries for Jenkins's account of gender identity.
47. Weiss (2018).
48. Ibid.
49. Penny (2015).

socially coerced to obey.[50]

In addition to over-generating, though, it also under-generates. There is an additional reason why we should be skeptical of the idea that genderqueer persons do not take any gender norms to be relevant to themselves: Some people locate their genderqueer identity in their fluidity between different gender categories. More specifically, this testimony suggests that some genderqueer individuals experience various gender-specific norms as relevant or apt in different contexts. For example, in Galupo, et al's (2018) study of genderqueer persons, many participants described their gender in ways that include, but are not bound by only one of the binary options:

> My gender changes. Sometimes I am female, sometimes I am a boy, sometimes I am both, and sometimes I am neither. (genderfluid)

> Sometimes I feel like I am completely a man. Sometimes I feel like I am mostly a man, with some woman/agender mixed in. (demiguy)

> I can switch in between a variety of genders (man, woman, androgyne, agender, third gender, polygender, etc.) day by day. (genderfluid)[51]

In short, genderqueer persons sometimes *do* identify as women and/or men, in Jenkins's sense. In fact, Galupo et al explicitly observe that "[genderqueer] participants' gender identit[ies] could not be dis-

cretely conceptualized as 'male', 'female', 'neither', or 'both'".[52] Insofar as Jenkins takes the neither approach, then, the approach does not align with genderqueer individuals' descriptions of their own internal states.[53]

Setting aside a norm-relevancy approach to genderqueer identity, then, what about a dispositional approach? Why not think that being genderqueer is less about what norms one considers relevant to oneself, but rather about what one is internally disposed *to do*—e.g., use gender neutral pronouns, assert "I am genderqueer", and so on? Such an approach might amount to something along the following lines:

> S is genderqueer in a context C iff S is sufficiently disposed to behave in C in ways that would (in trans-friendly contexts) mark S as genderqueer.[54]

What might the behaviors be? On one interpretation, the relevant behaviors for being *genderqueer* would be different in content, but not in kind from those for being *men* and *women*. That is, the behavioral dispositions relevant to being genderqueer would include dispositions toward things like "modes of dress, posture and mannerisms, productive and leisure time activities, styles of communication and social interaction".[55] But, as we already saw in §3.1, no such external behaviors decidedly mark someone as genderqueer.

Given this, the scope of relevant behaviors is significantly constrained. In fact, it seems that the only behaviors that would decidedly mark someone as genderqueer in a trans-friendly context is them (sincerely) *saying so*.[56] On this account then, someone is genderqueer so

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50. Recall that Jenkins (2018, 729) suggests that a nonbinary person would uniquely feel that gender-marked toilets are "uncomfortable places fraught with stress and danger". Notice this would also be true for a gender nonconforming woman or man, an androgynous woman or man, or perhaps even a gender conforming woman or man who dislikes being in gender-marked spaces.
51. Galupo et al. (2018, 12). Participants' preferred gender labels are in parentheses.

52. Ibid., 18.
53. Ibid.
54. This proposal is an adaption from McKitrick (2015), who does not emphasize trans-friendly contexts or discuss genderqueer persons. Without this emphasis, the proposal would, for reasons that are hopefully clear, be even further off target: In dominant context, *no* behaviors would mark someone as genderqueer, because this category is not recognized in those contexts.
55. McKitrick (2015), 2581.
56. Although not framed dispositionally, a similar idea is floated by Riki

long as they are sufficiently disposed to assert that they do not exclusively identify as a man or a woman: e.g., 'I am genderqueer', 'I am nonbinary', 'I am gender fluid'.[57]

Here, two further worries arise. The first concerns the manifestation conditions for these dispositions. I suspect that much of the motivation for adopting a dispositionalist account of genderqueer identity is gaining the ability to count persons as genderqueer even when these dispositions are masked or counteracted by social costs, such as the threat of bullying, discrimination, being fired, assaulted, or simply misunderstood. Rather than seeing someone as genderqueer only in contexts where they in fact say so, a dispositionalist approach allows us to count as genderqueer anyone who *would*—under certain conditions—assert that they are genderqueer. Someone who is prevented from openly asserting a genderqueer identity due social costs, then, can still be genderqueer.

With this in mind, the thought goes, we should privilege how that person *would* be, were it less-or-not-at-all socially costly to be genderqueer. From here, we arrive at the idea that someone is genderqueer just in case, *were the social costs sufficiently low*, they *would* assert that they do not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. But what are these conditions? If they are ones where *some* social costs remain, then it would seem to prevent those with low risk tolerance from being genderqueer: Some people who might be willing to assert a genderqueer identity under *no* social costs might be unwilling to do so even in the face of small or infrequent costs. So leaving any social costs in the manifestation conditions means that only some people, but not others, can have a genderqueer identity.

