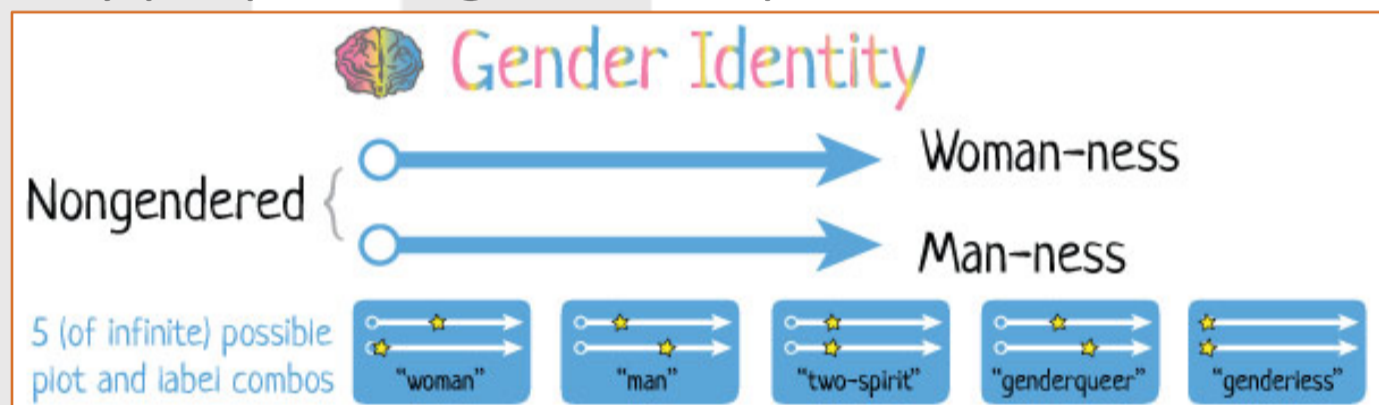


Young peoples' experiences of non-binary gender.

Luke Ward - University of Northampton

Background

Announcing a newborn's gender is often significantly important, even though there may be uncertainty and fluidity for the child (Wiseman & Davidson, 2011). By adolescence, personality theories expect people to discover who they are and this identity to become permanent and essential (Wiseman & Davidson, 2011). However, this does not account for fluid genders and those that don't match one's biological sex (Diamond, 2002). Consequently, some young people feel the need to conform to binary masculine/feminine roles, sometimes through surgery, to change their bodies without exploring other gender expressions (Richards et al., 2016). Alternatively presenting discomfort to professions may lead to a Gender Identity Disorder diagnosis (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). So how do young non-binary people navigate this experience?



There is currently extremely little research in this area from young peoples' perspectives, therefore the aim of this research is to include unvoiced experiences to explore non-binary gender in young people. The research question is how do young people experience their non-binary gender identity.

Method

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was the chosen methodology to understand the young people's experience (Smith, 2003). Young people ages 13-18 years, who currently identified as non-binary (defined as identifying as neither exclusively male, nor female) was the recruitment criteria. A focus group consisting of 4 participants was used to allow a range of experiences and perspectives to be heard (Liamputtong, 2011). The audio data was analysed with particular emphasis on how the young people experienced their gender identity. As the analysis was of a focus group, the group process (instances of collective speaking and group dynamics) was also analysed (Palmer et al., 2010). The transcript was initially coded line by line, focusing on the young people's feelings, experiences and sense-making of the world (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). The coding was then refined and patterns were looked for within the data.

References

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Findings

From the analysis of the transcript 3 main themes emerged. **Support** included areas from family, friends, community, and a sense of being supported unconditionally.

"My mum's completely supportive, like she, she's the kind of person that is really supportive in whatever I do... My dad... [laughs] He's, he's got the idea that I was born a girl, so I should be a girl so [group laughs]."

Identity management included conversations around how the young people navigated their gender identity through their day-to-day lives.

"... like I actually went back to identifying as a binary girl, because I just felt so uncomfortable and worried and scared about what everyone would think."

And lastly, a sense of **fluidity**. This theme encompasses the sense of journey the young people narrated with regards to their gender. Transition, change and not thinking in absolutes help bind this theme together.

"I came out first as gender fluid, and then non-binary, and then trans-male. Now I'm just non-binary again..."

Support	Identity Management	Fluidity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Friendship Online Unconditional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unvoiced Incongruent Secret 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexibility Fluidity Absoluteness

Implications & Limitations

The analysis suggests that although there is a lack of visibility for non-binary people, the young people interviewed have support from various areas. A consideration of the participants is that they were recruited through an LGBTQ youth group, perhaps they had support of a community already. The concept of identity management is something that isn't seen in the literature. This could reflect the lack of young people present in the current literature and the nuanced day-to-day balancing of their gender. The talk about invisibility and de-gendering from teachers highlights areas for further research.

