Being a woman and wanting to be a woman: an application of subject matters, questions and FDE

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Abstract: I provide a new way of thinking of questions using an expanded space of FDE worlds. This allows both for non-exclusive and non-exhaustive answers to questions concerning one's gender identity. Further, and most crucially for the purposes of this paper, it allows for a new, more general definition of question-inclusion that makes it possible to identify a new form of hermeneutical injustice. This form of injustice, I argue, affects trans people by keeping them in a prolonged state of gender questioning and confusion in which they only grasp the part of the question *Am I a member of gender G?* that corresponds to the question *Do I want to be a member of gender G?*.

Keywords: trans philosophy; gender; questions; impossible worlds; FDE.

1   Introduction

In the subject matters and inquisitive semantics literature (Lewis [1988]; Yablo [2014]; Ciardelli et al. [2019]) one often runs into the thought that the subject matter or question under discussion corresponding to whether, say, the conjunction $A \wedge B$ is true is determined by the answers we give to the questions of whether A is true and whether B is true. Take the example of the question *Is John going to the beach and to the cinema?*. Intuitively, for one to be able to answer this question, one should be able to answer two simpler questions in turn: *Is John going to the beach?* and *Is John going to the cinema?*. If one answers in the positive to both of them, then one should answer in the positive to the question concerning the conjunction, whereas if one answers in the negative to at least one of them, one should answer in the negative to the question concerning the conjunction.

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But unless we have an ideal language where atomic sentences express something like fundamental atomic facts unambiguously, we will have cases where intuitively to be able to answer a question as to whether an atomic sentence is true, we might need to be able to answer *other* questions, namely as to whether given sentences, possibly more complex, are true. For instance, it seems that if I want to be able to answer the question *Does Mark know that pigs don't fly?*, I should be able to answer the question *Does Mark believe that pigs don't fly?*, as knowledge implies belief. Or, to put another way, if I know the answer to the question concerning Mark's knowledge, then I also know the answer to the question concerning Mark's belief[1]. Yet, it's not uncontroversial that knowledge can be analytically decomposed into belief plus some other conditions (like, say, truth and justification). In particular, knowledge-first approaches in epistemology – which reject that such an analysis is possible or desirable – started by Williamson [2000], are very influential and perhaps even dominant in contemporary epistemology. We would here have a case where even though judgements concerning Mark's beliefs and knowledge are atomic, the questions they address nonetheless are connected: answering questions concerning the latter is therefore answering questions concerning the former.

One can express the previous thoughts more succinctly by saying that the question of whether $A \wedge B$ is the case contains the question of whether A is the case as a part. Standard approaches in the inquisitive semantics and subject-matters literature deal very well with question-inclusion of this kind. Yet, if the previous example is successful, there is another class of cases that the current accounts fail to model: inclusion between questions as to whether given propositions are the case where one is not constructible from the other with the help of the usual extensional Boolean connectives.

In what follows I want precisely to consider a novel framework by which we can shed light on how to characterize the parthood relation between such questions. In what follows, I elaborate on recent work on partial grasp of a question/subject matter which I have started in [Silva, 2024b], and I especially want to consider the social and political repercussions of such a theoretical framework. In a broader scope, I want to raise awareness to how ignoring the phenomenon of partial grasp on a question can incur several harms, and I want to further the understanding of this notion by extending it to the atomic case. In a more particular scope, I want to apply the framework in the context of transfeminism. For that purpose, I'll use the questions *Am I a woman?* and *Do I want to be a woman?* as a case study[2].

In doing so, I want to consider how a more oppressive society limits the capacity of individuals to explore their gender identities. In particular, I wish to

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[1]What is intended here is not some temporal order: just like one does not need to come to know each conjunct in moments prior to knowing the conjunction (one can learn the whole conjunction in one go), one need not learn first what Mark believes and then later learn what Mark knows, it might be that one learns everything in one fell swoop. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me on this point.

[2]Thank you to an anonymous referee for suggesting I make clearer the broad social and political effects that I aim to achieve with this manuscript, and for suggesting this way of describing them.

consider one way in which they are so limited: by being kept in a prolonged state of confusion and questioning. My main claim in this application is that while the activity of gender questioning can itself be a liberatory and positive process, it can be harmful and gatekeeping as it gets artificially prolonged through the action of forms of oppression.

In order to show precisely what I intend with this claim, I will start by presenting, in section 2, two idealized scenarios, one in which various forms of oppression take place, and another in which they don't, considering the position of individuals questioning their gender identity in both scenarios. Then, in section 3, I'll present a framework common in contemporary philosophy of language and metaphysics, influenced to a great degree by the works of Hamblin [1973], Belnap and Steel [1976], and Ciardelli et al. [2019], in which questions are modelled as the set of their respective direct complete answers, and these as sets of possible worlds (Lewis [1988]; Yablo [2014]). Having presented objections to this view, I'll introduce a novel way of thinking of questions in a space of FDE worlds (Jago [2014b]; Berto and Jago [2019]) that is inspired by the Lewisian understanding of subject matters. In section 4, I then consider the matter of question-inclusion and how agents might only partially grasp a question that they consider. I introduce the novel notion of a partial grasp of a question, which in a slogan can be stated as: partial grasp is grasp of a part. I propose intuitive cases for when questions are included in one another motivating the general principle for subject-matter, or question, inclusion. In section 5, I will highlight how this way of modelling questions can help shed light on a significant process for trans people – that of questioning one's own gender identity. More specifically, I show that: i) gender oppression harms *everyone* (not just trans people as agents who deviate from established gender prescriptions[3]) qua knowers concerning gender issues; ii) gender oppression leads closeted trans people to gatekeep themselves as they are only able to consider the question *Do I want to be G?* instead of *Am I a G?* for G a gender kind; and finally iii) that gender oppression might keep trans people second-guessing their own identities, thinking of themselves as not *really* a member of the gender kinds they identify with[4].

To make the discussion more manageable, I will focus (though not exclusively) throughout on the particular case of questioning trans women[5] who report not being able to determine whether their experiences motivate a positive

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[3]I agree to a large extent with Dembroff (forthcoming) that costly and wilful gender deviance marks at least a core of trans experience, even though it does not provide by any means necessary and sufficient conditions for being trans, as the author would concur.

[4]Even though I will focus throughout the paper on the case of trans women, I will also allude to cases involving other gender identities. Therefore, I think I am licensed to state these conclusions in a more general form concerning trans people and not simply trans women. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pushing me to make this clear and for encouraging me to give more attention also to other gender kinds.

[5]Here I'll be understanding "trans women" as referring to women that were assigned a gender identity other than woman at birth. More broadly "trans people" will refer to anyone whose gender identity is not identical to the gender identity attributed to them at birth. The term "cis people" will be reserved to people whose gender identity is identical to the one attributed to them at birth.

answer to the question *Am I a woman?* or merely to the question *Do I want to be a woman?*. For instance, in the online reddit post "Really want to be a woman, but not sure if I'm transgender...", the user u/justthrowmeawaybuddy writes: "I'm not sure if I FEEL like I'm a woman, but I feel like I want to BE one, or I'd love to become one. Is that the same thing as being transgender?" [6].

The conclusions just advertised draw on how such conundrums arise as agents want to determine what the answer is to the question of whether they're women and: i) the evidence they have available only speaks to the question of whether they want to be women; and ii) the dominant concept of gender in their society challenges the thought that wanting to be a member of a certain gender is enough to have that gender identity. I will conclude by very briefly drawing some normative conclusions from what is a presently unjust state of affairs affecting trans people more broadly [7].