Suppose, then, the manifestation conditions are ones with *no* so-

cial costs. First, it seems likely that, in such a scenario, many persons who currently and comfortably identify exclusively within the binary might begin to assert other, nonbinary identities.[58] That is, if being nonbinary were completely socially accepted, such that no difficulties or prejudices faced those resisting binary categorization, why think that those who, under actual conditions, do *not* consider themselves nonbinary, would continue to do so? Regardless of which way we go, then, it seems this view gets the extension of *genderqueer* wrong even by its own lights: It will either exclude those with a low risk tolerance, or extend the category to persons who in fact take themselves to have a binary identity, but who might think otherwise in lieu of social repercussions.

The second, and I think even more important worry for this dispositional account is that it metaphysically *trivializes* being genderqueer. Regardless of the manifestation conditions for a dispositional account, we've seen that the most plausible behaviors that, when manifested, would be socially considered determinative of being genderqueer are assertions that one is genderqueer. But in that case, being genderqueer amounts to nothing more than a linguistic construction: There is nothing *substantively* different between someone who is and someone who is not genderqueer. The only difference is that one, but not the other, is disposed to use certain terms to describe themself. On this dispositional account, no difference other than this is necessary (or sufficient) for being genderqueer. It is hard to see, for this reason, what the content of such terms might be, or what might be the difference between 'sincere' and 'non-sincere' assertion of identity. 'Genderqueer', 'nonbinary', 'agender', etc. seem reduced to empty (or at least opaque) labels.

It may turn out, in the end, that genderqueer identity amounts to nothing more than self-describing using certain terms. But if possible, we should—and I think *can*—do better. To that end, I turn now to a new proposal: *genderqueer* as a *critical gender kind*.

Wilchins (2017, 101): "With nonbinary people, it is the identifying act of saying one is 'nonbinary'...which is central to identity".

57. I leave open that assertion occurs in many ways, including writing, sign language, etc. Many nonbinary youth depend on social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube, to communicate their gender identification. See Singh (2013, 698).

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58. The same point holds for the scenario with very low social costs, but is more obvious when all costs are removed.

4. A New Approach: Critical Gender Kinds

What explains being genderqueer? Is asserting one's preferred gender label sufficient? Is it necessary? Is gender non-conformity or androgyny sufficient, even if not necessary? These questions are complicated by the fact that, as we've seen, purely external factors are insufficient for understanding *genderqueer*, and appealing instead to gender identity only pushes us to ask what might constitute a genderqueer identity. While it is tempting to think of this identity in terms of wholly internal features, such as a sense of norm relevance or a disposition to claim membership in a category, we've seen why these approaches fall short. So what could the difference between genderqueer and non-genderqueer persons amount to?

The solution, I suggest, lies in understanding the category *genderqueer* not in terms of external or internal features of individuals, but rather in terms of features of a collective—in particular, features that combine both external (political) and internal (motivational) components. I suggest that *genderqueer* is best understood as a category whose members collectively destabilize the idea that *men* and *women* are discrete, exclusive, and exhaustive gender categories, and do so because of members' felt or desired gender categorization outside this exclusive and exhaustive binary.[59]

Importantly, I do not assume that genderqueer persons will be successful in destabilizing this axis. Nor do I assume that each member of *genderqueer* destabilizes this axis, much less do so in a way that is intelligible to others. For an individual to be genderqueer, on my view, only requires that they take part in a collective resistance. While I say more about this below, I will not try to give precise conditions for what this taking part requires. In part, this is because I think there are no such precise conditions; certainly, there are not context-independent condi-

tions. Primarily, though, it is because my central target for analysis is the kind *genderqueer*, and not the individual property *being genderqueer*.

I should pause here to make clear a background methodological commitment. It is common to conflate the project of analyzing a gender kind with the project of analyzing its membership conditions—indeed, they are treated as one within existing externalist and internalist models of gender kinds.[60] I think this is a metaphysical error. It is already well recognized that explanatory individualism, or the theory that the explanation for a social kind or phenomenon reduces to facts about individuals, is typically not an apt way to approach social ontology.[61] Just as an analysis of *Christianity* would be different than an analysis of what it takes for an individual to be a Christian, so too, an analysis of *genderqueer* is distinct from (though, of course, related to) an analysis of what it takes for an individual to be genderqueer. To the extent that I am interested in individuals, it is in service of understanding how, as a collective, these individuals resist the gender binary.

What is the best way to understand a gender kind of this sort? I propose that, to do so, we must recognize a new type of gender kind: a *critical gender kind*.

> **Critical Gender Kinds**: For a given kind X, X is a *critical gender kind* relative to a given society iff X's members collectively destabilize one or more core elements of the dominant gender ideology in that society.[62]

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59. Here I disagree with Halperin (1995, 62), who argues that while identities like 'queer' create solidarity outside of heteronormativity, it must be "an identity without an essence." A collective function of ideological destabilization can (but need not) provide an essence for such identities.

60. A more general assumption of this sort frequently appears within metaphysics more broadly. For example, metaphysical account of *persons* or *causation* typically offer only an account of what it takes for something to be an instance of a person or of causation. I reserve judgment, here, as to the merits of this assumption in other areas of metaphysics.

