



**Uncomfortable in my own skin - Emerging, early stage identity-related information needs of transgender people**

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# Uncomfortable in my own skin - Emerging, early stage identity-related information needs of transgender people

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this study, we examine identity-related, early stage information needs as described by transgender individuals. Early stage information needs have been described as embodied, intuitive emotions or **affects** that will evolve into formalised information needs (Taylor 1968; Ruthven 2019a). Taylor's (1968) famous conception of information needs was based on **research** on how and why information seekers come to library desks to ask questions (Case and Given 2016; Taylor 1968). However, **as** information needs are difficult to study empirically, research has focused on information seeking activities rather than needs (Lundh 2010), and the concept is still poorly understood (Ruthven 2019a; Savolainen 2017). **This being said**, information needs are the core of many models and studies on human information behaviour in contexts of work (Krikelas 1983; Wilson 1981) as well as everyday life (Gorman 1999).

Particularly relevant for the purpose of this study are approaches focusing on information needs in the contexts of “*deeply meaningful and intensely personal situations with life-long impacts*” (Clemens and Cushing 2010, p. 9) and *meaning-making* (Ruthven 2019b). In these situations, the ‘trigger’ for information seeking may be a personal crisis, legal barriers to information, social stigma or a significant life-long impact, for example (Clemens and Cushing 2010). Moreover, the process of meaning-making can emerge both **from significant events and gradual awakenings** (Ruthven 2019b). Significant events can be difficult life changes, during which our beliefs about the world can change. Gradual awakenings, on the other hand, happen when the current existence is not meaningful anymore, and a new way of living may be required (Ruthven 2019).

The study focuses on information needs among people who identify as transgender. The term is usually understood as an umbrella term referring to people with a range of gender-variant identities (Simmons and White 2014; Valentine 2007). In this study, we use the term to refer to people who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth, people whose relation to gender fluctuates and people who do not identify with the gender-binary at all (Simmons and White 2014; Valentine 2007). **For transgender people identity-related information needs can emerge in connection to significant life-events or gradual awakening (see Ruthven 2019b) and be deeply meaningful (see Clemens and Cushing 2010), since “being treated as a man [for female-to-male transgender people] socially is important enough to risk many other things including loss of family, friends, and career” (Dozier 2005, pp. 304-306).** Underpinned by social **constructivism** and queer phenomenology as an approach for studying experiences, the study aims to explore the **experiences** in which **way** early stage **identity-related** information needs are transformed into conscious information needs, taking into account the role of embodiment as a part of this process.

## 2. BACKGROUND

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3 Transgender and trans are used as umbrella terms referring to a range of gender-variant  
4 identities, practices, and communities. As an identity category, broadly defined, transgender  
5 includes people who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth, people  
6 whose relation to gender fluctuates, as well as those who do not identify with the gender-  
7 binary at all. The term has also been contested, and its meanings vary in different cultural and  
8 material contexts. Many gender-variant people do not identify with the term or feel that it  
9 does not account for the complexity of their lived experiences (Simmons and White 2014;  
10 Valentine 2007). The varying understandings of transgender are also related to on-going  
11 epistemological, political, and social changes (Kähkönen and Wickman 2013).  
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14 The flexible nature of the term makes it difficult to use it in quantitative surveys and  
15 statistical analyses. It is impossible to estimate the percentage of transgender people within  
16 one nation, let alone globally. For example, in Finland, the growing number of people  
17 (around 800 in 2017) who seek medical treatment—hormones and reassignment surgery—to  
18 alter their physical bodies to align their gender identities, represents only a small percentage  
19 of the trans-spectrum. Even within this group, approximately 50% decide not to undergo  
20 reassignment surgeries. This is partly because Finnish law requires that patients must be  
21 sterile (either sterilised or sterile through hormone replacement) to have access to the medical  
22 and legal transition process, which includes the legal recognition of gender (for more on this,  
23 see Honkasalo 2018). The majority of trans people, consisting of a diversity of gender  
24 identifications, do not want medical interventions. In addition, many trans people choose not  
25 to reveal their identification to others or on official forms (see, for example, Schild and  
26 Bratter 2015). They may have different reasons for doing so, but one major reason for this is  
27 a fear of being discriminated against. Results of many studies show that trans people face  
28 significant amounts of discrimination, violence and harassment in several areas of social life  
29 (see, for example, Bender-Baird 2011; Grant *et al.* 2011; Nordmarken and Kelly 2014).  
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34 This study is among the first to explore identity-related information needs of transgender  
35 people. Given the interdisciplinary nature of this work, it was informed by several areas:  
36 theories of information needs, research and theory on identity-related information practices,  
37 research on information seeking of transgender people and embodiment as part of  
38 information activities, transgender studies, and finally, queer phenomenology.  
39  
40

## 41 2.1. Medical understanding of transgender people

42 The medical understanding of the transgender experience is based on the idea of mind/body  
43 incongruence, the notion of being trapped in a wrongly gendered body (Linander *et al.*  
44 2019b). The history of the ‘wrong body’ narrative comes from the history of gender  
45 reassignment where the narrative of ‘being in the wrong body’ has enabled medical treatment  
46 (Bettcher 2014; Hines 2007; Stone 2006). However, the ‘wrong body’ narrative can be  
47 deeply unsatisfactory for understanding one’s own embodied experience (Linander *et al.*  
48 2019a; Hines 2007; Stone 2006). In many countries, the clinical evaluation that precedes  
49 access to gender-conforming medical procedures regulates how gender is performed, and  
50 research has shown how gender norms guide access to medical procedures (Linander *et al.*  
51 2019a; Spade 2006). Within Foucauldian terms, medical procedures can be understood to  
52 embody the regulation that happens through governing techniques, norms and discourses  
53 (Linander *et al.* 2019a; Spade 2006). This study relies on the critiques of e.g. Hines (2007)  
54 and Spade (2003) of the medical perspective, that is, the understanding of gender through  
55 binary male/female categories.  
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3 In the English-speaking world, gender dysphoria is often understood as a medicalised term to  
4 refer to strong discomfort of the physical body (Kondelin 2017; Hines 2007), which needs to  
5 be diagnosed in order to attend to medical care (Aizura 2018). However, in Finland, the  
6 concept of gender dysphoria is commonly used within transgender communities to discuss  
7 the negative feelings in relation to one's gender and body, and additionally, the ways other  
8 people see and categorise transgender people (Kondelin 2017). The separation between body  
9 dysphoria—discomfort connected to the physical body coming “from the inside,”—and social  
10 dysphoria—connected to not being treated as belonging to one's gender or being misgendered  
11 “from the outside”—is adapted from Kondelin (2017) in this study (see also Vähäpassi 2017).  
12 It should be noted, however, that not all transgender people experience gender dysphoria, and  
13 levels of discomfort may vary.  
14  
15

## 16 17 **2.2. Constructing transgender identities**

18  
19 The idea that everyone has an internal identity has been described through concepts such as  
20 the *hermeneutic subject* and *core identity* (Rubin 2003). However, from a social **constructivist**  
21 and queer theory perspective, identity is not simply a subjective decision but rather it is  
22 fundamentally social and intersubjective (Nicholas 2014). According to Hall (1996), identity  
23 is constructed within discourse, produced in specific historical and institutional sites.  
24 Identities emerge within specific modalities of power, and thus identities are more the  
25 product of marking differences and exclusion, than unity (Hall 1996).  
26  
27

28 Salamon (2010) suggests that there are two kinds of modes of gender identity: first, the fully  
29 autonomous subject possessing a gender that is built from an internally felt sense of self, and  
30 second, a subject hoping to be conferred properly in the social world. It is impossible to  
31 conceive a purely internal felt sense of gender because society's structures of gender always  
32 attend and inform that felt sense (Salamon 2010, pp. 124-125). Noble (2013) describes the  
33 experience of ‘something like an identity’ where the ‘something like’ aspect is crucial for the  
34 understanding of the self. The understanding of identity being ‘something like’ something  
35 else happens also through experiences of ‘something that fails’, meaning that the identity may  
36 fail to cohere as a thing unto itself, hence the need for a comparison to begin with. In terms of  
37 transgender identity, this may happen by *passing* or *blending*, the experience of being read as  
38 a member of a group (Noble 2013, p. 251).  
39  
40

41 Hicks (2019) found five key identity conceptualisations in her review of information  
42 behaviour and practices research. Firstly, *identity as a personal project* (e.g. Hasler *et al.*  
43 2014) focuses on how information seeking supports and reflects self-perception and  
44 expression. Secondly, the conceptualisation of *identity and social groups* (e.g. Lingel and  
45 Boyd 2014) understands identity construction as a product of social circumstances with a  
46 focus on social groups. Thirdly, *identity as self-presentation* (e.g. Bronstein 2013) shares  
47 commonalities with both of the aspects above (Hicks 2019). Fourthly, *identity as a*  
48 *fragmented discursive subject* (e.g. Hamer 2003) understands identity to be the consequence  
49 of negotiating conflicting accounts and a plurality of voices that comprise communal  
50 meaning-making (Hicks 2019). Lastly, *an intersectional, hybrid and global identity*  
51 conceptualises identity as comprised of multi-faceted experiences (Hicks 2019).  
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55 In a study on gay males' information seeking, Hamer (2003) argued that a gay identity  
56 emerges from the experience of same-sex attraction, but also through the use of social and  
57 cultural resources to make sense of the experience since identity is built on the interplay  
58 between an individual and society. Thus, information seeking is positioned close to identity  
59 construction; according to Hamer (2003) people may “navigate identity creation by pursuing  
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1  
2  
3 information needs” and create identities using “representation and discourse accessed through  
4 interactions with social and cultural resources, that is, information” (Hamer 2003, p. 78). In  
5 this study we understand gender to include both “what we consciously choose to identify as,  
6 and subconsciously feel ourselves to be” (Serano 2016, p.78). Thus, we view identity both as  
7 a personal project and as a fragmented discursive subject (Hicks 2019).  
8  
9