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[6] This post was accessed on 14 of March, 2024, at the following URL: `https://www.reddit.com/r/asktransgender/comments/33zx4e/really_want_to_be_a_woman_but_not_sure_if_im/`

[7] A quick online search also puts us in contact with cases of putative trans men and non-binary people who have had similar experiences, closely related to not feeling/knowing that they were trans since their early childhood (*contra* the myth many cis people share that trans people must have always deeply known or felt what their "real gender" is). Here are two examples of experiences that could be representative of some trans men. User u/M_Chan_uwu reports in a Reddit post titled "i wanna be a boy but don't feel like one" (Accessed on 17th of November 2024 at the following URL: `https://www.reddit.com/r/asktransgender/comments/r5xvh8/i_wanna_be_a_boy_but_dont_feel_like_one/`) that "I'd like to have stuff such as a flat chest and no curves and sometimes a low voice and just, the appearance of a guy. However, not matter how much I think about it I don't really "feel" like a guy. I've been a woman my whole life so the whole ordeal of trying out a new name and pronouns feels fake, kind of like putting on a costume and pretending to be a boy even though I'm actually a girl. And don't get me wrong, I'd LOVE it if I was just a guy. But I'm not, and I'd feel like such a faker if I tried to claim I was one?". In a post titled "I feel like I'm not trans enough to be trans?" (Accessed on 17th of November 2024 at the following URL: `https://www.reddit.com/r/asktransgender/comments/7lw3wt/i_feel_like_im_not_trans_enough_to_be_trans/`), user u/ghosthell shares similar experiences from the perspective of someone who was assigned the gender identity woman at birth. Searching for "want" in r/NonBinary one very quickly comes across an assortment of very similar posts and comments where putative non-binary people share the same kind of experiences. Here's one example. In a post titled "Is it enough to WANT to be nonbinary?" (Accessed on 17th of November 2024 at the following URL: `https://www.reddit.com/r/NonBinary/comments/18pej8a/is_it_enough_to_want_to_be_nonbinary/`), user u/BigAbbreviations2323 asks "I've been questioning my gender for the past three years. I've settled on maybe some form of genderfluidity, maybe, but lately I've been trying to pay attention to the things that make me smile, or give me euphoria. One thing that's been coming up lately is the concept of, I guess, wanting. Like...wanting to be nonbinary, or something like it. Like when I see pieces of media with nonbinary characters (there aren't many, but they're there!) I've been noticing this intense longing to want to be that. I've been absolutely ravenous for stories by trans and gendernonconforming people.(...) I guess, is the question I have is, is simply wanting to be nonbinary enough to....actually be nonbinary, I guess? I hope that makes sense. If this is problematic or offensive, please let me know.". The most upvoted comment on this post is by user u/ProfessorOfEyes (who reports being non-binary and agender in their tags), who says: "Short answer: yes. Wanting to be nonbinary is often a symptom of being nonbinary as the saying goes.". The second most upvoted comment, by u/Imaginary_Map_962 goes so far as stating as part of their comment "(...)Long answer: that's how it started for me.". Of course, all these references are mere defeasible evidence that there is such a general phe-

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2 The circumstances of gender questioning

Just like what one chooses and does is influenced by one's social circumstances, so what one thinks and in particular what questions one is able to entertain and the way one entertains them is also affected by one's surrounding social environment. In particular, when it comes to questioning one's gender identity, different agents' social environments might be radically different, depending on a number of factors. These include the concepts available to the agent – for instance, does the agent possess the concept of what it is to be trans[8]?

nomenon in the trans and non-binary communities. If one wanted to be sceptical one could postulate that all the posters ended up realizing they weren't trans or non-binary, or that all the commenters were lying about their identities and/or their experiences, or, finally, one could postulate (in a very condescending and problematic way) that while this is how some in the trans and non-binary communities interpret their own experiences, they are wrong about their own experiences. I am myself not convinced of any of these scenarios. Still, it is my hope that in the future empirical studies may be conducted to attest whether this is a prevalent phenomenon. And, more interestingly, how it might be differently experienced by different groups in the trans and non-binary communities. Does it change across different gender kinds? What about other characteristics like age and race? And, as an anonymous reviewer suggested, how should we account for factors inherent to the different kinds, like women being a more oppressed group than men? These are all interesting venues for future empirical research.

[8]An anonymous referee asks what is this thing that I'm calling *the* concept of "being trans" (to which I refer throughout the paper). After all, there are many different subjective understandings of what it is like to be trans. Likewise, one may define the notion in various ways. This is a very interesting question. Here by "the concept of being trans" I simply mean the one I have employed thus far: people who have been assigned a gender identity at birth that is different from their gender identity. I am convinced that this way of using the term has advantages over, say, at least some gender dysphoria based accounts, given their pathologizing roots and/or the risk they face of excluding some trans individuals. It is controversial whether the definition I have picked is indeed able (as I hope) to include all trans people. Tackling that issue would, however, take me too far from the aims of this paper. Just as different people have different lived experiences and mental associations triggered by the concept WATER, the same will supposedly be true for TRANS. Nonetheless, I am assuming we can still hold that there is a single concept of what water is, and similarly of what being trans is. I am also assuming that there is an externalist notion of concept possession whereby if one is able to apply the concept TRANS successfully in a variety of contexts then, even if not aware of its intension, one possesses the concept. If the definition I have given above is successful, then having a different gender identity from the one assigned at birth is necessary and sufficient for being trans, and given that many can aptly possess the concept without having thought much about it, I see no problem in calling it "the" concept of being trans. Those who prefer different definitions can slot in their preferred one, and those who hold a pluralist stance can take this as a simplifying assumption. Thanks to an anonymous referee for this last suggestion. An anonymous referee also suggests that I'm taking gender identity to be essential to an individual, which would imply that necessarily everyone has a gender identity or other. This is not the case, and I don't believe it finds textual support in this paper. What the proposed definition *does* entail is that if one is trans, therefore one has a gender identity. This has as a striking consequence that agender people are trans only if they have a gender identity. This implies a connection between two big questions that divide the agender community: whether agender is itself a gender identity; and whether agender people are trans. I don't wish to get into these issues, but the account of what it is to be trans assumed in this paper minimally implies a connection between them: if agender is a gender identity, then agender people will by and large (assuming they haven't been assigned the (putative) gender agender at birth) be trans. Of course, one can deny both of these claims. In such a scenario one could simply say something like "I was assigned a gender identity, but I have none", or

-– but also what they are presented with on a more frequent basis in their lives. Namely, are they presented in their social circles and in the media with diverse representations of gender expression? Are they presented in their social environment with a dominant conception of gender that allows for one's gender identity to be distinct from that which was attributed to oneself at birth?

In respect to all these questions, let us consider two limit scenarios, that respectively correspond to one restrictive and not welcoming to gender questioning of any kind, and to another that is the opposite on all counts.

Scenario A: Anna is a questioning trans woman. She is presented in her immediate social circles and in the media with a great variety of expressions of womanhood that defy a common stereotype and/or expectations of body type. In the society she's part of there is no widespread belief in biological essentialism[9] or any other body of beliefs that entails that one has, of necessity, the gender identity one was attributed at birth. The concept of what it is to be trans and what it means to transition is widely shared and Anna possesses those concepts.

Scenario B: Beth is a questioning trans woman. In her immediate social circles and in the media, she is presented only with very limited representations of what it is to be a woman in a very stereotypical way that includes fulfilling certain biological and social functions for which certain body types are required. Biological essentialism is widely believed to be true and shared among peers as if it were common knowledge. The concept of what it is to be trans is absent from the society in which Beth is included and Beth does not, therefore, possess the concept.

In both scenarios, I make use of the notion of possessing a concept. Here I'm taking this notion in a fairly intuitive and general way as a capacity to perform certain mental acts. In this case, things like supposing that one is trans, entertaining the thought/propositional content that one/someone is trans and checking or revising one's beliefs upon acquiring the concept.

Both scenarios are idealized extremes, one for its idyllic liberatory nature, the other for the extent of its oppressive power when it comes to the repression of trans individuals. More realistically, questioning individuals are often situated in scenarios that approximate scenarios A and B to greater and lesser extents, and it is such scenarios that later on we will consider. Needless to say, scenario B constitutes a clear case of hermeneutical injustice [Fricker, 2007] for Beth. A case of hermeneutical injustice, as Fricker [2007] characterizes it, takes place whenever agents of a given social group are unable to make sense of their own experiences due to a lack of hermeneutic/interpretative resources. Her gender identity does not in fact match the gender identity attributed to her at birth. However, the resources that she is socially given and allowed to procure are

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"I had a gender identity, but my experiences have changed me and now I'm agender, and therefore have no gender identity (including that of the putative gender agender)". Claims such as these are perfectly compatible with all I want to claim in this paper.

[9]Biological essentialism is the view according to which one's gender is an essential, immutable part of who one is, and determined by one's biological sex.

not adequate for her to question her gender identity and come to realize that she is, in fact, a woman. Nonetheless, there are other scenarios which are in-between scenario A and B in which the agent already possesses the concept of being trans and faces a better epistemic environment. Yet, as I will argue, even in such scenarios the agent might still face, for different but related reasons, hermeneutical injustice[10].