61. See, e.g., Epstein (2009) and Haslanger (2016).

62. By 'society', I roughly mean communities of persons with shared clusters of beliefs, concepts, and attitudes that give rise to concrete social practices and structures. These clusters facilitate social interaction; they make it possible to "interpret and organize information and coordinate action, thought, and affect" (Haslanger 2016, 126). They also can be individuated with more or less fine grain. By 'dominant gender ideology', I mean the beliefs, concepts, and attitudes toward gender that have the most social power within a society, and that

Note that this definition leaves open the source of this destabilization. I take it that collective destabilizing can be motivated or caused in many ways. For our current purpose of analyzing *genderqueer*, I want to specifically highlight at least two importantly distinct, but compatible modes of destabilizing: *principled* and *existential*. We can understand these as follows:

Principled Destabilizing: Principled destabilizing of dominant gender ideology is destabilizing that stems from or otherwise expresses individuals' social or political commitments regarding gender norms, practices, and structures.

Existential Destabilizing: Existential destabilizing of dominant gender ideology is destabilizing that stems from or otherwise expresses individuals' felt or desired gender roles, embodiment, and/or categorization.

Principled destabilizing is a common practice, shared among a variety of activists, allies, and members of gender and sexual minority groups. For example, those who speak out against sexist, transphobic, or heteronormative practices, and do so from their commitment to gender or sexual equality, engage in principled destabilizing of dominant gender ideology. Attending Take Back the Night or gay pride marches, voting for politicians who support trans rights, donating to organizations that advocate for women's reproductive rights, using gender-neutral pronouns, or having a gender non-conforming aesthetic are just a few examples of principled actions that are open to everyone. Many engage in these actions not (or not only) because of their own felt or desired gender role, embodiment, or categorization, but (also) because they have values and beliefs that commit them to resist dominant gender norms, practices, and structures. These persons are, in my view, jointly engaged in principled destabilizing.

More can and should be said about principled destabilizing. But because my account of *genderqueer* relies on the notion of *existential* destabilizing, I've described the phenomenon of principled destabilizing primarily for the purpose of contrast. Unlike its sibling, existential destabilizing stems from one's felt or desired place with respect to gender roles, embodiment, or categorization—typically, one that is deviant given the practices, norms, and structures that arise from and sustain dominant gender ideology.

To more sharply distinguish between these modes of destabilizing, suppose you meet two persons who use the gender neutral pronouns 'they/them'. One does not consider themself nonbinary in any sense, but uses these pronouns because they are committed to making English more hospitable for nonbinary persons.[63] The other uses these pronouns because they consider themself genderqueer, and so take both 'she' and 'he' to misdescribe their claimed gender categorization. In this case, it may be that both persons take part in principled destabilizing of the dominant belief that everyone is either a man or a woman. But only the second person takes part in existential destabilizing of this belief. And this is because the second, but not the first, engages in the relevant behavior—here, use of gender neutral pronouns—due to their felt or desired categorization outside of the gender binary. In line with this example, I propose that the key mark of existential destabilizing is its source: namely, subjectively felt or desired gender role, embodiment, or categorization. And I propose that the mark of existential destabilizing in the case of *genderqueer* is felt or desired gender categorization specifically.[64]

The distinction between principled and existential resistance helps us articulate the difference between allies and members of gender

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impose (often unreflectively) their shared epistemic, conceptual, and affective systems onto less powerful communities.

63. See Dembroff & Wodak (2018) for further argument on this point.
64. Of course, this is compatible with the observation that many of the members of this kind also engage in existential destabilizing due to felt or desired embodiment or roles. However, I here take seriously the claim—made by many genderqueer persons—that there are not particular embodiments or social roles that belong to *genderqueer*.

kinds such as *genderqueer* and *trans*: While both resist dominant gender ideology, members of these kinds resist (at least in part) due to felt or desired gender categorization that deviates from dominant expectations, norms, and assumptions. That is, who they take or desire themselves to be is itself incompatible with or otherwise does not conform to the categorization imposed on them by persons operating under dominant gender ideology. Importantly, though, this is not a purely internalistic notion of *genderqueer*: an internal relationship to gender categories is only one piece of the characterization. In addition to this internal relationship, and because of it, members of *genderqueer* engage in collective and existential destabilizing. Moreover, by including 'desired' alongside 'felt', I hope to capture a broader range of phenomenological states with respect to gender categorization than those emphasized by Jenkins and McKitrick. This desire could be based on political (or perhaps religious) motivations, in addition to an internal sense of gender authenticity, relevance, belonging, or dysphoria.[65]

To be clear, critical gender kinds are not the only gender kinds whose members stand in political relationships to dominant gender ideology. In my view, which I cannot fully defend here, all persons stand in relationships—both principled and existential—to gender ideology. When these relationships function to restabilize or maintain dominant ideology, we can describe those who manifest them as belonging to *non-critical* gender kinds:

Non-Critical Gender Kinds: For a given kind X, X is a *non-critical gender kind* relative to a given society iff X's members collectively restabilize one or more elements of the dominant gender ideology in that society.