### 10 2.3. Information seeking of transgender people

11  
12 Research on the lived experience of transgender people has started to emerge since the 1990s  
13 (Stryker and Aizura 2013), but only a few studies have looked at information seeking from  
14 this perspective (see, however, Huttunen *et al.* 2019; Karami *et al.* 2019; Hawkins and  
15 Giesecking 2017; Pohjanen and Kortelainen 2016). It has been noted that transgender people  
16 actively seek information related to their own gender identity (Floegel and Costello 2019;  
17 Pohjanen and Kortelainen 2016; Adams and Peirce 2006). At first, in acquiring information  
18 on the transgender experiences, serendipity plays an important role (Floegel and Costello  
19 2019; Pohjanen and Kortelainen 2016) since the individual may not know the words or  
20 concepts to describe their experienced gender, although in many cases there is an experience  
21 of dissonance and that “something is wrong” (Huttunen *et al.* 2019; Beemyn and Rankin  
22 2011).  
23  
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25  
26 Without information on the transgender experiences, understanding one’s own feelings may  
27 be difficult. They may feel like being ‘the only one’ or think there is something wrong with  
28 them (Beemyn and Rankin 2011). Transgender people themselves play an important role in  
29 producing information about the transgender issues, especially in online spaces and on social  
30 media (Austin 2019; Hawkins and Watson 2017).  
31

32  
33 Studies indicate that for transgender people, friends, other transgender people and the Internet  
34 are important information sources (Drake and Bielefield 2017; Pohjanen and Kortelainen  
35 2016). The Internet allows anonymity and ease of access (Drake and Bielefield 2017;  
36 Hawkins and Giesecking 2017), although information on the transgender experiences may not  
37 always be reliable or accurate (Drake and Bielefield 2017; Hawkins and Giesecking 2017;  
38 Levitt and Ippolito, 2014; Beiriger and Jackson 2007; Adams and Peirce 2006; Taylor 2002).  
39 Search engines that do not require controlled vocabularies can help information seeking on  
40 marginalised topics when the vocabulary about the subject is not well-known (Kitzie 2019).  
41

42  
43 Limited media presentation can negatively affect the impression of the transgender  
44 experience and its commonness (Huttunen *et al.* 2019; Beemyn and Rankin 2011). Floegel  
45 and Castello (2019) noted in their study of queer individuals’ information practices that  
46 information landscapes are usually overloaded with heteronormativity, wider discourse that  
47 privileges the dominant gender and sexuality-based narratives over queer alternatives  
48 (Floegel and Castello 2019; Ahmed, 2006). Similarly to heteronormativity, cisnormativity  
49 works as an analytical concept that problematises the idea of cis-position being natural,  
50 unlike the categories of transgender or non-binary (Linander *et al.* 2019a; Spade 2006).  
51 Cisgender is a term used for marking the trans/not-trans distinction and it can be used to refer  
52 to people who gain social privilege of being not-trans. (Enke 2013.) For marginalised  
53 identities, hetero- and cisnormativity can have a significant impact on their information  
54 practices (Kitzie 2019).  
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57  
58 These previous studies contribute to understanding on what kind of challenges transgender  
59 people may encounter when seeking information as well as what sources they may rely on in  
60

1  
2  
3 their information seeking. To our knowledge, this study is among the first to study the  
4 identity-related, early-stage information needs of transgender people.  
5

#### 6 7 **2.4. Early stage information needs**

8  
9 The notion of information needs has not been well conceptualised although it is probably the  
10 most frequently used concept referring to the motivators for information seeking (Savolainen  
11 2012). Case and Given (2016) define an information need as a recognition of one's  
12 knowledge as inadequate in order to satisfy one's goals. There are also unconscious  
13 precursors to needs, such as curiosity (Case and Given 2016). Additionally, Savolainen  
14 (2017) defines an information need as a key construct in understanding why people initiate  
15 and continue the information-seeking process. Information needs differ from primary  
16 physiological needs such as the need for food and water and constitutes a paradox: what  
17 exactly is required to satisfy the information need is often not known before the information-  
18 seeking process (Savolainen 2017; Cole 2011; Wilson 1981).  
19

20  
21 Information needs have been placed at the core of information behaviour in many studies  
22 (e.g. Krikelas 1983; Wilson 1981; Wilson 1997), but alternative conceptions have also been  
23 presented (Case and Given 2016; Savolainen 2012; Cole 2011). These include the notion of  
24 an anomalous state of knowledge (ASK) (Belkin *et al.* 1982), a gap in understanding (Dervin  
25 1983), and uncertainty (Atkin 1973; Kuhlthau 1993).  
26

27  
28 **This study relies on** Taylor's (1968) model of information needs **which** can be seen as one of  
29 the most influential conceptions in the field of LIS (Ruthven 2019a; Case and Given 2016;  
30 Savolainen 2012; Cole 2011; Lundh 2010), contributing to many theories in the field  
31 (Kuhlthau 1993; Ruthven 2019a). **In Taylor's (1968) model needs are viewed to provide an**  
32 **initial impetus to an information-seeking process.** Taylor (1968) proposes that information  
33 needs exist across four levels: the visceral ( $Q_1$ ), conscious ( $Q_2$ ), formalised ( $Q_3$ ), and  
34 compromised ( $Q_4$ ). The first two levels ( $Q_1$  and  $Q_2$ ) are defined as originating from within the  
35 individual, while the last two ( $Q_3$  and  $Q_4$ ) from a process where a person has to (re)formulate  
36 one's questions in interaction with an intermediary or an information system, in other words,  
37 in a question-negotiating process (Lundh 2010; Taylor 1968). Additionally, the first two  
38 levels ( $Q_1$  and  $Q_2$ ) are usually understood as early stage information needs (Ruthven 2019a).  
39 These two levels can be understood to be qualitatively different from the last two, since they  
40 can be understood as actual information needs while the last two are 'questions' (Ruthven  
41 2019a; Lundh 2010; Taylor 1968). Taylor (1968) describes the visceral information need as  
42 the actual, unexpressed need for information. This need may be only a vague sort of  
43 dissatisfaction, and it is probably inexpressible in linguistic terms. This need will change in  
44 form, quality, concreteness and criteria as information is added (Taylor, 1968).  
45  
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48  
49 Research on information needs has focused on *conscious* needs (e.g. Ruthven 2019a; Lundh  
50 2010), and less attention has been paid to early stage or visceral (Taylor 1968) needs.  
51 However, according to Ruthven (2019a), empirical studies on information needs rarely  
52 differentiate the levels of information need. Cole (2011) describes a visceral information need  
53 as a black box, as something which we cannot know or observe and which an information  
54 seeker cannot define. Similarly, it has been claimed that information needs can be studied  
55 only based on the behaviour that they engender, that is, information seeking and use (Bruce  
56 2005) and that it is beyond our observation to study activity in human minds that leads an  
57 individual to recognise these needs (Case and Given 2016). **Despite these challenges, this**  
58 **study attempts to explore the experiences of visceral information needs and the way they are**  
59  
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transformed into conscious information needs, taking into account the role of embodiment as a part of this process.

## 2.5. Embodied information

Historically, in the field of LIS, embodiment and the body as an important actor and information source have largely been ignored. In exploring information practices, language has received a lot of attention rather than the roles of the body and materiality (Olsson and Lloyd 2017). However, in several recent studies, embodiment has been emphasised in LIS (see Huttunen *et al.* 2019; Olsson 2016; 2010; Gorichanaz 2015; Bonner and Lloyd 2011; Lloyd 2009; 2007, for example).

Embodied information manifests itself in many forms. Sensorial information and corporeal experiences are an important part of embodied information (Cox 2019; Cox *et al.* 2017; Gorichanaz 2015; Lloyd 2007), and learning from other bodies has been discovered to be an important part of embodied information practices as well (Huttunen *et al.* 2019; St. Jean *et al.* 2018; Bonner and Lloyd 2011). A key element of embodied information is social information, which can be defined as information embodied within social networks which is difficult to articulate or express in written form, drawing from real life experiences (Lloyd *et al.* 2013; Lloyd, 2010).

Ruthven (2019a) notes that early stage information needs are described through embodied and sensorial experiences rather than formalised information needs (Ruthven 2019a; Taylor 1968) and are typically associated with negative emotions (Ruthven 2019a). Lundh (2010) emphasises the role of social interaction as important for information needs, rather than their construction on an individual level independent of social encounters.