3   Modelling Questions

Following a tradition in inquisitive semantics inspired to a great extent by the works of Hamblin [1973], Belnap and Steel [1976] and Ciardelli et al. [2019], one can model questions as their set of direct complete answers. Intuitively, when one considers a given question, one considers ways in which they can be answered, so one can directly think of questions as their possible answers – those that are available when one entertains the question.

In this traditional picture, these different answers correspond to non-maximal ways that the world (the whole of reality) could have been, so they correspond to propositions, i.e. sets of (possible) worlds, the worlds that are indiscernible relative to the answer they give to the question at hand. Suppose that the question under consideration is *How many stars are there?*, then worlds which have the same number of stars would be indistinguishable in regards to this question, even if they are very different in several other respects. The resulting view, proposed by Lewis [1988], is then that questions just are partitions of logical space (that is, the set of all possible worlds) in which worlds are grouped into exclusive sets — which might be called cells – depending on what they claim regarding given questions. Going back to the example of *How many stars are there?*, worlds would then be grouped into sets corresponding to the answer *There is one star*, *There are two stars* and so on, for all the numbers of stars that there could have been.

Since it was first proposed as a general picture of what questions and topics/subject matters are, this view has been subjected to various sorts of criticism, several of which I believe to be right. Namely, criticism pertaining to how it does not allow us to distinguish between questions that average human reasoners seem to be able to distinguish. Namely, Lewis will have to claim that all necessary truths share the same subject matter – the degenerate or trivial subject matter, which makes no distinctions between possible worlds – and further that all other propositions include *the* topic of the necessary truths as a part. This sounds intuitively wrong, so much so that, as Hawke [2017] points

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[10]This is not the first paper trying to illuminate the fact that some trans experiences are the result of hermeneutical injustice. Good places to start exploring this literature are Fricker and Jenkins [2017], George and Goguen [2021] and Edgoose [2024]. Hermeneutical injustice is a fruitful concept and various facets of trans people's experiences can be understood through it. The value of this paper is that it tackles one of the particular forms it can take, and suggests how it results, in part, from a more general phenomenon that can be illuminated through the formal framework of inquisitive and truthmaker semantics. Thanks to an anonymous referee for the references.

out, Lewis [1988] even considers extending his own account of subject matters to include impossible worlds, thereby avoiding this worry[11]. Another source of criticism pertains to the fact that it might be the case that the cells in some questions should not be exclusive [Yablo, 2014], i.e. that there should be some overlap between different possible complete answers to the question (so that it should not be a partition but instead a *division*). This second source of criticism is particularly relevant in the context of the present paper as questions pertaining to what one's gender identity is might not be exclusive -– one might have more than one gender identity. For instance, someone with a bigender gender identity might both identify as a woman and as a man, or as a woman and agender. Nothing in what follows would be substantially changed if framed in terms of Yablovian divisions instead of Lewisian partitions. However, for sake of simplicity I will assume the standard Lewisian picture of what questions are is right in this respect since I will be working with the example of trans *women*, who have exclusive binary gender identities.

I won't, however, be working with Lewis's original conception of subject matters. For mainly two reasons. The first is that we're dealing with questions concerning contingent individuals' gender identities. It would seem strange to include worlds in which Anna does not exist in any of the cells of the question *Am I a woman?* as asked by Anna[12]. The second reason is that for Lewis (1988), question-inclusion is defined as follows: question Q includes question Q' if and only if every cell of Q' is a union of cells of Q (which is the same as saying that Q' is a coarser-grained partition than Q). But this entails that Yes-No questions, which define only a two-celled partition, can only include themselves and potentially the trivial question (the one that makes no distinctions between worlds) as parts. However, we saw earlier that apparently it made sense to speak of question-inclusion between Yes-No questions! So, I take it, we should abandon Lewis's conception of subject matters and opt instead for a different definition, one that is based on a broader space of valuation points including impossible worlds, as well as one that conceives of question-inclusion in a different way.

I will be working instead, while making use of a plain propositional language whose only connectives are $\neg$, $\vee$ and $\wedge$, within the space of FDE worlds [Berto and Jago, 2019]. These get their name from being representationally closed under the logic of the first degree entailment (FDE) of the relevant logic E of Anderson and Belnap, first axiomatized by Belnap [Anderson and Belnap, 1962], and later on given an intuitive two-valued semantics by Dunn [1976] of which the standard power-set four-valued semantics was then given by Belnap [1977].

$\mathscr{M} = \langle W, N, \rho \rangle$ is a model in which W is a set of FDE worlds, $N \subseteq W$ is a set of *possible* worlds and ρ is a representation relation following the relational reading in Priest [1998] in which a formula is related to one or more truth-values at any given world. $\rho_w(A, True)$ will mean that A is related to the truth-value $True$ in w (and similarly for $False$ instead of $True$) and where $w \in W$. We can

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[11]Thanks to an anonymous referee for helping me clarify this case.

[12]Or perhaps not and we could include it in the *I am not a woman* cell, for one is not a woman if one does not exist. I believe, though, that this would be less natural, so I take this to still count as a reason against possible worlds-based approaches.

then give recursive clauses for how ρ behaves at all worlds:

For an atom, p, it is directly the case that $\rho_w(p, True)$ or $\rho_w(p, False)$ (where "or" is an inclusive disjunction) or neither;

For any A, $\rho_w(\neg A, True)$ iff $\rho_w(A, False)$;

For any A, $\rho_w(\neg A, False)$ iff $\rho_w(A, True)$;

For any A and B, $\rho_w(A \wedge B, True)$ iff $\rho_w(A, True)$ and $\rho_w(B, True)$;

For any A and B, $\rho_w(A \wedge B, False)$ iff $\rho_w(A, False)$ or $\rho_w(B, False)$;

For any A and B, $\rho_w(A \vee B, True)$ iff $\rho_w(A, True)$ or $\rho_w(B, True)$;

For any A and B, $\rho_w(A \vee B, False)$ iff $\rho_w(A, False)$ and $\rho_w(B, False)$.

If $w \in N$ then there are no gaps nor gluts and ρ_w relates all sentences of the language at w to a truth-value and at most to one truth-value. If $w \in W - N$ then ρ_w either relates one sentence to both truth-values, or does not relate some sentence to any truth-value[13]

Using FDE worlds, is the most natural way of expanding the space of possible worlds so as to allow for worlds that neither represent nor make true certain propositions, or that can make certain propositions both true and false. The case of states in which propositions are neither true nor false has been seen earlier for when agents do not exist in certain worlds. But it might also be wanted that agents neither are nor are not of a certain gender identity, or that agents are both of a given gender identity and not of that gender identity. I'm personally not fully convinced that we have to interpret bigender/multigender identities and some boundary non-binary identities, for instance, in this way but going beyond a space only including possible worlds potentially helps in this and other ways in accounting for the full range of gender experience and categorization[14].

Mirroring usual ways of speaking in truthmaker semantics, I'll say that whenever everything true at v is also true at w that v is part of w, which I represent formally by $v \sqsubseteq w$[15]. I remain neutral here on what kinds of entities worlds are.

Having laid down some background, for the most part I will focus on the remainder of the paper on Yes-No questions. These are questions, Q, as to

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[13]Instead of speaking of a space of FDE-worlds, we could have instead presented the semantics in terms of inexact truthmaker semantics (Fine [2017]; Fine and Jago [2019]), where an inexact truthmaker is a state containing an exact truthmaker as a part. Both truthmaker semantics, and impossible worlds semantics have been applied to several issues in epistemology (Jago [2009, 2014b]; Berto and Jago [2019]), in semantics, where they've been used to provide semantics for logics of tautological and relevant entailment (Fine [2015]; Berto and Jago [2019]; Jago [2020]), and for hyperintensionality in general [Jago, 2014a, 2020]. As Berto and Jago (2023) note, aside from the importance that it attributes to the notion of exact truthmaking, truthmaker semantics seems to be just a kind of impossible worlds semantics. In Silva [2024c] I have attempted to vindicate this claim by showing how, if we take some metaphysical desiderata seriously, the states of standard truthmaker semantics end up resembling to a great extent the double worlds of Jago [2014b] and the impossible worlds of Berto and Jago [2019].

[14]For an up and coming use of FDE worlds to model gender identities, see Eckert [2024]. Thank you to Franci Mangraviti for pointing me to this recent work in feminist logic.