As above, we can divide restabilizing into both principled and existential modes. Someone who considers themself a man and on this

basis adopts hegemonic masculine roles and embobdiment (relational to his class, race, etc.) takes part in existential restabilizing of the dominant idea that men ought to behave and appear according to hegemonic masculine norms. In contrast, someone who considers themself a woman but uses slurs to describe gay or effeminate men, and does so on the basis of beliefs about how men ought to behave, takes part in principled restabilizing of this dominant idea.[66]

To be clear: in my view, individuals can and do belong to both critical and non-critical gender kinds. The critical/non-critical distinction is not intended as another binary into which individuals can be exclusively sorted. In fact, I suspect it is unavoidable to belong to both types of kinds: We all belong to a variety of political gender kinds—critical *and* non-critical—as well as externalist and internalist gender kinds. My focus here is on *genderqueer* as a particular, critical gender kind. But my account does not preclude that members of *genderqueer* simultaneously belong to many more gender kinds.

Of course, saying that *genderqueer* is a critical gender kind is nowhere near the level of specificity needed to understand this kind. Even once we narrow our scope to so-called Western societies, we find there are many critical gender kinds, and they can be identified to various degrees of specificity, relative to how fine-grained one describes (an aspect of) the dominant gender ideology.[67] To draw this out, and further motivate thinking of *genderqueer* as a critical gender kind, let's consider the gender ideology that dominates in Western societies. Broadly speaking, a vast number of social groups resist this ideology: to name but a name, *trans men*, *trans women*, *abortion rights activists*, *butch dykes*, *drag queens*, *genderqueers*, *stay-at-home dads*, *female powerlifters*, *tomboys*, *feminists*, and on and on. That is, in both princi-

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65. Thanks to Alicia Fowler for alerting me to the possibility of religiously motivated resistance to the binary axis. The example of religious principles motivating nonbinary category-claims is a good example of nested critical gender kinds.

66. Insofar as this person's behavior may also be motivated by her beliefs about her own gender role with respect to (e.g.) encouraging male masculinity, she may also thereby take part in existential restabilizing of this idea.

67. Throughout this paper, I use 'Western' as an imperfect shorthand, while also recognizing that this term is flawed—see, e.g, Appiah (2016). If the reader prefers to talk about, e.g., 'the Global North' or 'postcolonial societies', they can substitute their preferred term.

pled and existential ways (among others), multiple groups resist normative, gendered social expectations regarding their bodies, gender roles, or categorizations.

On one way of thinking about critical gender kinds, then, all of these various and sundry groups might be classified together within one kind:

> **Western Gender Defiers**: *Western gender defiers* is a critical gender kind, whose members collectively resist one or more elements of dominant gender ideology in Western societies.

In at least two ways, this definition is not particularly illuminating. First, how might one go about deciding who does or does not count as a gender defier without a more detailed analysis of what composes the dominant gender ideology in question? Second, with respect to *genderqueer*, if genderqueer persons are a subset of gender defiers, this does not illuminate what is unique to *genderqueer*. It seems that, in order to give an analysis of *genderqueer*, we need a better idea of *what aspect* of dominant gender ideology genderqueer persons resist, as well as *how* they do so. All in all, more details are needed.

To this end, I propose a more (but still not very) fine-grained picture of Western dominant gender ideology.[68] On this picture, the ideology can be thought of as having four distinct, but interconnected and mutually reinforcing axes: the binary axis, the biological axis, the teleological axis, and the hierarchical axis. While no one of these axes can be fully understood apart from the others, for the sake of analysis we can somewhat artificially take each individually:
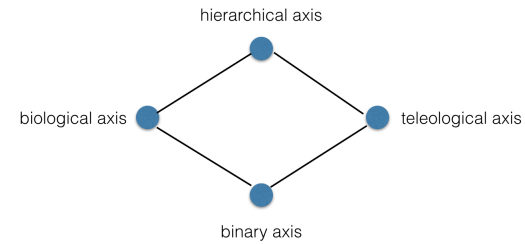
The binary axis: The genders *men* and *women* are binary, discrete, immutable, exclusive, and exhaustive.[69]

The biological axis: Every person essentially has a biological sex that, by virtue of nature, grounds (metaphysically explains/defines) their gender. By their natures, men have a male biological sex and women have a female biological sex.[70]

The teleological axis: Someone's gender, by virtue of nature, determines a range of social, psychological, and physical features—e.g., sexual desire, occupation, family role, attire, comportment, personality features—that they either must (are determined to) or ought to have. Males naturally must or ought to have masculine features, females naturally must or ought to have feminine features.

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68. This picture significantly diverges from, but was inspired by a description of "the postcolonial understanding of gender" in Tan (manuscript).