In this study, we use the concept of embodiment as a tool for understanding early stage information needs and the role of the body as a subjective experience that has cultural meaning (Huttunen *et al.* 2019; Csordas 1999). This means that we understand embodiment as experience and also as a social practice in a concrete social, cultural and historical context (Merlau-Ponty 1945/2012; Davis 1997).

## 3. STUDY APPROACH

### 3.1. Social constructivism and queer theory

This study takes a social constructivist approach but also draws on particular strands in queer theory (Butler 1990; Foucault 1976). We approach information needs originating from within an individual (Q<sub>1</sub> and Q<sub>2</sub> of Taylor's model, 1968) from a social constructivist point of view. This means that we understand an individual to be affected by the social surroundings already as the visceral information needs are formed. Social constructivism presumes that individuals live in a world that is physically, socially and subjectively constructed and that societal conventions, history and interaction significantly affect individuals' thinking (Talja *et al.* 2005). Rather than focusing only on "needy users" (see Olsson 2005; Talja 1997) or understanding information seeking processes as driven by "actual, true, inner and individual information needs" (Lundh 2010), this approach allows taking into account the way bodily experiences and social and cultural surroundings are intertwined in human experiences. To recognise this, the analytical focus in studying information needs has to be in lived

experiences — on how individuals are differently situated in the social world, which shapes their (bodily) experience.

Queer theory, which emerged in the 1990s, was founded in poststructuralist thinking, in particular in Michel Foucault's and Judith Butler's theorising. It introduced new viewpoints to gender and sexuality as socially constructed and aimed to deconstruct the naturalising discourses of the Western dichotomous gender order (Hines 2007; Wickman 2003). Queer theory suggests that our bodies are always shaped by the social world in which they are inescapably situated. This happens at the conceptual level and the historical moment affects what is socially understood as a body (Salamon 2010). Scholars in the field of transgender studies have criticised queer theory for missing the complexity of gendered embodiment and the reality of bodily materiality (Salamon 2010; Hines 2007; Whittle 2006).

Moreover, queer theory – and in particular Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity – has been criticized of theorizing 'transgender queer' by emphasizing it as performative and transgressive (Prosser 1998). The key rifts relating to this debate have blamed queer theory of utilizing transgender subject as a touchstone of queer theory, theorizing transgender from gay/lesbian point of view instead of taking into account actual lived experiences of transgender people, misreading the particular 'transsexual' experience of embodiment, as well as of not understanding a trans person's desire to live a conventional gendered life, which involves a creation of a congruence between gender identity and sex (Namaste 2000; Prosser 1998; Rubin 1998). Briefly, the debate was about the theorization of trans experiences and identities. It contributed to the beginnings of transgender studies that puts emphasis on the variety and complexity of actual transgender lives and experiences. Since queer theory offers tools for analysing how social world influences to the body, but not for the analysis of the embodied *experiences* of transgender people, we use a specific adaptation of queer theory, queer phenomenology, as a research method, described below.

### 3.2. Queer phenomenology

This study utilises queer phenomenology (Ahmed 2006, Rodemeyer 2017) to understand experiences of information needs in relation to gender identity and as a tool for analysing how experiences of information needs are formed both individually and socially. In addition, Rubin's (1998) ideas on how a combination of phenomenology and Foucault's theory can contribute to studies on transgender experiences, are used to guide analysis. Rubin (1998) argues that "*the political advantage of this methodological hybrid is the potential to mend the rift that has developed between many marginalised communities and the scholarship written about them*" (Rubin 1998, p. 279).

Queer phenomenology offers a model of how gendered, sexualised, and racialised bodies become oriented in time and space (Ahmed 2006). Drawing from feminist, queer and critical race philosophy scholars engaged with the phenomenological tradition, it focuses in particular on the notion of orientation, examining it as ways in which the bodily, spatial and the social are entangled (Ahmed 2006). According to Ahmed (2006), we are oriented when we are in line. Lines are here understood as the spatialization of the concepts of norms and contributing to which bodies become intelligible and as belonging in a space (Linander *et al.* 2019b). For the purpose of this study, the notion of disorientation is particularly useful as it helps to elaborate bodily experiences of being out of place or losing one's place. Disorientation happens when the subject does not follow the line, but instead seems to be 'out of space' (Ahmed 2006 p.160).



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2  
3 There is an important philosophical difference between phenomenological and queer  
4 approaches (Rodemeyer 2017; Fryer 2012). While phenomenologists presume that we have  
5 direct access to our immediate sensory experiences, and that we can describe them, queer  
6 theorists usually understand our sensory experiences as already filtered through our  
7 discursive surroundings (Rodemeyer 2017). Queer phenomenology can be used as a coherent  
8 perspective, if there is no presumption of a ‘raw’ material source to our sensory experiences,  
9 but instead, sensory experiences are simply taken as they are experienced (Rodemeyer 2017).  
10  
11

12 Previous studies have used phenomenology as a method for exploring transgender people  
13 (Rubin 1998, 2003; Salamon 2010) and queer phenomenology—especially the concept of  
14 orientation—in studying trans-specific care in a Nordic context (Linander *et al.* 2019). In the  
15 Finnish context, Kondelin (2014) adapted Ahmed’s concept of disorientation to examine  
16 what kinds of experiences cause transgender bodies to become disoriented in terms of gender  
17 and sexuality. **Queer phenomenology has been used successfully to study how embodied  
18 experiences of transgender people can be understood both as individual and social. Based on  
19 this, we expect it to be a suitable method to enable understanding experiences of early stage  
20 information needs as embodied and intuitive (Taylor 1968; Ruthven 2019a) but at the same  
21 time, influenced by social norms and expectations (see, Linander *et al.* 2019a).**  
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### 25 **3.3. Aim and research questions**

26  
27 **The aim of this study is to explore the experiences in which early stage identity-related  
28 information needs are transformed into conscious information needs, taking into account the  
29 role of embodiment as a part of this process.** The research questions are stated as follows:  
30

- 31 1. How do transgender people describe their **experiences of** early stage information  
32 needs in relation to gender identity?
- 33 2. How do they describe the way these needs were transformed into conscious  
34 information needs?  
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## 40 **4. METHOD (AND MATERIALS)**

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42 In accordance with the queer phenomenological approach that emphasises experiences, the  
43 data **were** collected by interviewing people who identified themselves as transgender.  
44 Potential interviewees were approached via an online questionnaire directed towards gender  
45 minority people in Finland conducted in the spring of 2016. The survey focused on gender  
46 minority related information seeking and it was designed and administered by the first author  
47 of this article (*author citation deleted*). Of the 162 respondents, 41 were willing to participate  
48 in the interviews and were contacted.  
49  
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51 Altogether, 25 individuals participated in semi-structured interviews conducted in 2016 by  
52 the first author in Finnish: 17 face-to-face, five via Skype, and three by phone. Face-to-face  
53 interviews took place in five Finnish cities in private places which felt comfortable for the  
54 interviewees, for example in a library group-work space, a private office room or a meeting  
55 room. **Originally, information needs were not in the specific focus in the interviews,** but the  
56 interviews concentrated on the experiences of gender identity formation, gender identity-  
57 related information needs, sources, information sharing and factors affecting information  
58 seeking (**see appendix 1**). All the interviews were **audio** recorded.  
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2  
3 The interviews took from 35 minutes to 1 hour 59 minutes, for a total of 29 hours 25 minutes.  
4 The average time per interview was 1 hour 10 minutes. The interviewees did not receive any  
5 financial or material payment for their participation. All the interviewees gave their consent  
6 to record the interviews and use the data for research purposes. All personal data, such as  
7 email addresses, were separated from the data used in the research, and security issues were  
8 considered when storing the data. Details considering identifiable information, e.g. names  
9 and places of residence were changed in the data. Ethical guidelines for integrity,  
10 meticulousness, and accuracy in conducting research, and in recording, presenting, and  
11 evaluating the research results for human and social sciences were taken into account during  
12 the research (Finnish advisory board on research integrity 2012).  
13  
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15  
16 The interviews were transcribed and coded using NVivo Plus software by the first author.  
17 Memos were also written during the analysis. This study utilised a combination of  
18 theoretically and empirically driven analysis. During the transcription process, the attention  
19 was drawn to how interviewees described their early stage information needs as a part of  
20 identity formation. Additionally, information needs became visible as a part of the first steps  
21 of information seeking, especially when describing embodied experiences and lack of  
22 suitable words for experiences. All the transcriptions were carefully read and reread focusing  
23 especially on statements related to early information needs and identity formation.  
24 Additionally, the statements connected to finding a word for an experience and embodied  
25 experiences were taken into account. The theoretical background, especially studies on  
26 information needs and transgender experiences (see sub-chapters 1.3. and 1.4.), were used to  
27 guide the analysis. Taylor's (1968) categorisation of information needs was used to identify  
28 stages of information needs. Additionally, Ahmed's (2006) concept of disorientation  
29 informed the analysis of queer experiences at this stage of the analysis.  
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33 In most interviews there was a certain type of narrative to be found about identity  
34 construction from childhood to the current situation with certain life-events that had changed  
35 the direction or triggered information seeking. These 'turns' were taken for closer  
36 examination. The two core categories of the analysing frame were the early stage information  
37 needs and experiences of dysphoria. The early stage information needs category was divided  
38 into four subcategories: 'a trigger for information seeking,' 'finding the right words',  
39 'understanding the experience' and 'lack of information in society.' The core category of  
40 experiences of dysphoria was divided further into three subcategories, bodily dysphoria,  
41 social dysphoria and a combination of bodily and social dysphoria. It must be highlighted that  
42 all the interviewees did not describe experiences of bodily or social dysphoria. However,  
43 descriptions of experiencing discomfort contributing to emerging information needs were  
44 common and included into this category.  
45  
46  
47