[15]Thank you to Franz Berto, who helped me clarify the notion of parthood between worlds.

whether φ, which I represent as Q_φ, and they are a set of two propositions (the positive and negative direct answers to the question), which are themselves upward-closed sets of possible and impossible FDE worlds all of which represent that φ is the case or not the case. In the case I'm here concerned with, I'll be assuming that the answers are also exclusive, so that worlds do not represent also φ as being both true and false. The reader should, however, keep in mind the considerations of the previous paragraph for other applications of the present framework to other gender identities and experiences.

4 Full questions and partial questions

The content of propositions is independent of whether agents are able to properly relate to them or not in given contexts. Similarly, what set of propositions a question is, is independent of what part of a question agents are able to entertain in a given context and what interrogative content they take a given interrogative sentence to express.

Real epistemic agents are both cognitively limited and have access to an only very limited set of resources in any context. So there seems to be a distinction between, on the one hand, the ideal full question or set of distinctions between worlds, and various partial or incomplete counterparts thereof, partial questions whose direct answers might only include worlds whose contents are a proper part of those in the full question that corresponds to the linguistic item or thought that they aimed to consider.

While I take the notion of a grasp of a question to be a primitive notion, I would like to elucidate it as follows. One grasps a question when one is able to form propositional attitudes towards its various possible complete informative answers. Going back to the case of the question *How many stars are there?*, then one can say one grasps the question whenever one, for instance, believes that there are n stars, disbelieves that there are only two stars, is able to imagine that there are no stars, and so on. When one entertains a given subject matter, one supposes that the world goes one way or another with regards to it, and if one is able to do so, then one can be said to grasp a subject matter.

The reader might be wondering why I use "grasp" to relate agents to subject matters or questions instead of agents to propositions. Here I do not wish to claim that uses according to which agents grasp propositions are not in good standing, but I take it that what primarily agents grasp are questions or subject matters. The reason for this is that it seems that if two propositions share the same subject matter or are complete informative answers to the same question, then an agent will always grasp one proposition to the same extent that they grasp the other. This indicates that what is really being grasped is what they have in common: their subject matter or the question that they both address. Perhaps this claim will ring truer with an example. Consider again the question "How many stars are there?". Intuitively, as long as the agent possesses all the relevant concepts, they will grasp, say, *There are two stars* and *There are eight stars* to the exact same extent. And the reason seems to be that what they're

really grasping is the question *How many stars are there?*. For this reason, I'll keep talking in what follows of agents grasping questions[16].

Of course, in various occasions we fail to grasp a question in its full generality. This might happen for various reasons. I would like to consider some of them, and the ways these might take place. One, already suggested by the previous paragraph, is that the agent simply lacks the conception that is necessary to entertain all the possible answers to the question. Consider a question like *What is Jane's profession?*. In a sense, this is a question that we take ourselves to easily grasp. However, it is also the case that there is a great number of professions, including some professions which only a very limited number of agents know to exist. Suppose that Paul is considering this very question, that Jane's profession is that of an art therapist, and that while Paul is aware that there are both artists and therapists of various kinds, he is unaware of the existence of art therapy and of people who are specialized in that form of practice. In such a case, it would seem that even if Paul would be able to give a partially correct answer to the question *What is Jane's profession?* (by saying that she is a therapist), he would not be able to give a complete answer to it, as he would not be able to consider worlds where she is an art therapist and therefore would not be able to give the correct full answer that she is an art therapist.

Significantly, it is not just the case that Paul lacks the knowledge that Jane is an art therapist. Rather, he does not know what an art therapist is to begin with! This coincides with the distinction made in awareness logics between lack of awareness and lack of information [Schipper, 2014]. It's not simply that Paul lacks the information that Jane is possibly an art therapist. Rather, he is unaware of that possibility to begin with. If he only lacked the former, he could still wonder "Is she an art therapist?", but not so if he is unaware of the possibility altogether. Paul is not able to recognize all the distinctions between worlds that would be necessary to give a correct full answer in the first place because he is only able to consider, given his knowledge of what professions there are, a more limited version of the question of what Jane's profession is. Instead of being able to group worlds into a proposition where they agree as to the fact that Jane is an art therapist, Paul is only able to group worlds into propositions where she is an artist of various sorts, or a therapist, but at least not a therapist that practices art therapy. And this, importantly, seems to be the case not necessarily because Paul mistakes worlds in which Jane is an art therapist for worlds in which she has a different profession, but rather because those worlds don't seem to be part of his epistemic space altogether, as they are more determinate than the possibilities that he is able to envisage. This highlights the importance of using a space of impossible worlds that allows for truth-value gaps: it seems that the worlds in Paul's epistemic space are silent on whether Jane is an art therapist or not.

More formally, let's define questions where one asks what falls under a given

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[16]Thanks to an anonymous referee for asking me to clarify why I take agents to grasp questions instead of answers to questions, and therefore propositions.

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predicate – "what is" questions such as "What is the x such that $\varphi(x)$" – as follows:

WHAT-IS QUESTIONS: A question as to what is the x such that $\varphi(x)$ is the case, which we express by $Q_{\varphi(x)}$, is a set of propositions, $\{\varphi(a), \ldots \varphi(n)\}$, where $a, \ldots, n$ are all the possible values that x can take while making $\varphi(x)$ true or false[17].

So for instance if j is a designator for "Jane" and $\varphi(x, j)$ is the predicate "x is Jane's profession" then the values for x will have to be professions, otherwise the proposition will not have a truth-value. Sentences like "Excellence is Jane's profession" definitely convey something, but, I take it, not in their literal reading, in which they are not truth-apt[18].

One way the agent partly grasps $Q_{\varphi(x)}$ is when they grasp a $Q_{\psi(x)}$ and $Q_{\psi(x)} \subseteq Q_{\varphi(x)}$, that is, they are able to consider the same propositions as answers, or only a subset of them (this entails that if you grasp Q, then you partially grasp it). This seems to be what's going on in the case just considered where Paul ignores what an art therapist is. As long as Paul is sensitive to a subset of answers of the set of possible professions, it seems clear that the question that he's sensitive to is part of what he aims to be sensitive to. So a good theory of question-inclusion should have as a consequence that if $Q_{\psi(x)} \subseteq Q_{\varphi(x)}$, then $Q_{\psi(x)}$ should be a part of $Q_{\varphi(x)}$. As it will be seen later, this is the case in the proposed theory of question-inclusion, though it clearly isn't the case in the Lewisian theory of question-inclusion, for the set of answers an agent is able to consider might not be a partition of the set of possible worlds.

This highlights how this way in which an agent might partially grasp a question can only be captured by possible worlds accounts of subject matters if all the answers in $Q_{\psi(x)}$ still make up a partition of the set of possible worlds and therefore if the answers in $Q_{\psi(x)}$ are incomplete answers to $Q_{\varphi(x)}$, as $Q_{\psi(x)}$ will just be a coarser partition on the same set of worlds. Thus, possible-worlds-based accounts won't be able to make sense of cases where agents fail to fully grasp a question because they are ignorant of all the possible answers to it.

A different way one might partly grasp a question is when one is only able to consider part of what is involved in one or more of the possible alternative answers. This seems to be the case for instance when agents are considering questions of the form "Is x such that $\varphi(x)$?" or "Is an x such that $\varphi(x)$ also an x such that $\psi(x)$". This happens all the time in Philosophy when we deal with proposed definitions. As we did above, we might call these "Yes-No Questions" as they concern the truth-value of a given sentence or whether a condition holds. More formally:

YES-NO QUESTIONS: A Yes-No question as to whether φ is the case, which we label Q_φ, is going to be a set of two propositions, $\{\varphi, \neg\varphi\}$ corresponding to the positive and negative answer as to whether φ is the case.

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[17]This corresponds to the notion of predicative subject matter as defined in Silva [2024b].

[18]For more on similar cases of (non-)catastrophic presupposition failure see [Yablo, 2014].

Consider again the case of items of knowledge in how they're opposed to justified true beliefs. Agents who consider the question "Is x an item of knowledge?" might not grasp the question beyond the question "Is x a justified true belief?" as they might not have any grasp of what differentiates items of knowledge from mere justified true beliefs. Yet, this set of conditions (being a belief that is true and is justified) might all be components of what one would require of an epistemic state to be knowledge[19]. Assuming, for the sake of argument, that being a justified true belief is part of what it takes to be an item of knowledge, then we can say that $Q_{JTB(a)}$ (the question of whether a is a justified true belief) $= \{JTB(a), \neg JTB(a)\}$ is part of $Q_{K(a)}$ (the question of whether a is an item of knowledge) $= \{K(a), \neg K(a)\}$. This begs the question of how to make sense of question-inclusion so that we get the right results.