69. The binary axis provides the conceptual framework that constrains and conjoins the content of the biological and teleological axes. For this reason, it is a mistake to think that genderqueer persons reject the idea that most persons have, e.g., penises or vaginas: In rejecting the binary axis, they are instead challenging the conceptual framework underlying the biological, teleological, and hierarchical axes. See Dembroff (2018).

70. In most (but not all) cases, biological sex is understood as a feature determined by or reducible to external genitalia. Notably, combined with the binary axis, this axis erases persons born with genitalia that defies exclusive classification as male or female. This is not a shortcoming with my description of the axis; rather, my description accurately capture prevalent ideology that leads to the erasure of these persons, as well as unnecessary medical interventions on children born with so-called "ambiguous genitalia". See, e.g., Chase (1998) and Bettcher (2016).

The hierarchical axis: The biological and teleological features that are natural for men (as men) are incompatible with and more valuable than the features that are natural for women (as women), and naturalness is more valuable than unnaturalness.[71]

All four axes together establish an ideology that exclusively divides bodies into two categories, polices these categories according to ideas of 'natural' biological and teleological features, and establishes a self-perpetuating hierarchy between them. This hierarchy, unsurprisingly, primarily privileges whose who can and do conform to norms of "natural" men. Within this framework, we could spell out a variety of critical gender kinds whose members collectively destabilize these axes.[72] For example, those persons who consistently claim categorization other than the gender they were assigned based on their natal genitalia—a property typically considered sufficient for being trans—collectively destabilize the biological axis. Similarly, butch lesbians, who defy social expectations with respect to gender presentation and sexuality, collectively destabilize the teleological assumption.[73]

I propose that *genderqueer* is best understood as a critical gender kind whose members collectively destabilize the binary axis. More specifically, I propose that its members destabilize the idea that they must belong to one of two discrete, exhaustive, and exclusive gender kinds (men/women): that is, binary kinds that do not overlap (discrete), account for all persons (exhaustive), and are such that one person cannot belong to both kinds (exclusive). Moreover, these members do so on the basis of a felt or desired gender categorization that is ontologically incompatible with the binary axis. We can put this more formally as follows:

Genderqueer: *Genderqueer* is a critical gender kind, such that its members have a felt or desired gender categorization that conflicts with the binary axis, and on this basis collectively destabilize this axis.[74]

On this proposed understanding of *genderqueer*, genderqueer persons collectively and existentially destabilize the binary axis. That is, this collective destabilizing is rooted in genderqueer persons' felt or desired gender classifications that conflict with the binary axis. This point is important because it demarcates *genderqueer* as a kind such that internal features (here, subjective relationship to gender categorization), as well as external features (here, collective ideological destabilizing) are required to adequately model this kind.

This dualistic feature brings a number of important implications. First, it suggests that *genderqueer* cannot exist in contexts where persons are so bereft of access to gender deviant presentations, concepts, and language that they are unable to perform speech acts and behaviors that would collectively destabilize the binary axis.[75] That is: I do

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71. First, here I follow, but make distinctions within, feminist theories on which gender within Western contexts is "traditionally assumed to be based on a binary, mandatory system that attributes social characteristics to sexed anatomy, with humans categorized from birth as male vs female based on their external genitalia" (Nagoshi, et al. 2012, 407, referencing Hausman (2001)). See Witt (2011), Frye (1983), and Wittig (1992) among many, many others for further discussion. The ideas that masculinity and femininity are oppositional and hierarchical is further developed in Serano (2016, 100—113) under the labels "oppositional sexism" and "traditional sexism". Second, note that other, intersecting social identities–such as race, class, sexuality, and disability—often disqualify or prevent persons from attaining these so-called "natural" features, rendering them "unnatural" and devalued.

72. While various targets of destabilizing are compatible, some groups treat them as exclusive. For example, one anti-trans activist position is that destabilizing the social axis is incompatible with destabilizing the biological and binary axes.

73. See, e.g., Rich (1980) and Halberstam (1998).

74. I do not mean to suggest that all genderqueer persons resist the binary axis under this theoretical guise. Most often, they simply reject the idea that they must be neatly and permanently categorized as either a man or woman—that they must comply with binary gender classification. This harkens to the familiar feminist point that "the personal is political": Even if a genderqueer person does not conceptualize (e.g.) use of gender neutral pronouns *as* political in nature, it is, as is using gender-specific pronouns.