## 48 5. FINDINGS

49  
50 The interviewees had the opportunity to define their gender identity with their own words at  
51 the beginning of the interview. For some of the interviewees this task was easier than for  
52 others. Usually the interviewees used more than a single word to describe their gender  
53 identity and often the definition was not experienced as clear-cut or unambiguous.  
54  
55

56 *Well, I have defined myself as a gender non-conforming mainly because I think manhood is*  
57 *pretty terrible and feels quite strange for me. But maybe it is now somewhere between gender*  
58 *non-conforming and transman. So maybe I would still say to be gender non-conforming.*  
59  
60

(Gender non-conforming, I10).

Moreover, some interviewees described gender identity as a contextual matter:

*Well, I like to say it moves between areas where I define myself as man, other or who cares. So if someone asks from me what is my gender I say like this. So, so, I feel it is quite contextual how I got gendered in relation to my surroundings. It is ok if most of the people read me as man and works with it but for example in political or activist contexts the definition of "other" is pretty important for me since I don't feel I would be a man like one hundred percent always and everywhere. (Man, other, who cares, I12).*

However, in order to represent the variety of identity labels, descriptions of the interviewees were shortened into following definitions: transman (4), gender non-conforming (3), man (2), woman (2), no-gender (2), something between a woman and man (1), third option (1), man/other/who cares (1), transgender woman (1), transgender man (1), fluid/gender non-conforming (1), boy/transboy (1), transgender (1), transboy (1), androgyne man (1) and non-binary transmasculine guy (1). One interviewee did not want to define their gender.

The interviewees were highly educated on average, lived in urban areas, and were read as white. The ages of the interviewees were between 15 and 72; the average age was 33. Five of the interviewees mentioned being in a sexual minority group. One of the interviewee's mother tongue was other than Finnish. Three of the interviewees reported having ADHD and one an autism spectrum disorder. All but one lived in Finland at the time of the interview. Of the interviewees, 18 had finished or were in the middle of a medical transition process. Four were considering or aiming to complete a medical transition process, and three aimed not to go through the medical transition process.

In the following sub-chapters, we will focus on the ways transgender people described their early stage information needs in relation to gender identity and how these needs were transformed into conscious information needs.

### ***5.1. Dealing with gender dysphoria***

For some of the interviewees, body dysphoria was a clear signal of the transgender experience. These experiences were not necessarily understood to be caused by gender, rather, the experience seemed to be hard to define without information about the subject. In queer phenomenology terms, these experiences can be described as moments of *disorientation* (Ahmed 2006).

For those who had suffered from body dysphoria, strong discomfort had usually begun at puberty. The bodily changes with strong 'turns' of discomfort led the subjects to understand the friction between their own gendered body and their gender experience. Even for the interviewees with less strong body dysphoria, the bodily changes at puberty had still caused discomfort and confusion. The lack of information on body dysphoria had made these experiences harder to deal with. The excerpt from one of the interviews below illustrates this point:

*It did affect me, well at first the experience that you appear as a teenage girl, but you feel like a teenage boy, and at the time of puberty some appendages begin to grow that you don't want to, it raises anxiety and depression. And there was no information to say that you could bind your breasts, there was not any kind of practical help on how to deal with gender dysphoria.*

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3 *Suddenly it makes you anxious to go to the shower and all these kinds of disturbing things. It*  
4 *was hard to deal with these issues. (Transman, I6.)*  
5

6 For some of the interviewees, the discomfort with their own body had escalated to a point  
7 where it was not possible to live without change. This was described as a 'dead-end' where  
8 change had to happen. These dead ends **started taking shape into information needs, which in**  
9 **turn** triggered information seeking and helped the interviewees to deal with their bodies and  
10 to find different ways to reduce their discomfort. For those who were unfamiliar with the  
11 term 'transgender' it may have been difficult to know what kind of information to even seek.  
12  
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## 14 **5.2. Uncomfortable in my own skin**

15

16 Not all of the interviewees experienced body dysphoria. With these interviewees the  
17 experience of being transgender may have taken more time to understand. However,  
18 embodied experiences were usually part of the sense of being somehow 'different' from  
19 others. The experience was formed through the feeling of body as being odd, strange or 'out  
20 of place.' The forming of the transgender identity **and at the same time, forming of**  
21 **information needs**, had begun through this 'difference' and through understanding the gender  
22 role they saw was not the right one for them.  
23  
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25 **Information of transgender phenomenon was not always perceived as accurate or helpful.**  
26 **Thus, it did not necessarily help the interviewees to understand their own experience** (see also  
27 Pohjanen and Kortelainen 2016). The problem with information about transgender people  
28 was usually the 'wrong body narrative' in the media presentation of transgender people  
29 (Prosser 1998). **In particular in the 1990s, the wrong-body model was also used in**  
30 **autobiographies by trans people themselves to express their sensory or visceral experience, of**  
31 **having a "second skin", as Jay Prosser (1998) puts it. The wrong-body narrative is not the**  
32 **only available model, but it persists especially in media and popular discourses. It has been**  
33 **criticized for its pathologizing aspects, and as Talia Mae Bettcher (2014) argues, it is**  
34 **connected to surgical alteration of the body. Any identity that fails to align with the narrative**  
35 **is "ruled ineligible" (Bettcher 2014, p. 402).**  
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41 Several of the interviewees described getting the impression that they could not be  
42 transgender unless they had experienced the feeling of being in the wrong body since their  
43 childhood. In addition, the media representations mainly concerned binary transgender people  
44 (see also Huttunen *et al.* 2019). However, for some, this information served as a 'turn' which  
45 led to an understanding of the cause of discomfort and change in orientation. **This turn can**  
46 **also be seen as a turn from a visceral information need into a conscious information need.**  
47 The excerpt below illustrates this aspect:  
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49

50 *I have always felt myself somehow uncomfortable in my own skin, and through many, well, I*  
51 *don't actually know when it started. But anyhow, at some point I watched television and I*  
52 *remember there was Buck Angel on, who is a transman who has not had genital surgery or*  
53 *anything like that. I was like wow, how cool is that! It happened years ago but somehow it*  
54 *remained. And now it finally, I don't remember exactly what launched it, but I went to watch*  
55 *stuff like video blogs made by transmen, and it made me think that this is it, I have found my*  
56 *own place, kind of. I finally found the word I can use to describe this experience. (Transman,*  
57 *I11.)*  
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### 5.3. *Some kind of friction*

Gender dysphoria has its social forms as well. Social dysphoria includes the negative experiences of not being recognised in the right gender, not being seen and treated as one wants. This experience had in many cases deepened at puberty. Many interviewees described how they had the experience of being ‘genderless’ in their childhood. It was not until puberty when their gender started to affect their lives. The excerpts below illustrate this aspect:

*If I look back on my life, I maybe link it more to feeling where I feel that I am outside of some definitions. It is hard for me, well, there are some experiences where it is hard for me for example, well, I am seen as a woman. - - Really clear, no-one ever confuses with it, my, well, to them there is nothing unclear with my supposed gender and it may have been some kind of friction between the own experience and the message that comes from the outside. There is some kind of, well, friction is a pretty good term for it, friction, friction in it. (No-gender I9.)*

In the above description, the discomfort and the information need **form friction between experiences “from the inside” and the message coming “from the outside” of the person**. It is caused by dissonance in the way other people see the person’s gender (identity), not solely by the bodily experience. This *friction* between one’s own experience and how other people see the person **had caused discomfort and need for information to understand this friction**. The interviewees described the experience of *not* identifying with the gender other people presume them to be. This exclusive experience causes friction between one’s own identity and presumed gender and can be described as *disorientation* (Ahmed 2006). These moments of disorientation had triggered information seeking in relation to gender and gender identity.

### 5.4. *Everybody will see my body*

Some of the interviewees described how the **expectations** from outside affected how they experienced their body. Bodily experience and social experience are not necessarily separate from each other. Body dysphoria can increase in social situations as the following description demonstrates:

*If I begin with the feeling of dysphoria, it, at the beginning it was directed strongly towards the midriff, to the chest, waist and hips. And somehow those, I had somehow the experience that those should be, like if I was having a presentation for example, somehow those felt like compelling to me. I know this sounds strange but somehow it, like even though I was able to move my attention to the content of my speech I still felt like, oh no, everybody will see my body, help me! (Androgyne man I24.)*

The gendered body influenced the way other people saw the interviewees. For some interviewees, it had been easier to be seen as the correct gender as children, but after puberty the gendered body had started to affect how they were seen. **The expectations coming from the outside caused discomfort and developed into information needs. However**, some of the older interviewees described the experience of not having any (real) possibilities to deal with their transgender identity or gender dysphoria until the 1990s. These people had lived in their presumed gender role until the general atmosphere in society became more open-minded and permissible. Some of them had lived their life *following the line* of getting married and having children. **During this time, the early stage information needs had gradually formed into conscious information needs**. One of the **interviewees** described how after her divorce she started to seek information on how to get rid of her bodily hair and get a hair transplant.