Here a natural answer is to say that $Q_{JTB(a)}$ is part of $Q_{K(a)}$ because the *content* of the latter includes the content of the former [20] In that case, we can express the conditions in terms of propositions themselves. Let A and B be two sentences and φ and ψ be the propositions that they respectively express as sets of possible and impossible worlds. Then content inclusion $\lll$ can be defined in the following way:

CONTENT INCLUSION: The content of B is included in the content of A ($B \lll A$) if and only if i) $\varphi \subseteq \psi$; ii) for every world $w \in \psi - \varphi$, there is a world v in φ such that $w \sqsubseteq v$; and iii) $\neg\psi \subseteq \neg\varphi$[21].

The definition of question inclusion for Yes-No questions then immediately follows:

QUESTION-INCLUSION (YES-NO QUESTIONS): A Yes-No question, Q_φ, includes another, Q_ψ, if and only if $A \lll B$.

Importantly, for $Q_{JTB(a)}$ to be part of $Q_{K(a)}$, it must be the case that every world where a is a justified true belief is part of a world where a is an item of

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[19]Here, again, I am not taking a stance on the debate of whether knowledge is analysable into further components or should itself be taken as a primitive notion, already considered above [Williamson, 2000].

[20]Here, as the reader will soon see, I'll take some notes from Yablo [2014] and Fine [2017, 2018], which were themselves inspired by Humberstone [2003], and who say that for there to be content-inclusion between two sentences, A and B such that A includes B, then: every truthmaker for A must be part of a truthmaker for B; every truthmaker for A must contain a truthmaker for B as a part; and every falsitymaker for B must be a falsitymaker for A. Of course, so far I've been talking of FDE worlds, not of truthmakers and falsitymakers, and unlike in truthmaker semantics, in a setting with impossible worlds we can't appeal to a notion of exact truthmaking and falsitymaking. At least, not uncontroversially, in my [Silva, 2024c] I try to show that we can regain truthmaker semantics' primary advantage of exact truthmaking and exact falsitymaking in a space of impossible worlds and using the tools of Jago [2014b] and Berto and Jago [2019]. But FDE worlds can themselves be interpreted as inexact truthmakers, and propositions are therefore upwards-closed sets of inexact truthmakers.

[21]The first condition states that any world $w \in \varphi$ is such that $w \in \psi$, which entails that any inexact truthmaker for A is an inexact truthmaker for B, corresponding to the first condition of Yablo and Fine; the second condition imposes that any world that represents B as being the case is part of a world representing A as being the case, as per the second condition of Yablo and Fine; and finally the third condition says that every world that represents B as false (i.e. $\neg\psi$ as true) thereby also represents A as false (i.e. $\neg\varphi$ as true).

knowledge by the first and second conditions of CONTENT INCLUSION together with the reflexivity of parthood between worlds[22].

Having now provided a definition of question-inclusion for Yes-No questions, we can provide a definition of fusion for Yes-No questions. The result of combining Yes-No questions together is a question that has all the possible combinations of answers to the original questions as possible answers. We can think of it as the question as to "How" are given statements true or false Yablo [2014] or what is responsible for/what grounds their truth or falsity.

In line with the view I proposed in [Silva, 2024a,b] (with relevant notation changes), I propose that whenever we have given subject matters $Q_\varphi = \{\varphi, \neg\varphi\}$ and $Q_\psi = \{\psi, \neg\psi\}$, then that their fusion should be $Q_{\varphi \wedge \psi} = Q_{\varphi \vee \psi} = \{\varphi \cap \psi, \varphi \cap \neg\psi, \neg\varphi \cap \psi, \neg\varphi \cap \neg\psi\}$. The resulting subject matter is a partition of a different set of FDE worlds.

Having these notions of inclusion and fusion in mind, we can now define question-inclusion more generally. The core thought is that Yes-No questions give us the building blocks for our inquiry, and that one question includes another insofar as it includes all the Yes-No questions as parts that the other includes as parts, as all questions are ultimately made up of Yes-No questions[23]. At the present stage, I am taking the thesis that questions boil down to Yes-No questions as a working assumption, as there isn't yet a formal treatment of all kinds of questions one may ask. For instance, an important class of questions asks for an explanation for given events or kinds of phenomena. As far as I'm aware, how to model such inquiries in terms of the subject matter apparatus hasn't been explored. Still, if a general argument is wanted for why I think this assumption has some merit starts by first noting that answers to questions are declarative sentences; then by, second, noting that declarative sentences in context express propositions; third showing that the question associated with a proposition is just the fusion of the questions associated with its atomic constituents (as above and in standard inquisitive and subject matter semantics); and finally, four, showing that the questions associated with given atomic propositions are Yes-No questions or, if not, that the atomic proposition can be translated into a non-atomic form, which itself would have a corresponding question which is itself a fusion of those of its atomic constituents (and so on we go until we reduce it all to what we might call properly atomic propositions, i.e. propositions which could not be translated into a non-atomic form). Of course, this argument makes substantive controversial assumptions whose

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[22]Here is a proof of this result. We start by immediately having that $JTB(a) \lll K(a)$, since $Q_{JTB(a)}$ is being assumed to be part of $Q_{K(a)}$. Going through the first two conditions of the definition, we get, then that: i) every $K(a)$-world, is also a $JTB(a)$-world (i.e. knowledge implies justified true belief); and ii) every world in $JTB(a)$ which is not a $K(a)$-world is nonetheless part of a $K(a)$ world (i.e. every world where a is a justified true belief can be expanded to a world where a is an item of knowledge). Of course, by the reflexivity of parthood we get that every world is part of itself, so that all the $JTB(a)$ worlds that are $K(a)$-worlds are also part of a $K(a)$-world, which is sufficient for the conclusion that any $JTB(a)$-world is part of a $K(a)$ world, as advertised.

[23]Since questions are just sets of sets of worlds and therefore extensional entities, parthood-extensionality is also assumed.

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defence would take me too far from the aims of this paper.

QUESTION-INCLUSION: A question Q' is part ($\leqslant$) of a question Q if and only if Q is a fusion of Yes-No questions and includes all the Yes-No questions that Q' includes as part[24].

Now with a clearer notion of question-inclusion, we can now also more properly talk of the notion of partial grasp of a question, as introduced informally above:

PARTIAL GRASP: An agent A partially grasps a question Q if and only if they grasp a question Q' and $Q' \leqslant Q$[25].

It is a corollary of this notion of parthood that if a world w is a member of a set in a question Q' that is part, $\leqslant$, of Q, then there must be a world v that is a member in a set in Q, such that $w \sqsubseteq v$, i.e. such that v represents at least as much as w represents. In a way this is obvious once you realize that since Q' is part of Q then the direct answers to Q must be intersections of propositions such that one of the terms intersected are the various possible complete answers to Q'.

When $Q' \subseteq Q$ (i.e. not only $Q' \leqslant Q$ but also every member of Q' is a member of Q), then all worlds in all propositions in Q' are part of at least one world of a proposition in Q – themselves – it's just that more worlds might be added up with the propositions that are in Q but not in Q' (if there are any, i.e. if $Q' \subset Q$). When the propositions are themselves different between Q' and Q and $Q' \leqslant Q$ then the worlds of Q' are *proper parts* of Q, as in the case of atomic Yes-No questions. There are, of course, other cases besides Yes-No questions like this, just like there are other cases of the first kind beyond "What is" questions. I will not, however, pursue this matter further here, as it's not my main concern[26].

5 Questioning one's gender identity

In this paper I focus on the particular case of Yes-No questions pertaining to one's own gender identity. Questions expressed in the first-person, that ask whether a given agent has a determinate gender identity. I will focus on the case of the gender identity *woman*, and so on the question *Am I a woman?* as asked by agents in different contexts. I will consider the question as asked by trans women and how the continued presence of this question hanging over their heads can gatekeep them in their processes of transition, as well as keep them in a state in which they "invalidate" (i.e. consider in some way less real or justified) their identity as women as opposed to that of cis women or other

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[24]The reader should here note that the condition is worded in terms of what Yes-No questions both Q and Q' include as parts, not (only) as subsets.

[25]Here recall that grasp is not being further defined, but is rather being understood as per the informal gloss given in p.10, which follows the one given in [Silva, 2024b].

[26]I hope to in the future expand the framework to deal with more questions and to address the issue of whether to every question there corresponds a subject matter.

women perceived by them as "real" women (which might include other trans women).