75. Relatedly, it suggests that *genderqueer* will not exist in a world so ignorant of nonbinary persons that they cannot post a destabilizing threat to the binary

not think *genderqueer* is adequately captured solely in terms of internal features, such as a dislike of being gendered within the binary, or intentions to resist the binary axis. *Genderqueer* is not a merely psychological phenomenon. For one thing, this would overextend *genderqueer*. No doubt, many people who would not consider themselves (or be considered) genderqueer dislike being gendered within the binary, but have resigned themselves to it or otherwise accepted it as part of their lives. For another, this would remove the force of *queer* within *genderqueer*. If being genderqueer were simply in the head, a world functioning smoothly according to the binary axis, with no material challenges to this binary, could very well be a world full of genderqueer persons. This, to me, seems like a reductio: Resistance to gender binary systems requires more than thought and affect. This point aligns with genderqueer persons' description of being nonbinary as a way of "reject[ing] such [binary] systems that lead to harmful stereotypes and oppression" and "breaking down what it means to be a gendered person in the world".[76] Neither resistance nor breaking down others' assumptions occur merely within the head.[77]

Second, it suggests that *genderqueer* does not exist simply by virtue of there being a group of persons who adopt gender presentations, language, or behaviors that resist the binary axis. As seen in §3.1, external features are not sufficient for modeling *genderqueer.* Androgyny, use of gender neutral pronouns, and so on, are features that are not universal among genderqueer persons, and also are shared by many persons who identify within the binary. These features may well function to destabilize the binary axis, even when manifested by binary-identified persons, but for this reason, destabilizing the binary axis is not the only feature of *genderqueer*.

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axis. As evidenced by the fact that 'There are only two genders!' has become a right-wing rallying cry, that world is not our world.

76. Taluson (2017).

77. While I lack space to explore this here, this point suggests fruitful intersections between discussion of critical gender kinds and hermeneutical injustice, as described in Fricker (2007).

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, this dualistic analysis leaves space for variation within both the mental states accompanying felt or desired gender categorization outside of the binary, as well as the destabilizing actions collectively undertaken by genderqueer persons. The construction of binary gender kinds (*men/women*), the latitude individuals have within them, and how individuals are socialized into them, vary dramatically across intersections with other social identities, such as race, class, and disability. For this reason, my model intentionally leaves open that within the group of genderqueer persons, one can (and I suspect will) find a vast range of concepts about and attitudes towards these binary kinds, as well as strategies for resisting binary categorization.[78]

What is essential to *genderqueer*, I've proposed, is found at the intersection of external and internal features. In particular, it is collective, existential destabilizing of the binary axis. The actions making up this destabilizing are many: Again, there is no one, much less one *right* way to be genderqueer. Many forms of resisting binary categorization are possible. Some common strategies will be familiar: using gender neutral pronouns (and other terms, like the title 'Mx.'), cultivating gender non-conforming aesthetics, asserting nonbinary categorization (e.g., 'I am agender'), queering personal relationships, defying sexual binaries, and what I'll call 'space switching', or moving between male and female gendered spaces. While, again, no single one of these features is unique to or required in order to be genderqueer, they are familiar tools that genderqueer persons use to resist the idea that *they themselves* must comply with binary categorization. What they share— and what is, I think, a constraint on what groups can aptly be called "destabilizing"—is that they violate what Kate Bornstein (1994) calls the "gender rules": the binary set of norms that are imposed and enforced (via social practices, material structures, and various forms of gender policing) upon individuals according to the sexed interpreta-

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78. Thanks to Jorge Meneses for pressing me on this point.

tion of their bodies.[79] Violating these rules challenges or defies dominant gender practices and structures. As these practices and structures are many, so too are the possible modes of destabilizing, which we again can expect to vary widely across intersectional contexts and individuals. To name but a few:

1. **Gender neutral pronouns**: Communicating that one uses gender neutral pronouns (e.g., ze/zim/zis, they/them/theirs) rather than a gender-specific pronoun (e.g., he/him/his, she/her/hers).[80]

2. **Gender non-conforming aesthetics**: Gender presentations that violate cultural gendered expectations (e.g., cross-dressing, androgyny).[81]

3. **Gender categorization assertions**: Articulating one's own sense of gender kind membership (e.g., 'I am nonbinary', 'I am gender-fluid').

4. **Queering personal relationships**: Fluidity between or violation of traditional gender roles within personal relationships (e.g., taking on certain traditional female parenting roles as well as male roles,

gender play in sexual relationships).[82] [83]

5. **Eschewing sexuality binaries**: Identifying one's sexuality outside of the 'gay', 'straight', or 'bisexual' taxonomy, which is based on a binary gender system.[84]

6. **Space switching**: Fluidity between female and male coded material spaces (e.g., using both men's and women's bathrooms, moving between male and female friend groups).[85]

This list is by no means exhaustive of the many ways in which genderqueer people resist captivity within the gender binary.[86] My purpose is not to provide an exhaustive list of ways to be genderqueer, but rather to illustrate the dappled and diverse nature of genderqueer expression. While some of these expressions (e.g., assertion) will be more easily interpreted by others as resisting the binary axis, others (e.g., gender non-conformity) admit more ambiguity. Moreover, gen-

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79. This approach, I think, nicely aligns with genderqueers shared sense of ignoring and/or breaking gender rules. As one genderqueer person comments in Howell (2018): "I'm what people would be if gender rules didn't really exist."
80. And similarly for other gender neutral language—e.g., 'human' over 'man' or 'woman', 'parent' over 'mother' or 'father', or using a chosen, gender ambiguous name over one's birth name. The importance of generating gender neutral language in the service of breaking down the binary axis cannot, I think, be understated, given the close relationship between language and available concepts. See, e.g., Wittig (1992, 55): "We must produce a political transformation of the key concepts, that is of the concepts which are strategic for us. For there is another order of materiality, that of language, and language is worked upon from within by these strategic concepts".
81. Transgressive gender aesthetics are a long standing tradition of queering gender. Marjorie Garber (1992), for example, discusses transvestism as a way to create a crisis not only for the gender binary, but for the stability of gender categorization altogether. See also Chan (2017) for a discussion of bodybuilding as a genderqueer aesthetic.