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3 For her, feminising her body had to happen in order to be seen as woman before she was  
4 ready to adopt the transgender identity.  
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### 6 **5.5. Trying to find words**

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8 Many interviewees described their early stage information needs as having an experience  
9 they did not have a word for. It was hard to seek information when they did not know what  
10 the experience was about and thus, they did not know where to begin to seek information.  
11 One interviewee described how a serendipitous encounter with the description of a  
12 transgender experience felt like déjà vu because it seemed like not being the only one who  
13 was having the same experience. In addition, another interviewee recounted the difficulty of  
14 describing the experience of gender identity in general.  
15  
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17 The moments of disorientation had resulted in seeking information from different sources in  
18 order to understand their own experiences. One interviewee, for example, described the  
19 difficulty of trying to explain his experience to his therapist when he *“was trying to find, like,*  
20 *trying to find words to it, like is it normal if you feel like you are not a girl?”* (Man 117). In  
21 addition, search engines such as Google were used for tentative searches for questions such  
22 as *“What is it if you feel yourself partly a man, partly a woman, or, or, none of those things,*  
23 *searches like that”* (Something between woman and man I4). Search engines that allow  
24 seeking information without the exact terms have been helpful for finding the words to  
25 describe individual experiences (see also Kitzie 2019).  
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29 Finding the right words had sometimes happened through exclusion. As noted above, usually  
30 the forming of the transgender identity had happened through exclusion of the gender role the  
31 person is seen to have. However, exclusion had also included identities such as ‘lesbian,’  
32 ‘homosexual’ or ‘cross-dresser’, which may have helped to form the identity at some point  
33 but did not explain the experience as a whole. This may have taken years to happen.  
34 Additionally, some of the non-binary transgender people had excluded binary transgender  
35 identities.  
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### 38 **5.6. A somehow vague or extremely rare experience**

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40 The normative understanding of gender had made it harder for the interviewees to encounter  
41 terms describing the transgender experience. All the interviewees described how there had  
42 been a lack of information of transgender issues in society. School, media and health care had  
43 not offered reliable information on the topic. Only the youngest of the interviewees (aged 15)  
44 had gained helpful information on transgender people in school, although it was given after  
45 he had already sought information elsewhere. Many interviewees thought, however, that the  
46 school should have offered information about gender (and sexual) minorities. **The lack of any  
47 kind of information in one’s social surroundings hampered the formation of visceral  
48 information needs into conscious information needs. This was because of the lack of  
49 possibilities to relate to others’ experiences or words needed to seek for information.**  
50  
51

52 For four interviewees, religion had strongly affected their acceptance of their identity,  
53 especially for those from small towns in Northern Finland. For interviewees with religious  
54 backgrounds, shame and guilt were apparent in terms of emotions and actions in relation to  
55 their transgender identity. For some, religion had slowed down the process of accepting their  
56 gender identity. For some, religion had slowed down the process of accepting their  
57 gender identity.  
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3 In terms of other institutional sources, medical understanding of transgender people,  
4 especially in previous decades, had made it more difficult to understand or accept one's  
5 experience as transgender. One interviewee had found the word 'transsexuality' as a child in  
6 a popularised medical book (*Kodin lääkärikirja*) at home, in which being transgender was  
7 defined as a mental disorder. Four interviewees had suffered from depression. **However, for**  
8 **these interviewees medical care or therapy had not resolved the challenges of understanding**  
9 **their gender identity.** On the contrary, in some cases their gender experience had not be taken  
10 seriously by medical authorities or the idea of being transgender was disputed.  
11  
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13 The public media had offered little information in terms of transgender people and the  
14 information had not been necessarily accurate (see also Huttunen *et al.* 2019; Floegel and  
15 Costello 2019; Austin 2019). Some interviewees had gained information on transgender  
16 people in childhood, but the information had been in such a form that it did not help them to  
17 understand their own experience. Transgender people may have been described negatively or  
18 the description may have included descriptions such as 'the wrong body narrative', which is  
19 not experienced by all transgender people. Thus, having a word for 'transgender' did not help  
20 understand their own, undefined experience. The interviewee in the excerpt below reflects on  
21 this:  
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24  
25 *It must have been somewhere at the primary school or somewhere because there is always*  
26 *something like, there are TV documentaries or things like that, where I have found out that*  
27 *this experience does exist. I have kind of known it always, but it has not been like... Well, it*  
28 *may have been presented or I may have interpreted it somehow vaguely or as an extremely*  
29 *rare experience, or in a such way like, like this could not concern me, kind of. (Third option,*  
30 *I7.)*  
31

## 32 6. DISCUSSION

33  
34 In this study, we were interested in how transgender people describe their early stage  
35 information needs in relation to gender identity and how they describe the way these needs  
36 were transformed into conscious information needs. **Queer phenomenology was found as a**  
37 **suitable method to study this phenomenon since it offered a tool for analyse the experiences**  
38 **of transgender people.** Based on the findings, in many cases experiences of early stage  
39 information needs were related to experiences of the body, social dysphoria or a combination  
40 of these two. Additionally, other embodied experiences and social encounters led to early  
41 stage information needs in relation to gender identity. These experiences formed into  
42 conscious information needs in the process of encountering information and finding the right  
43 words to describe the experience.  
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47 The interviewees represent a varying group of transgender people in terms of age and  
48 identities. What the interviewees had in common, however, was the experience of difficulty  
49 in understanding and expressing their own gender identity in a cisnormative society. For  
50 those interviewees who had suffered from body dysphoria, it usually had begun at puberty  
51 causing an experience of disorientation. The lack of information about body dysphoria had  
52 made the experience more difficult to deal with. For some interviewees, the discomfort with  
53 their own bodies had escalated to a point where it was not possible to live without change.  
54 This was described as a 'dead-end' where the change had to happen. It had triggered  
55 information seeking which, eventually, had helped to deal with their own bodies.  
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58 Besides body dysphoria, gender dysphoria can appear as social dysphoria or a combination of  
59 both. The findings of this study indicate that social dysphoria had manifested through a  
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3 discomfort coming ‘from outside’ the person. This *friction* between the own experience and  
4 how other people see the person had formed a visceral information needs concerning the  
5 gender identity. In the process of forming a gender identity, exclusive experiences can lead to  
6 disorientation (Ahmed 2006). Moments of disorientation had triggered information seeking in  
7 relation to gender and gender identity.  
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10 Forming an identity may have involved adapting other identities (e.g. ‘lesbian’ or a ‘cross-  
11 dresser’) before finding the word for the transgender experience. It must be noted that  
12 identities are constantly shaped, and re-shaped and people have intersectional identities (see  
13 Hicks 2019). A visceral information need has been conceptualised as an inner need that  
14 comes from the individual themselves (Taylor 1968; Ruthven 2019a). When approaching the  
15 individual through the lens of social constructivism, as part of a social world, a visceral  
16 information need can be understood through discomfort and friction that happens between the  
17 individual and the surrounding world. The embodied experience happens in the social world  
18 and this social world may affect the embodied experience.  
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21 Based on the findings of this study, for some individuals, information on the transgender  
22 experience had served as a ‘turn’ that helped to understand the cause of the felt discomfort.  
23 The process of trying to understand one’s own experience can be seen through the concept of  
24 meaning-making. According to Ruthven (2019b) meaning-making can happen through  
25 ‘gradual awakenings’, in which reorientations result from a growing awareness that our lives  
26 are not working and may lead to the desire to belong to a new community or social grouping  
27 that is a better fit to how we wish to live our lives in a more meaningful way. In this study,  
28 meaning-making, and the interviewees efforts in trying to understand their own experiences  
29 were apparent.  
30  
31

32 Many of the interviewees described early stage information needs as experiences they did not  
33 have words for. They described not knowing what the experience was about, and,  
34 consequently, not knowing where to begin to seek information. Finding people with similar  
35 experiences had been important in the process of identity building and information seeking.  
36 Previous research indicates that the difficulty in not understanding the experience or not  
37 having appropriate language to describe it, can lead to confusion or mischaracterised  
38 identities (Huttunen *et al.* 2019; Pohjanen and Kortelainen 2016; Beemyn and Rankin 2011).  
39 The opportunity to seek information online using natural language had been helpful, as noted  
40 also in previous studies (Kitzie 2019). In the process of identifying with other experiences,  
41 language and how it is used is important in order to succeed. However, the normative  
42 understanding of gender had made it more difficult to encounter terms describing the  
43 transgender experience. Additionally, religion and the medical understanding of transgender  
44 people had challenged the acceptance of the transgender identity. In many ways,  
45 cisnormativity had hampered the acceptance of the identity and finding information about the  
46 experience (see also Floegel and Costello 2019).  
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51 This study is not without limitations. Since information needs are something that can be hard  
52 to verbalise, especially at an early stage, this study covers only experiences reflected  
53 afterwards. **When studying cultural influences, it must be noted that the theories used in the  
54 study are culturally influenced and other cultures have different ways of thinking about  
55 gender. Overall, the findings, due to contextual and situational nature of this study, concern  
56 only these participants and their reflections. Thus, the approach is culturally tied, and the  
57 results cannot be generalised to other cultures or communities.**  
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## 7. CONCLUSIONS



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Though an ‘information need’ is a common concept in the study of human information behaviour, early stage information needs (Taylor 1968) are understudied. This study offered a viewpoint on the early stage information needs described by transgender people. It suggests that early stage information needs are a valid concept to help understand how embodied experiences and the friction between the lived experience and the social world can lead to information seeking. Moreover, it provides an understanding of the process of building identities through moments of disorientation.