In particular, I would like to consider what I take to be the very live case of oppressive societies that do not allow for (or punish) experimentation with gender roles and expression, and that have restrictive, essentialist and subordinating dominant conceptions of gender. Gender questioning experiences, while being deeply personal, also involve a crucial interpersonal and intersubjective dimension. As several authors have pointed out (for instance notably Collins [2000], Fricker [2007] and Dotson [2014]), the conceptual and hermeneutical resources available in the society one is inserted in play a crucial role in determining the extent to which one can make sense of one's experience. Further, the possibility of sharing experiences and perspectives on one's lived experience allows for new ways of interpreting those same experiences and to challenge given dominant views. It is a commonly reported experience among trans individuals that they were only able to make sense of a whole array of experiences they had in relation to gender once they first came into contact, later in their lives, with the concept of a trans person and what it signified to be one. According to the Q&A section "The truth about trans" of the LGBTQ+ rights organisation Stonewall, while many trans people know they're trans from a young age, "[s]ome trans people might not have the language or understanding of what it means to be trans until later in life". This included being given the opportunity to be amongst a group of peers who had similar experiences, experiences that validated questions and feelings that their own gender identity did not align with the one they were attributed at birth.

I believe that this creates a particular kind of hermeneutical injustice [Fricker, 2007] that damages *everyone* in society in their statuses as knowers about gender issues[27] and in particular trans and non-binary people[28] in their "gender transgressive desire" (Dembroff, forthcoming). One particular way in which this hermeneutical injustice can be felt, I will argue, is that in lacking the right conceptual resources to make sense of gender experiences, agents are prevented from engaging in gender questioning or, when not prevented from doing so, they might be kept in a process of gender questioning that undermines their gender identity, instead of such a process simply being emancipatory or liberatory, allowing for a greater insight into oneself[29].

The way in which this might happen, as I will show, is that in oppressive

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[27]For instance, in a society where biological essentialism is widespread, not only are trans people more vulnerable, but also the sex/gender distinction seems to be, in some way, undermined. For one of the main purposes of its introduction is that facts about the former should not determine facts about the latter. If that is so, why should sex determine what gender is (and thereby what gender any individual has) to begin with?

[28]Here I use "non-binary people" to refer to individuals who have a gender identity other than (just) man or woman.

[29]Here it is of note that with respect to a particular form of hermeneutical injustice, Mangraviti [2023] favours, like I do, a space of worlds suitable for FDE, as opposed to classical logic. For the purposes of combating epistemic injustice more broadly, however, Mangraviti [2023] favours a version of logical pluralism. Thank you to an anonymous referee for alerting me to this last point about logical pluralism.

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epistemic environments, interrogative sentences concerning one's gender identity, such as *Am I a woman?*, instead of being associated with the correct question, *viz.* $Q_{I\ am\ a\ woman}$, are associated with a different question altogether, such as $Q_{I\ am\ an\ adult\ human\ female}$. Or it might be that given how limited one's opportunities to experiment are, then one ceases to consider questions such as *Am I a woman?*, as in the case of a questioning trans woman, and rather starts to consider the question *Do I want to be a woman?*, then being lead to wonder, given dominant conceptions of gender, if a positive answer to the latter warrants a positive answer to the former.

Let us focus on the first case. If one thinks that one's gender is determined by one's biology, then when one asks the question *Am I a woman?*, one will be thinking of the question $Q_{I\ am\ an\ adult\ human\ female}$ (or something along these lines). If further one believes in biological *essentialism*, that is, that further one's sex is part of one's essence, then this question will only contain one proposition, for either *I am an adult human female* or *I am not an adult human female* will be the empty set of worlds in the restricted set of worlds where biological essentialism is true. So depending on one's views, the questions one is able to consider will be different and one will be blinded to some possibilities. So dominant concepts of gender might limit oneself as a knower exactly because they erase from one's epistemic/doxastic space possibilities that one could otherwise consider, such as the possibility of mismatch between sex and gender. Effectively, insofar as biological essentialism is false, and presumably necessarily false (insofar as it's not contingent what essential properties we have), then agents' epistemic space is thereby confined exclusively to impossible worlds[30].

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[30] An anonymous reviewer questions my association of biological essentialism with the claim that one's sex is a necessary property of one. Here I'm being quite literal as per footnote 9: I'm understanding biological essentialism as the claim that one's gender is essential to one and determined by one's sex. Therefore, according to this perspective, one's sex is a necessary property of one, as per standard views on essence. It seems, further, in general true that if N is an essential property of a given agent A, and if A's instantiation of N is determined by A having a different property M, then M itself must be an essential property of A. For otherwise A could have not instantiated M, but per hypothesis since N is an essential property of A, A would still instantiate N. But this contradicts the supposition that M's instantiation determined N's instantiation! So M must itself be an essential property (or at the very least a property that A always instantiates in any situation in which they exist). But perhaps, as the reviewer pointed out to me, one only needs to maintain that one's sex (which, read, determines one's gender) is immutable, in the following sense: regardless of whether one's sex is necessary or contingent, one is not able to change one's sex and therefore one is not able to change one's gender. I think that this might indeed be what some have in mind in their transphobic stances. However, I don't think it fully captures the range of deniers of trans people's experiences falling under the umbrella term of "biological essentialists". For one, because if one's sex is a contingent property, then it seems that at most one is practically or physically incapable of changing sex, for one could have possibly had a different sex. Yet, many biological essentialist stances seem to me to be stronger than this: they seem to claim that there is no metaphysically possible circumstance in which I could change what my sex is, and therefore what my gender is. Sex would be for each of us what humanity is for Socrates in the usual philosophical examples in philosophy of modality. Indeed, I can't seem to find any example of an intrinsic property (as supposedly one's biological sex is) that one instantiates which one could not in any circumstance change, but which one could have failed to have (otherwise it wouldn't be contingent). Finally, biological essentialists are likely to adhere

In an oppressive scenario, now corresponding to the second case above, a questioning trans woman might not be able to experiment with gender norms for fear of being punished for such experimentation. She might then have to resort to only internal evidence in regard to what she feels she wants to be instead of what she feels she is. That is, her evidence might be restricted so that she can only determine what world she is in, in relation to the question *Do I want to be a woman?* instead of in relation to the question *Am I a woman?*. She is then led to wonder whether that is enough to warrant a positive answer to the question of whether she should transition, or rather if she is a woman (and normally wanting to be F is not enough to be F) and therefore something is missing for her to start the process that she feels she would want to start[31].

It is hard to find empirical studies attesting to the fact that this is a real phenomenon as trans people are a small demographic in and of themselves,

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to the pre-theoretically intuitive thesis of the necessity of origin, which would lead to the conclusion (together with their stance that one can't change one's sex and that it determines gender), that one's assigned sex and gender is a necessary property.

[31] An anonymous referee questions whether conflating transitioning with being a given gender isn't itself a symptom of a hermeneutical injustice. And rather than first determining whether one is a member of a given gender kind, or whether one wants to be a member of that gender kind, simply wanting to transition is often reason enough to transition. This challenge brings up a number of issues which I'm not able to fully address in this paper. First, I would like to say that my use of "rather" was not meant to be taken to imply that any instance of "*A* should transition" may be substituted for "*A* is a woman", whenever *A* is a trans woman that hasn't transitioned yet. On the one hand, as the reviewer says, one might first determine one should transition, and only later determine their gender. On the other hand, in some contexts the sociopolitical costs of transitioning might be too much to bear, even if that's what one would want to do if one were given a choice free of such repercussions. So I want to clarify that the two notions should not be conflated, as the referee rightfully alerted. This challenge also allows me to clarify one other issue: I'm not by any means recommending that one should first try to establish *in abstracto* what one's gender identity is, or what gender kind one wants to be a member of, and then from there establish whether one should transition. As detailed above, Yes-No questions have themselves mereological structure. And many factors go into whether one is or is not member of a given gender kind. In my Silva(unpublished), I suggest that for different people those factors might look very different, sharing only in common the fact that they construct a way for the agent to psychologically relate to the norms of the given gender kind which, were they aware of them, would be sufficient for sincere self-identification with that gender kind. The claim I would advance with which I think the reviewer would perhaps disagree (as I believe they have more of a constructive point of view) is that for it to be the case that an agent should start a process of transition, then their gender identity should already be incongruent with the one assigned to the agent at birth. That is, one is first trans and for that reason transitions, not the other way around: one does not become trans *because* one transitions. I think this opposite view would exclude many of the trans people who most need help in the struggle for trans liberation: those who are silenced and oppressed into their closets. Finally, I would like to alert to the fact that my own account is compatible (and I myself very much agree) with accounts according to which one's gender identity might change over time, and in particular due to the experience of transitioning. It would be interesting to see how this model would behave in a more dynamic setting. An anonymous reviewer suggests to incorporate ideas from Kosten(forthcoming), coming out in this very special issue. I myself find the models therein very fruitful and urge the reader to consult them. However, given my other work in epistemic logic [Silva, 2024a] on considering questions and its implicit dynamicity, I would prefer to stick to it. This is especially the case as we are dealing here with questions and partial grasp on questions, so that a dynamic process of considering questions seems especially appropriate to model such processes of gender identity changes.