82. Mo, a female-assigned genderqueer person describes this enactment of genderqueerness. "My feelings about my gender are not dependent on [how I am perceived]," they say, "but are more tied in to how I identify with people (men as much as women, and trans people of all kinds) and how I relate to my family (as a husband and dad), etc." Mo Interview (2018). (Mo's last name has been omitted to maintain anonymity.)
83. Any queering of sexual relationships is typically met with the strongest negative reaction from dominant culture. According to Murray Davis (1983), this is because these gender violations directly challenge others' pervasive reliance on binary sexual norms to organize their lives. Cited in Bornstein (1994, 72).
84. Nagoshi et al. (2012) provides qualitative empirical data concerning the close relationship between gender and sexual identities. At one genderqueer participant, AJ, reported, "I identify as queer, as my sexual identity... I don't really see that there really is a binary. So I wouldn't even say bisexual, because that's still acknowledging that there's a binary system." (417). For further empirical discussion, see Bradford et al. (2018, 5). See also Dembroff (2016) for philosophical discussion on the relationship between gender and sexual identity.
85. Like all of the above, space switching is a way of breaking and also fluidly navigating binary gender rules: "[Fluidity across gender rules generates] the ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number of genders for any length of time, at any rate of change. Gender fluidity recognises no borders or rules of gender" (Bornstein 1994, 52).
86. For empirical data on the various strategies toward genderqueer expression, see Richard et al. (2016).

derqueer persons will not adopt the same or perhaps any of these expressions at all times or spaces. Someone who uses gender neutral pronouns with friends may not do so at work. Someone who will assert a genderqueer identity in explicitly trans-inclusive groups may not do so outside of these groups. Genderqueer persons enact their identities in multiple ways because *genderqueer* does not present a new set of gender norms; it seeks to disrupt existing gender norms. That is: Genderqueer persons are not aiming to maintain a grey, androgynous middle ground between 'masculine' and 'feminine', 'man' and 'woman', but rather, to resist the cultural command to accept these binary categories as the categories by which one must be identified, labeled, and evaluated. This point is further reinforced by qualitative empirical research on genderqueer identities. Bradford et al (2018, 8) notes that while models of gender typically expect gender to be stable and predictable, "having the agency to make decisions regarding one's body and identity may be an integral component of genderqueer identity development"—one that often results in a "process of experimentation". Again, though, my focus is on the collective, destabilizing effects of this resistance, rather than on the effect of any single individual's expression of their felt or desired gender categorization. Given this, there is plenty of room underneath the umbrella of *genderqueer* for a variety of expressions.

In closing, I want to draw out two key upshots of the proposed view. First, the category *genderqueer* is socially located. Because *genderqueer*, on my proposal, essentially involves destabilizing the binary axis, as understood within Western gender ideology, it is largely constrained to contexts where this ideology is dominant. This is because 'destabilizing', I take it, connotes at minimum a causal relationship. However, this is not to ignore a closely related kind—one whose members challenge, via destabilizing or not—the binary axis. Such a category would unify *genderqueer* with the variety of genders beyond *male* and *female* recognized in other societies, such as Indonesia's *waria*, Native American *two-spirit*, and Samoan *fa'afafine*. In this, we have the tools for finding important similarities and points of solidarity between critical gender

kinds in a given context with gender kinds across other contexts. We also thereby have a framework for interpreting common claims to the tune of "nonbinary persons have always existed everywhere". If we interpret 'nonbinary', in such a claim, as any group that challenges the binary axis, then we can look to any time or society to identify such persons. Alternatively, if we interpret it as concerning existential destabilizing of the binary axis, then our search will be constrained to contexts where this axis is dominant, pointing to important differences between *genderqueer*, as here defined, and categories such as *waria*.

Second, insofar as I have described *genderqueer* in terms of destabilizing the binary axis, one might worry that *being genderqueer*, on my proposal, requires that an individual must—to some extent and in some context—externalize resistance to this axis.[87] No doubt, some will find this result unpalatable, for reasons discussed in §3.2. Many people prefer to think of being genderqueer as something that can be wholly internal, such that someone could be entirely closeted and remain genderqueer. This internalized approach is reified by common narratives of "discovering" or "realizing" that one is genderqueer, as opposed to "choosing to be" or "becoming" genderqueer. At the same time, these narratives are counterbalanced by other, also common narratives such as, "I [finally] get to be who I want to be", or "I...try to get to a place where I can safely be myself."[88] One might worry that my account precludes those in hostile environments with heavy costs of defying gender rules from being genderqueer.