The formation of early stage information needs was conceptualised as a chain including a trigger for information seeking, finding the right words, and understanding the experience. For the interviewees, especially the bodily changes starting at puberty were a strong catalyst for discomfort causing friction between the subjects’ own gendered body and their gender experience, even leading to gender dysphoria. Finding words to describe the experience played an important role in the process of identity formation. In many cases this was difficult because of the lack of accurate and relevant information. In reflecting on others’ verbalised experiences in comparison to one’s own experience, language and how it is used is important for success and involves usually active information seeking. To do this, one must be able to verbalise one’s own experience in one way or another. This process does not concern only transgender people, but more generally processes where individual experiences are translated into formalised information needs.

Cisnormative culture and medical understanding of transgender experience negatively affects transgender peoples’ process of building their identities. We need more knowledge about the transgender experience in general, especially in health care, in schools and in public media, and it should include information about the diversity of transgender identities and experiences. Providing information especially of varying transgender experiences is vital for individuals trying to understand and verbalise their gender identity. **In future studies, the role of embodiment in early stage information needs should be studied more, particularly from the perspective of identity formation. In addition, there is not enough research on transgender people’s information seeking in relation of identity construction.**

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## INTERVIEW GUIDE

### 1. Gender identity

- a. How would you define your gender?
- b. When do you think you started to think about your own gender identity and in what situation you are now?

### 2. First encounters with information

- a. How did you get information on relation to transgender phenomenon for the first time?
- b. When and where?

### 3. Information needs in relation to gender identity

- a. How have your information needs changed during your life?
- b. On what themes have you been looking for information?

### 4. Information sources in relation to gender identity

- a. What information sources are important to you?
- b. What information sources you rely on the most?

### 5. Themes influencing information seeking of transgender phenomenon

- a. How do you think age, income, education level or language skills influence your information seeking?
- b. Do you think distances, place of residence or library services have influenced your information seeking?

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4 c. Do you think religion, culture, work or school could have influenced your  
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6 information seeking?  
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9 d. What kind of feelings have you had towards information seeking?  
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12 e. Do you think other people have influenced your information seeking? Such as  
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14 family, friends, peers and health care personnel.  
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17 6. Passive information seeking, information sharing and information avoidance  
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19 a. Have you ever gained information on transgender phenomenon  
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21 serendipitously?  
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24 b. What sources do you encounter, do you follow some channels in relation to  
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26 transgender topics?  
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29 c. In what situations might you avoid information on transgender topics or are  
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31 there particular sources you avoid and why?  
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34 d. Do you share information in relation to transgender topics more broadly or in  
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36 relation to your own identity?  
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39 e. In what situations you don't want to share information in relation to your gender  
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41 identity?  
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## Response to the Reviewer's Comments

We thank the reviewers for their time and consideration of our manuscript *Early stage identity-related information needs of transgender people* and have revised it based on their comments. The detailed responses to each comment can be found in the table below. The changes that have been made are marked in the manuscript in red.

Reviewer 1	
<p>I think this is a lovely paper; very well written, insightful, articulate and sensitive. It tackles an important and emerging area of (particularly Western) cultural reorientation to thinking about gender and how we support non-binary identities. I really like it very much indeed and will be very excited to recommend and cite it.</p> <p>I only have a few minor comments. Firstly, the interviews are quite sketchily presented. Could you say some more about the major themes being discussed?</p>	<p>We thank the reviewer for their constructive and supportive remarks.</p> <p>To clarify the focus of the interviews, we have added an interview guide as an appendix. The guide includes the following themes and related questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gender identity             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How would you define your gender?</li> <li>b. When do you think you started to think about your own gender identity and in what situation you are now?</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. First encounters with information             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How did you get information on relation to transgender phenomenon for the first time?</li> <li>b. When and where?</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Information needs in relation to gender identity             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How have your information needs changed during your life?</li> <li>b. On what themes have you been looking for information?</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. Information sources in relation to gender identity             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What information sources are important to you?</li> <li>b. What information sources you rely on the most?</li> </ol> </li> <li>5. Themes influencing information seeking of transgender phenomenon</li> </ol>

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	<p>a. How do you think age, income, education level or language skills influence your information seeking?</p> <p>b. Do you think distances, place of residence or library services have influenced your information seeking?</p> <p>c. Do you think religion, culture, work or school could have influenced your information seeking?</p> <p>d. What kind of feelings have you had towards information seeking?</p> <p>e. Do you think other people have influenced your information seeking? Such as family, friends, peers and health care personnel.</p> <p>6. Passive information seeking, information sharing and information avoidance</p> <p>a. Have you ever gained information on transgender phenomenon serendipitously?</p> <p>b. What sources do you encounter, do you follow some channels in relation to transgender topics?</p> <p>c. In what situations might you avoid information on transgender topics or are there particular sources you avoid and why?</p> <p>d. Do you share information in relation to transgender topics more broadly or in relation to your own identity?</p> <p>e. In what situations you don't want to share information in relation to your gender identity?</p>
<p>Secondly, I wonder if worth providing a fuller description of some of the gender codes, e.g. transboy. I think (?) that you asked</p>	<p>We added the following text to the beginning of Findings section to provide more information of the gender codes:</p>

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<p>participants to describe their own gender rather than select from a predefined list but as these gender descriptions themselves may change over time, it may be worth trying to provide some idea of what the participants meant by them in case definitions change in the future.</p>	<p>The interviewees had the opportunity to define their gender identity with their own words at the beginning of the interview. For some of the interviewees this task was easier than for others. Usually the interviewees used more than a single word to describe their gender identity and often the definition was not experienced as clear-cut or unambiguous.</p> <p><i>Well, I have defined myself as a gender non-conforming mainly because I think manhood is pretty terrible and feels quite strange for me. But maybe it is now somewhere between gender non-conforming and transman. So maybe I would still say to be gender non-conforming. (Gender non-conforming, I10).</i></p> <p>Moreover, some interviewees described gender identity as a contextual matter:</p> <p><i>Well, I like to say it moves between areas where I define myself as man, other or who cares. So if someone asks from me what is my gender I say like this. So, so, I feel it is quite contextual how I got gendered in relation to my surroundings. It is ok if most of the people read me as man and works with it but for example in political or activist contexts the definition of “other” is pretty important for me since I don’t feel I would be a man like one hundred percent always and everywhere. (Man, other, who cares, I12).</i></p> <p>However, in order to represent the variety of identity labels, descriptions of the interviewees were shortened into following definitions: transman (4), gender non-conforming (3), man (2), woman (2), no-gender (2), something between a woman and man (1), third option (1), man/other/who cares (1), transgender woman (1), transgender man (1), fluid/gender non-conforming (1), boy/transboy (1), transgender (1), transboy (1), androgyne man (1) and non-binary transmasculine guy (1). One interviewee did not want to define their gender.</p>
<p>Thirdly, you carefully and thoughtfully talk about the influence of culture in identity. It may be worth noting also that the theories you are working with are also culturally influenced and other cultures have different ways of thinking about gender – so the results may have some limitations.</p>	<p>We thank the review for pointing out this important point and added the following to the limitations section:</p> <p>This study is not without limitations. Since information needs are something that can be hard to verbalise, especially at an early stage, this study covers only experiences reflected afterwards. <b>When studying cultural influences, it must be noted that the theories used in the study are culturally influenced and other cultures have different ways of thinking about gender. Overall, the findings, due to contextual and situational nature of this</b></p>