aside from the hostile political climate that leads to biased data collection and hypotheses' formation. However, we can find testimonies attesting to this fact throughout the online world, where various closeted questioning trans people share their anxieties and doubts. Here's a non-representative sample of posts from the subreddit r/asktransgender where (mostly) questioning trans people ask for help in clarifying their doubts. In a recent post, u/ElenaTheUndecided asks "Is wanting to be a woman enough of a reason?"[32] and in the body of the user's post we see the user saying "I know I'd prefer to live life as a woman, but that's just because being a woman seems so much better? I can't convince myself that that's reason enough, simply because I can live as a man if I have to and I don't hate being a man". The user doesn't specify for what it would be "enough of a reason" but we can fill in the details: to transition, presumably, and given some other details of the user's post, *viz.* "I think I'm just so deep in denial that I'm writing away obvious reasons that I'm trans.", that they are trans. And, if being trans aligns with the way we're understanding it here, then that means: enough of a reason for them to be a woman even though they have been attributed a different gender identity at birth. This seems to be a case in which the agent is operating within a society in which the dominant concept WOMAN is such that feeling like one's life would be better while living as a woman (what this means more precisely would probably involve going through life whilst being subjected to gender norms that apply to women or people recognized as women) is at least not clearly enough for one to be a woman, even if the messages in response to the post from what is a resistant community are themselves supportive of a different concept of WOMAN, in which, as another user replies "Yes, just wanting it is enough of a reason".

In a similar post titled "what if i'm not trans but i want to be a girl"[33] u/eraes154 states "i've recently discovered that i wish to be a girl, but i'm not trans. i don't feel like a girl, i don't identify as a girl, and i don't wanna transition, but i just wish i was born a girl. i'm gay, and i guess that's why? idk, i just needed to get it out of my chest". Here I will just deflect to some of the most upvoted answers to the post: "I'm not going to tell you you're trans, but most trans people don't want to be trans. They just want to be another gender.", and another states "Gay guys don't wish they were girls because (drumroll...) they're guys".

A different user quotes a *Medium* piece, "Gender Desire vs. Gender Identity" by Amanda Roman (2019) that resonates with the perspective here maintained:

"In retrospect, refusing to begin a gender transition because I didn't already feel like a woman was like refusing to take flying lessons because I didn't already feel like a pilot. [...] But gender is no different than any other identity. Sometimes we're born into it and know intuitively who we are, and sometimes

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[32]This post was accessed on 05 of March, 2024, at the following URL: `https://www.reddit.com/r/asktransgender/comments/11wd0xr/is_wanting_to_be_a_woman_enough_of_a_reason/`.

[33]This post was accessed on 05 of March, 2024, at the following URL: `https://www.reddit.com/r/asktransgender/comments/132wmfg/what_if_im_not_trans_but_i_want_to_be_a_girl/`.

we know who we want to be and must work to make that desire into reality."

Admittedly, Roman's view is much more constructivist than my own: as I see it, trans women already are women, but oppressive scenarios may stop them from realizing that they are so, for instance by taking away opportunities for gender experimentation. Still, we can find in Roman's words the testimony of a trans woman who delayed their transition because they wouldn't reply "Yes" to the question *Am I a woman?*, but who seemingly would want to realize a desire to be a woman (I invite the reader to consider again the title of the piece: "Gender Desire vs. Gender Identity"). Where Roman and I disagree is that for Roman, a trans woman would have to indeed live out and manifest that desire to be a woman, whereas I would say wanting to be a woman is sometimes enough [34].

One's intuitive feeling of who one is might be especially impaired in oppressive societies, as one is then working with wrong conceptions of what given gender identities are. This, of course, can already be captured in principle by explanations prevalent in the feminist literature. So what does the question/subject matters apparatus add? It adds that we're able to characterize precisely how a new form of hermeneutical injustice arises: that of agents being kept in a state of questioning and of confusion (as I believe the two posts highlighted are good examples of).

In such and similar scenarios (i.e., scenarios very close to B), I propose that when considering the question *Am I a woman?*, given the limited conception that trans women often are capable of having of the concept WOMAN at this stage of their transition, they will only be able to grasp a partial version of the question, one that is often informed by dominant concepts of what it is to be a woman [Bettcher, 2013]. For instance, not being recognized as women by others, they might lack some first-person insight into the ways women are treated in a variety of social contexts. One of many potential examples is that they might lack the awareness that other women have of what it feels like to be afraid of walking alone at night while being *recognized* as women.

In turn, this very limited conception is likely to exclude questioning trans women themselves from womanhood, especially the more isolated from the trans community they are and the more ingrained they might be in a community where being trans is not presented as an option. Especially if the complexities of what it means to be a woman for different women are also hidden from view. One might then even fully embrace the dominant concept of womanhood and give a negative answer to the question *Am I a woman?* (especially in a scenario like B) while giving a positive answer to the question *Do I want to be a woman?*. This is one way in which one might feel like one is not "trans enough" and thereby gatekeep oneself in one's transition, even when they might feel like something is wrong and feel a rejection towards the gendered norms of the gender identity they are recognized as. This is a state of affairs in which agents in the actual world have a gender identity mismatch with the one assigned to them at birth but where because of epistemic oppression and a wrongful understanding of

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[34]Thank you to ... for the prompt that led me to clarify this point.

what it is to be a woman, they are led to wrongfully include the actual world in the proposition corresponding to the negative answer to the question of whether they are women.

Given the aforementioned feeling of rejection towards the gender identity one was assigned at birth and the positive answer to the question *Do I want to be a woman?*, some questioning trans women might instead start to challenge dominant conceptions of womanhood. This might be so especially if they're able to share their experiences with other trans women who have similar backgrounds, or if they're more richly presented with all the intricacies and varied experiences shared by trans and cis women (therefore, scenarios more like A). However, in circumstances in which one still has a very limited grasp of the concept WOMAN, one cannot identify oneself with other women in terms of sharing the same biological sex as a significant portion of women. Besides, having limited opportunities to experiment with and violate expected gender norms, one cannot gather sufficient psychological data about how one feels in regard to such norms either. Presented with so limited circumstances, one's evidential basis becomes rather limited. So limited, in fact, that one has to resort to an inner sense of what one feels an inclination to do, to what one wants. In that sense, therefore, the question *Am I a woman?* becomes for some questioning trans women so partial that it effectively starts to resemble very closely the question *Do I want to be a woman?*. This is so as the only information accessible to them to arrive at a complete answer to the former is simply what has called their intrinsic inclinations[35]. Finally, since how in general what one is diverges

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[35] An anonymous referee notes that these constraints also seem to make it so that one would also have a partial grasp on the question *Do I want to be a woman?*, for one would then not have a good enough understanding of what is the object of one's wants. I think this question leads us to consider a whole host of other difficult questions. The reviewer has, therefore, identified an aspect of the paper over which I am simplifying and glossing over by not going into the answers to the questions one must determine (as I have alluded to earlier) in order to determine the answer to the question of whether one wants to be a woman. I think that for different people these questions will be different as different aspects of gendered reality will be more or less relevant: to give a toy example in broad strokes, for some certain social and cultural aspects matter the most, while for others it's first and foremost about being comfortable in their own bodies, while gender roles don't matter as much. Let's say that Graham is a trans man and that for him, one of the things that most makes him want to be a man is that he would have a lower voice. On the other hand, suppose Graham doesn't like having facial hair, and that perhaps he isn't aware of how regularly people with typically masculine levels of testosterone have to shave, or how it feels to have a five o'clock shadow. One could perhaps say that Graham doesn't fully know what he is getting into: only once he transitions will he fully know *exactly* what his experience post-transition is like. But the same, of course, would apply to every new life experience, from the most mundane to life-shattering transformative experiences (Paul, 2014). So while strictly speaking we might say that indeed one does not fully grasp the question of whether one wants to be a member of a given gender (or of whether one might want to eat cereal for breakfast tomorrow morning), this seems to be in a sense that largely does not matter pragmatically. This is especially attested by the fact that the number of detransitioners (i.e. trans people who go back on their processes of medical or social transition) is very low (cf. Detransition Facts and Statistics: Challenging the Myths Around Detransitioners. Accessed on 22 of November 2024 at `https://www.gendergp.com/detransition-facts/`). I don't know yet how to formally characterize this notion of grasp that results in partial grasp being enough for knowledge, but I would follow the suggestion in [Silva, 2024b] and follow from an analogy with the case for

from what one wants to be or feels inclination to be, this might then lead to a roadblock in one's mental process of coming to terms with being trans as one ceases to be able to determinately say that one is a woman, instead of just being able to say that one (merely) wants to be one.