In response, I first want to again emphasize that my project primarily concerns the category *genderqueer* and not the individual property of *being genderqueer*. It may well be that, while the category essentially concerns political resistance, external resistance is not required of each and every member of this category. Consider, for analogy, the category

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87. My proposal might, in this sense, be thought in the spirit of Butler's (1990) "symbolic interactionism", or the idea that an individual's gender is created an sustained through "reflecting back images of the self as object" (Hird 2002, 585).
88. Howell (2018), Brehob (2018).

L.A. Dodgers fans. Presumably, this category is only properly understood as a social phenomenon—a collective of people that support the Dodgers by attending games, buying merchandise, and so on. This, however, does not mean that in order for an individual to belong to this category, they *must* engage in socially perceived fan-like behaviors. Perhaps it is sufficient that they themselves are aware of their support for the Dodgers, even if they keep this a secret for fear of retribution from their San Francisco Giants-loving friends.

To be honest, I myself am not convinced that internal states should be considered sufficient for being genderqueer: I tentatively suggest this "way out" for those who demand that they must be. I myself lean toward the thought that some external expression is required for being genderqueer, keeping in mind that expression is multiply realizable and need not not gain uptake.[89] Indeed, there are myriad ways that someone could express felt or desired categorization without incurring heavy social costs, even in hostile environments. While pronoun pins, cultivating androgyny, or simply asserting one's identity are all clear ways of resisting binary categorization, nothing so loud is required by my proposal, which emphasizes collective over individual action. As one agender person put this, "[S]ometimes when we dress ourselves, or when we find...moments of authenticity, they are acts of resistance even when they're small".[90] My proposal leaves these "small acts of resistance" open to genderqueer persons, and does not require social uptake of any given individual's expression, even if some degree of social uptake of its members' collective expressions is required for the category's existence.

Social costs nevertheless could prevent someone from any external expression of felt or desired nonbinary identification. A common interpretation of this situation is that such a person is "truly" genderqueer, and unjustly prevented from self-expression. In contrast, I am tempted

to read the situation as one in which someone is unjustly prevented from being genderqueer. Referring to "closeted" genderqueers—rather than people who are unwillingly forced into binary categorization—downplays both the power of social forces over our access to social identities, as well as how oppressive that power can be. Someone who is forced to comply with the binary axis is, by my lights, prevented by an unjust social system from being genderqueer—the cost of resistance is untenable. This is not merely a stifling of self-expression, but a stifling of self-realization: If *genderqueer* is centrally about destabilizing the binary axis, oppressive social factors have the potential to prevent its realization.[91] In contexts where someone wants to resist binary categorization, but faces untenable costs of doing so, the central injustice is not, I think, a lack of recognition. Rather, it is a lack of freedom with respect to one's ability to resist gender categorization. Emily Brehob, who identifies as intersex and nonbinary, describes being caught in such a situation:

> Now that I live in Texas, I find it more difficult, not less, to walk the line of affirming my identity to myself while remaining safe... I find myself reverting to the mean—growing my hair long, letting it slide when people call me a woman... Is my identity even real if I don't express it... There's something incredibly powerful—revolutionary, even—about challenging someone's understanding of gender with your very existence.[92]

Understanding *genderqueer* as a critical gender kind whose members collectively destabilize the binary axis helps us understand the experiences of persons like Brehob. *Genderqueer* is not simply in the head: It challenges dominant gender ideology with its "very existence". To understand this gender kind, we needed a new model—one that captures the interplay between ideological destabilization and felt or desired categorization. I've proposed one such model, and no doubt there

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89. Dembroff & Saint-Croix (2019) refer to this combination of internalized and externalized identity as "agential identity", or the bridge between self- and social-perception.
90. Howell (2018)

91. See Dembroff's (forthcoming) discussion of "ontological oppression".
92. Brehob (2018).

are others. But if one thing is clear, it is that if we are to understand this cultural revolution, we need new concepts, new language, and new metaphysics. Armed with these tools, we can join Riki Wilchins in wondering if we are "unconsciously and finally treading towards the end of gender categories as we know them."[93] Either way, I agree with Wilchins: "It will be fun finding out".[94] [95]

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93. Wilchins (2017, 102).
94. Ibid.
95. Many thanks to Matt Andler, Elizabeth Barnes, Joanna Blake-Turner, Michael Della Rocca, Brian Earp, Alicia Fowler, Daniel Greco, Austen Hall, Katharine Jenkins, Sam Lebens, Moya Mapps, Laurie Paul, Cat Saint-Croix, Naomi Scheman, Yuan Yuan, the students in my Fall 2018 Feminist Philosophy course, and audiences at MIT, Minds of Our Own 2018, University of St. Andrews, Tufts, University of Illinois at Chicago, Rutgers, Yale, and the University of Nottingham for helpful feedback on earlier versions of this paper.

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