	<p>study, concern only these participants and their reflections. Thus, the approach is culturally tied, and the results cannot be generalised to other cultures or communities.</p>
<p>I wonder if it is worth using Taylor's visceral concept more strongly in the title of the paper. When I see 'information needs' I expect to hear what the need actually is but your focus is much more on the recognition of Taylor's 'vague feeling of dissatisfaction' – the developing awareness of the feeling rather than the content of the need. This is novel but I feel 'information need' on its own doesn't capture the novelty here.</p>	<p>We agree with this comment but prefer not to use the concept visceral here. We have rephrased the title as</p> <p><b><i>Uncomfortable in my own skin - Emerging, early stage identity-related information needs of transgender people</i></b></p> <p>Hopefully the revised title now points to developing information needs rather than the content of those needs.</p>
<p><b>Referee 2</b></p>	<p>We thank the reviewer for their constructive and supportive remarks.</p>
<p>Introduction The last half of the second paragraph in the Introduction shifts to a discussion of information seeking; while I understand that addressing information seeking as meaning-making contextualizes the significance of this project, I think it would also be helpful if the author(s) had a concluding sentence or two connecting their significance statement back to the research study under review.</p>	<p>We agree with this point and have clarified the introduction as follows:</p> <p><b>The study focuses on information needs among people who identify as transgender.</b> The term is usually understood as an umbrella term referring to people with a range of gender-variant identities (Simmons and White 2014; Valentine 2007). In this study, we use the term to refer to people who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth, people whose relation to gender fluctuates and people who do not identify with the gender-binary at all (Simmons and White 2014; Valentine 2007). <b>For transgender people identity-related information needs can emerge in connection to significant life-events or gradual awakening (see Ruthven 2019b) and be deeply meaningful (see Clemens and Cushing 2010), since "being treated as a man [for female-to-male transgender people] socially is important enough to risk many other things including loss of family, friends, and career" (Dozier 2005, pp. 304-306).</b></p>
<p>Background Given the interdisciplinary nature of this work, I would like a paragraph at the beginning of the section overviewing the scope and justifying the selection of the work reviewed.</p>	<p>We added the following text at the end of Chapter 2 (Background):</p> <p><b>This study is among the first to explore identity-related information needs of transgender people. Given the interdisciplinary nature of this work, it was informed by several areas: theories of information needs, research and theory on identity-related information practices, research</b></p>

	<p>on information seeking of transgender people and embodiment as part of information activities, transgender studies, and finally, queer phenomenology.</p>
<p>In each sub-section or at the end of the Background, the author(s) should state how the works reviewed informed the study's research approach. For instance, while the author(s) discuss multiple definitions and approaches to identity within a larger, poststructuralist framework, they should state which specific definition/approach they are adopting within the context of this study and justify why (the author(s) do this well in the section paragraph of the sub-section on embodied information).</p>	<p>We thank the reviewer for pointing this out and have now revised the text accordingly.</p> <p>At the end of sub-chapter 2.1 (Medical understanding of transgender people), the following text was added:</p> <p><b>This study relies on the critiques of e.g. Hines (2007) and Spade (2003) of the medical perspective, that is, the understanding of gender through binary male/female categories.</b></p> <p>At the end of sub-chapter 2.2, the following text was added:</p> <p><b>In this study we understand gender to include both “what we consciously choose to identify as, and subconsciously feel ourselves to be” (Serano 2016, p.78). Thus, we view identity both as a personal project and as a fragmented discursive subject (Hicks 2019).</b></p> <p>At the end of sub-chapter 2.3, the following text was added:</p> <p><b>These previous studies contribute to understanding on what kind of challenges transgender people may encounter when seeking information as well as what sources they may rely on in their information seeking. To our knowledge, this study is among the first to study the identity-related, early-stage information needs of transgender people.</b></p> <p>At the end of sub-chapter 2.4, the following text was added:</p> <p><b>Despite these challenges, this study attempts to explore the experiences of visceral information needs and the way they are transformed into conscious information needs, taking into account the role of embodiment as a part of this process.</b></p>
<p>The author(s) rightly bring up that constructionist, information practices approaches do not view the concept of an information need as particularly useful. However, their response to this challenge is weak. They need to elaborate as to why</p>	<p>To clarify this argument, this section was rewritten as follows:</p> <p>This study takes a social <b>constructivist approach but also draws on</b> particular strands in queer theory (Butler 1990; Foucault 1976). We approach information needs</p>

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<p>they can make the following claim: "studying early stage information needs from a social constructivist perspective offers a new understanding of the process of identity formation."</p>	<p>originating from within an individual (Q<sub>1</sub> and Q<sub>2</sub> of Taylor's model, 1968) from a social constructivist point of view. This means that we understand an individual to be affected by the social surroundings <i>already</i> as the visceral information needs are formed. <b>Social constructivism presumes that individuals live in a world that is physically, socially and subjectively constructed and that societal conventions, history and interaction significantly affect individuals' thinking (Talja <i>et al.</i> 2005). Rather than focusing only on "needy users" (see Olsson 2005; Talja 1997) or understanding information seeking processes as driven by "actual, true, inner and individual information needs" (Lundh 2010), this approach allows taking into account the way bodily experiences and social and cultural surroundings are intertwined in human experiences. To recognise this, the analytical focus in studying information needs has to be in lived experiences — on how individuals are differently situated in the social world, which shapes their (bodily) experience.</b></p>
<p>Study Approach</p> <p>I also wonder whether the critique of queer theory from a trans studies POV could be more fully discussed, particularly engaging with Prosser's critique of Butler. This critique has critical implications for one's sense of embodiment, particularly given that Prosser viewed identity as innate and subjective.</p>	<p>We thank the reviewer for this suggestion and have now written more about the critique of queer theory from a trans studies point of view:</p> <p><b>Moreover, queer theory – and in particular Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity – has been criticized of theorizing 'transgender queer' by emphasizing it as performative and transgressive (Prosser 1998). The key rifts relating to this debate have blamed queer theory of utilizing transgender subject as a touchstone of queer theory, theorizing transgender from gay/lesbian point of view instead of taking into account actual lived experiences of transgender people, misreading the particular 'transsexual' experience of embodiment, as well as of not understanding a trans person's desire to live a conventional gendered life, which involves a creation of a congruence between gender identity and sex (Namaste 2000; Prosser 1998; Rubin 1998). Briefly, the debate was about the theorization of trans experiences and identities. It contributed to the beginnings of transgender studies that puts emphasis on the variety and complexity of actual transgender lives and experiences.</b></p>
<p>Similar to my feedback regarding the Background, the author(s) need room to synthesize the connections between the various approaches and concepts used, and how they inform the work. For instance, the author(s)</p>	<p>To clarify, we have rewritten sections of Chapter 3.</p> <p>We added the following at the end of sub-chapter 3.1:</p> <p><b>Since queer theory offers tools for analysing how social world influences to the body, but not for the analysis of</b></p>



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<p>discuss tensions between queer theory and trans studies but do not signify how these tensions inform their approach. Further, the author(s) discuss using queer phenomenology as a method for this study without explaining why this method is well suited to understanding information needs. A sentence or two on this would help.</p>	<p>the embodied <i>experiences</i> of transgender people, we use a specific adaptation of queer theory, queer phenomenology, as a research method, described below.</p> <p>The following improvements were made at the beginning of the sub-chapter 3.2 (Queer phenomenology):</p> <p>This study utilises queer phenomenology (Ahmed 2006, Rodemeyer 2017) to <b>understand</b> experiences of information needs <b>in relation to gender identity and as a tool for analysing how experiences of information needs are formed both individually and socially</b>. In addition, Rubin's (1998) ideas on how a combination of phenomenology and Foucault's theory can contribute to studies on transgender experiences, are used <b>to guide</b> analysis.</p> <p>The following text was added at the end of sub-chapter 3.2:</p> <p><b>Queer phenomenology has been used successfully to study how embodied experiences of transgender people can be understood both as individual and social. Based on this, we expect it to be a suitable method to enable understanding experiences of early stage information needs as embodied and intuitive (Taylor 1968; Ruthven 2019a) but at the same time, influenced by social norms and expectations (see, Linander <i>et al.</i> 2019a).</b></p>
<p>Method (and materials) It would also be helpful to either have the interview protocol attached as an appendix or to include a table with sample interview questions, sorted by the elicitation method and themes covered.</p>	<p>We have added an interview guide as an appendix. The guide includes the following themes and related questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. <b>Gender identity</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How would you define your gender?</li> <li>b. When do you think you started to think about your own gender identity and in what situation you are now?</li> </ol> </li> <li>8. <b>First encounters with information</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How did you get information on relation to transgender phenomenon for the first time?</li> <li>b. When and where?</li> </ol> </li> <li>9. <b>Information needs in relation to gender identity</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How have your information needs changed during your life?</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

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b. On what themes have you been looking for information?

10. Information sources in relation to gender identity

- a. What information sources are important to you?
- b. What information sources you rely on the most?

11. Themes influencing information seeking of transgender phenomenon

- a. How do you think age, income, education level or language skills influence your information seeking?
- b. Do you think distances, place of residence or library services have influenced your information seeking?
- c. Do you think religion, culture, work or school could have influenced your information seeking?
- d. What kind of feelings have you had towards information seeking?
- e. Do you think other people have influenced your information seeking? Such as family, friends, peers and health care personnel.

12. Passive information seeking, information sharing and information avoidance

- a. Have you ever gained information on transgender phenomenon serendipitously?
- b. What sources do you encounter, do you follow some channels in relation to transgender topics?
- c. In what situations might you avoid information on transgender topics or are there particular sources you avoid and why?