Let's get a bit more technical. In scenarios somewhere in the middle between A and B, where one does not have a great grasp on the concept WOMAN as one is limited in how much one is capable of exploring one's gender identity and one's evidence is limited to what one wishes one's gender identity to be, then the part of $Q_{\text{I am a woman}}$ one grasps, might just be $Q_{\text{I want to be a woman}}$. This entails that $Q_{\text{I want to be a woman}} \leqslant Q_{\text{I am a woman}}$. Here notice that, as stated above, these are Yes-No questions asked in the first-person pertaining to one's gender. This means that *Do I want to be a woman?* is not simply a coarser partition of the same set of states as *Am I a woman?*, and for there to be parthood between these questions then it must be the case that "I want to be a woman" $\lll$ "I am a woman", i.e. the content of the former should be part of the content of the latter. For this to be the case, then, it must be the case that: all worlds where this questioning trans woman is a woman are worlds where she wants to be a woman; the worlds in which she wants to be a woman are part of worlds in which she is a woman [36]; and finally it must be the case that all worlds in which she doesn't want to be a woman are worlds in which she isn't a woman.

The first and third conditions are especially relevant. Due to them, my proposal stands by the claim that at least to some women, and perhaps especially prevalently for trans women, one has to want to be a woman to be one, and that, if one does not want to be a woman, then one *eo ipso* is not a woman. This tells us that for some trans women wanting to be a woman is *necessary* to being a woman, which is not to say that wanting to be a woman is sufficient to being a woman[37]. In a fairly weak but, I believe, still natural way of reading "want" (and cognate terms) according to which trans women who have already completed processes of social transition and who may not manifest an active desire to be women, as they already perceive themselves to be women, can nonetheless be said to want to be women, many women (including cis women) will come out as wanting to be women. In this sense "wanting to be a woman" would be a broad enough state that includes one being "content" in being a woman. So one can want to be a woman simply by not having an opposing desire to a current state of affairs. For instance, I believe there is a perfectly good sense in which five seconds ago I wanted to keep sitting in the chair I am now sitting on, even though no conscious desire to that effect crossed my mind. It can be said that I wanted to keep sitting in the chair as, say, it best suited a number of desires that *do* actively cross my mind. Perhaps even more so, our gender kind membership(s) play a crucial role in our day-to-day lives and in the

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universally quantified sentences.

[36]The reader should note that this condition is trivially satisfied if there are no worlds in which she wants to be a woman but is not a woman

[37]In my (Silva, manuscript) I suggest that what will exactly be sufficient will vary from individual to individual and no uniform answer is available.

fulfilment of our various active desires[38].

The fact that, thus understood, wanting to be a woman is part of what it takes to be one for many women but the conditions for being a woman are not clearly defined may lead questioning trans women to a state of confusion where they don't know whether there is something missing, as they haven't been able to experiment with gender norms on the one hand, and get a better grasp of the concept WOMAN on the other.

It might be even the case that trans women who have been on processes of transition, including hormonal replacement therapy for years with or without surgical intervention or who are not actively questioning their gender identity anymore still experience that they do not feel like they are women, or that they even feel like they are not women, but *only* that they want to be women. In turn, this experience seems to be at the heart of internalized transmisogyny and when extrapolated to cases of trans people more generally not feeling like they really are the gender they are, but merely that they want to be members of it, at the heart of internalized transphobia. This further illustrates how an environment in which inadequate and exclusionary concepts of womanhood and of other gender identities cause harms for trans women and for trans people more broadly, even if they're not questioning their gender identities anymore.

6 Recap and brief normative remarks

Using an approach to questions/subject matters inspired but relevantly different to that of Lewis [1988] and Yablo [2014] I have shown how in such a framework questions can be modelled as the set of their direct complete answers, which in turn allows for a model in which the questions one considers leads one to consider certain distinctions while ignoring other possible distinctions between worlds/states (Berto and Jago [2019]; Fine [2017]). After considering different contexts in which one might question one's gender identity and introducing this general framework, I showed how for various reasons agents may fail to fully grasp all possible answers to a given question. This is a case in which the agents fail to consider a given question in its full generality, thereby only considering a partial counterpart thereof. Further, I considered how to precisely define partial grasp as full grasp of a part (of a question).

I then moved on to consider the particular case of gender questioning experiences. Here, in line with ideas considered in the first section, I took note of the fact that these do not reduce to mere private acts of which solely the individual is responsible, but rather that there are structural and interpersonal factors that play an important role in determining how these processes play out.

Focusing then on the particular case of questioning trans women as an application of the preceding framework, I took into consideration that given constraints on the hermeneutical resources they are provided with, as well as the limitations on what gendered norms they are socially allowed to experiment with, they might often not have more data to work from than their own wants

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[38]Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for helping me to clarify this point.

and wishes. Therefore, the information they have available in order to get at a correct answer to the question *Am I a woman?* is (virtually) indiscernible from the information they have available to arrive at an answer to the question *Do I want to be a woman?*. Given that in general wanting to be something is not sufficient to be it, insofar as they fail to untangle the two questions, this can lead to a mental block that stops trans women in their transitions and has a serious impact on their well-being. In some cases, even in more advanced stages of transition, a possible harm felt by trans women is that they still have a lingering feeling of internalized transmisogyny according to which they do not feel like they are women but (merely) that they want to be women. Taking a step back from the particular case of trans women, this seems to be a way by which a source of a general feeling of internalized transphobia across various gender identities may be characterized.

Indeed, this is a way by which forms of oppression keeps trans people (even if not explicitly) questioning their own identities, undermining their own sense of self and the legitimacy of ways of existing other than being cis. This erodes self-respect and undermines political goals and the personal projects of trans people [Julia Kapusta, 2016].

So far, my incursion has been merely descriptive, aiming to capture how such forms of oppression operate. However, this state of affairs comes with obvious normative implications. Insofar as it constitutes an ongoing unjust situation in which trans women and trans people more generally face a system of gender representation and permissible experimentation which greatly restricts the ways in which they can arrive at the correct answers as to what their gender identities are, therefore taking steps towards living in accordance with it and the gains that brings in terms of well-being, this state of affairs calls for an immediate greater diffusion of non-dominant concepts of womanhood and all gender identities, of a better shared understanding of what it is to be trans, and of a greater permissibility for experimenting with gender norms.

Further, it might be that agents, due to lack of hermeneutical resources, like knowledge and social norms adequate for resistant gender kinds like non-binary and genderqueer identities [Dembroff, 2020], fail to understand what they want to be, or what their gender identity is. For instance, they might think that since they don't identify with the expectations of the gender they were assigned at birth, that they are only able to identify "with the opposite gender", whereas perhaps a non-binary gender identity would fit their wants and needs better[39].

For this, again, approaching a scenario like A, being informed and sharing

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[39]Thank you to Nick Küspert for calling my attention to how non-binary identities might be ignored by agents who are mistaken about what they want to be, given the prevalent thought that gender is a binary system. A helpful anonymous reviewer suggests that in this case the questions involved seem to be *What gender am I?* and that the question that is part of this question is *Am I a man or a woman?* and that therefore when one ignores non-binary genders one only grasps the latter and therefore only partially grasps the former. The anonymous reviewer further suggests that this might be a way of unifying and generalizing the account here provided for other forms of gender questioning. I think that they're right and would be interested in see in how the end result would look in detail, but I am not able to expand on it here.

epistemic tools that allow agents to better understand themselves, and avoid social and epistemic isolation in oppressive scenarios, and fighting political forces that would like to lead us to scenarios more alike B stand as clear normative goals.

Acknowledgements

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