	<p>d. Do you share information in relation to transgender topics more broadly or in relation to your own identity?</p> <p>e. In what situations you don't want to share information in relation to your gender identity?</p>
<p>The author(s) could helpfully elaborate a little more on how "theoretically driven analysis" was informed by their study approach and the background literature. The largest issue for me is that the author(s) signifies/signify that this study focuses on information needs, but analysis appears to focus on information seeking.</p>	<p>In Chapter 4, we have reworded the description of our analysis method more clearly as follows:</p> <p>The interviews were transcribed and coded using NVivo Plus software by the first author. Memos were also written during the analysis. This study utilised a combination of theoretically and empirically driven analysis. During the transcription process, the attention was drawn to how interviewees described their early stage information needs as a part of identity formation. Additionally, information needs became visible as a part of the first steps of information seeking, especially when describing embodied experiences and lack of suitable words for experiences. All the transcriptions were carefully read and reread focusing especially on statements related to early information needs and identity formation. Additionally, the statements connected to finding a word for an experience and embodied experiences were taken into account. The theoretical background, especially studies on information needs and transgender experiences (see sub-chapters 1.3. and 1.4.), were used to guide the analysis. Taylor's (1968) categorisation of information needs was used to identify stages of information needs. Additionally, Ahmed's (2006) concept of disorientation informed the analysis of queer experiences at this stage of the analysis.</p>
<p>Another issue is the author(s)' choice to focus on dysphoria when they acknowledged that not all trans people experience dysphoria. It would be good to see the justification for focusing on this construct needs to be made by the author(s).</p>	<p>We thank the reviewer for pointing this out. Our aim was not focus only on dysphoria, but more on embodied experiences of transgender individuals. To explain this, we have added the following at the end of Chapter 4:</p> <p>It must be highlighted that all the interviewees did not describe experiences of bodily or social dysphoria. However, descriptions of experiencing discomfort contributing to emerging information needs were common and included into this category.</p> <p>Additionally, the following was added to clarify the point at the end of Chapter 5:</p>

	<p>In the following sub-chapters, we will focus on the ways transgender people described their early stage information needs in relation to gender identity and how these needs were transformed into conscious information needs.</p>
<p>Findings The authors have the potential to connect findings related to some participants feeling constrained due to mediated portrayals of "wrong body" narratives to Prosser's work (see above comment under Study Approach section).</p>	<p>We thank the reviewer for this notion and added the following to Sub-chapter 5.2:</p> <p>Information of transgender phenomenon was not always perceived as accurate or helpful. Thus, it did not necessarily help the interviewees to understand their own experience (see also Pohjanen and Kortelainen 2016). The problem with information about transgender people was usually the 'wrong body narrative' in the media presentation of transgender people (Prosser 1998). In particular in the 1990s, the wrong-body model was also used in autobiographies by trans people themselves to express their sensory or visceral experience, of having a "second skin", as Jay Prosser (1998) puts it. The wrong-body narrative is not the only available model, but it persists especially in media and popular discourses. It has been criticized for its pathologizing aspects, and as Talia Mae Bettcher (2014) argues, it is connected to surgical alteration of the body. Any identity that fails to align with the narrative is "ruled ineligible" (Bettcher 2014, p. 402).</p>
<p>In the Some Kind of Friction subsection, the author(s) bring forth the concept of a visceral need triggering seeking; I'm not sure that the participant account actually illustrates that experience. If the author(s) further specified how their theoretical approach informed their overarching methodology, and how this, in turn, informed their choice of methods, relating these connections to the larger unit of analysis for this study, which is "need," then this implied connection would be made clearer for me in the Findings section.</p>	<p>The following improvements were made in order to explain how we understand the participant account as friction between the experience from the 'inside' and the message coming from the 'outside' of the person:</p> <p>In the above description, the discomfort and the information need form friction between experiences "from the inside" and the message coming "from the outside" of the person. It is caused by dissonance in the way other people see the person's gender (identity), not solely by the bodily experience. This friction between one's own experience and how other people see the person had caused discomfort and need for information to understand this friction.</p> <p>We hope that the improvements in relation to our approach and method described in comments above have specified of our analysis.</p>
<p>Discussion The first sentence of this section does a nice job of connecting the</p>	<p>In accordance with this comment, we added the following as the outset of the Findings chapter:</p>

<p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20</p> <p>themes from your findings and relating them to your unit of analysis. I almost would like to have this sentence at the outset of the Findings section and reiterated here, as it provides some clarity when re-reading the findings to understanding how the author(s) are envisioning this connection.</p>	<p>In the following sub-chapters, we will focus on the ways transgender people described their early stage information needs in relation to gender identity and how these needs were transformed into conscious information needs.</p> <p>Moreover, we revised the beginning of the discussion and added the following:</p> <p>In this study, we were interested in how transgender people describe their early stage information needs in relation to gender identity and how they describe the way these needs were transformed into conscious information needs. <b>Queer phenomenology was found as a suitable method to study this phenomenon since it offered a tool for analyse the experiences of transgender people.</b></p>
<p>21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38</p> <p>I'm not sure that the last sentence of p. 13 is a limitation, or rather an avenue for future research. For the Limitations section, I am interested in a deeper engagement with what the author(s) did/did not do to maintain qualitative "trustworthiness" within this study.</p>	<p>We agree and have revised the limitations section by adding the following:</p> <p>This study is not without limitations. Since information needs are something that can be hard to verbalise, especially at an early stage, this study covers only experiences reflected afterwards. <b>When studying cultural influences, it must be noted that the theories used in the study are culturally influenced and other cultures have different ways of thinking about gender. Overall, the findings, due to contextual and situational nature of this study, concern only these participants and their reflections. Thus, the approach is culturally tied, and the results cannot be generalised to other cultures or communities.</b></p>
<p>39</p> <p><b>Editor</b></p>	
<p>40 41 42 43 44 45 46</p> <p>The second sentence, 1st page. Do you mean "affects" rather than "effects"?</p>	<p>Indeed, we mean affects. This has been corrected:</p> <p>Early stage information needs have been described as embodied, intuitive emotions or <b>affects</b> that will evolve into formalised information needs (Taylor 1968; Ruthven 2019a).</p>
<p>47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60</p> <p>Write transition sentences between sections; some sections end abruptly (e.g., end of Background) and would benefit from a sentence or two that leads to the next section/line of thinking.</p>	<p>We have now added transition sentences. For example, at the end of Sub-chapter 2.3 (Information seeking of transgender people) we added:</p> <p><b>These previous studies contribute to understanding on what kind of challenges transgender people may encounter when seeking information as well as what sources they may rely on in their information seeking. To our knowledge, this study is among the first to study the identity-related, early-stage information needs of transgender people.</b></p>

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	<p>The end of Sub-chapter 2.4 now reads:</p> <p>Despite these challenges, this study attempts to explore the experiences of visceral information needs and the way they are transformed into conscious information needs, taking into account the role of embodiment as a part of this process.</p>
<p>Some instances of passive voice</p> <p>p. 2, line 35 "Within Foucauldian terms"</p> <p>p. 4, line 5 - should be "them" rather than "oneself"</p>	<p>These corrections were made.</p>
<p>The last full paragraph on p. 5 seems to be contradictory - suggest rewriting to suggest that there is an emergent body of work focusing on embodiment within LIS in response to lack of historical focus within the field.</p>	<p>We have reworded this paragraph as follows:</p> <p>Historically, in the field of LIS, embodiment and the body as an important actor and information source have largely been ignored. In exploring information practices, language has received a lot of attention rather than the roles of the body and materiality (Olsson and Lloyd 2017). However, in several recent studies, embodiment has been emphasised in LIS (see Huttunen <i>et al.</i> 2019; Olsson 2016; 2010; Gorichanaz 2015; Bonner and Lloyd 2011; Lloyd 2009; 2007, for example).</p>
<p>Make sure to include page numbers in parenthetical citations when direct quoting.</p>	<p>Page numbers were added.</p>
<p>p. 6, lines 27-29 - "the idea of information seeking processes as driven by actual, true, inner and individual information needs is not useful when studying information needs." Is the last word a misprint? The way I'm reading it, it seems like "seeking" should be subbed for "needs."</p>	<p>This sentence was a bit difficult to understand and we have rewritten this section as follows:</p> <p>Rather than focusing only on "needy users" (see Olsson 2005; Talja 1997) or understanding information seeking processes as driven by "actual, true, inner and individual information needs" (Lundh 2010), this approach allows taking into account the way bodily experiences and social and cultural surroundings are intertwined in human experiences.</p>
<p>Look out for split infinitives (e.g., "to understand better" rather than "to better understand")</p>	<p>These changes were made in text and marked in red. This revised paper will be send to professional proofreading if it is accepted.</p>

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<p>"Data" is plural (e.g., data were collected)</p> <p>p. 8, line 15 - specify whether the interviews were audio or video recorded</p> <p>p. 8, line 59 - "mentioned being in a sexual minority group"</p> <p>p. 9, line 6 - word choice "presumed"</p> <p>p. 9, lines 53-54 - rephrase this sentence</p> <p>p. 10, line 23 - delete "relatively"</p> <p>Can delete "the" from "the transgender people" and instead use "transgender people."</p> <p>p. 12, lines 12-15 - rephrase this sentence</p>	
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