AN EXPLORATION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GENDER DIVERSE YOUNG PEOPLE IN SCHOOLS

Natalia Hall

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School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences

Declaration

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Newcastle University for the award of Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology. I declare that it is my own work and does not include material that is the work of others without acknowledgement, that I have consulted all materials cited, and have not submitted this assignment for any other academic award.

Natalia Hall
September 2021

Overarching Abstract

This thesis explores the lived experiences of gender diverse (GD) young people (YP) in schools. It comprises of four chapters: a Systematic Literature Review, a methodological and ethical critique, a piece of empirical research and a reflective synthesis.

Chapter 1

This chapter reports on a Systematic Literature Review, synthesising five papers. It explores how transgender and cisgender YP's experiences of education differ. All five of the studies explored found that transgender youth experience more risk factors than their cisgender peers. Furthermore, these experiences were found to be unique to transgender students when compared to non-heterosexual cisgender peers, with whom they are often linked.

Chapter 2

This chapter provides a methodological and ethical critique of possible and relevant research designs and methods that have been employed in my empirical research. This includes a reflection on my positionality as a researcher and how the ontological and epistemological viewpoints I espouse have underpinned the methodological and ethical decisions I have made throughout my thesis.

Chapter 3

While the exploration into the experiences of GD YP is a growing field within psychological and educational research, much of the current research available has explored the negative experiences faced by GD YP and the detrimental impact this has had on their outcomes both within school and into adulthood. This chapter reports an empirical research project involving two GD YP. It provides a qualitative exploration of participants' experiences of education, exploring both positive and negative elements. Findings are discussed in relation to previous literature. Limitations and implications for schools, as well as for Educational Psychologists, are highlighted.

Chapter 4

This chapter demonstrates what the work has meant to me as a practitioner and researcher, and what the next steps are for me as I become a fully qualified Educational Psychologist. It also explores some of the critical thinking processes I went through during my research journey and the challenges I faced particularly considering the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Chapter 1: A Systematic Literature review: 'How do transgender and cisgender young people's experiences of education differ?'[1]

Abstract

Increasing numbers of young people (YP) in the UK are identifying as transgender. Despite an increasing amount of evidence which suggests that outcomes for these YP are poor, many of these studies have conflated issues of gender with those of sexuality. Therefore, the challenges that are faced by transgender YP uniquely are not well understood.

This review utilised Petticrew and Roberts' review structure to the answer the question 'How do transgender and cisgender YP's experiences of education differ?' Five studies were included for in-depth, systematic review and each was appraised using the EPPI-centre Weight of Evidence tool. All five of the studies found that transgender youth experienced certain aspects of school more negatively than their cisgender peers. Furthermore, these experiences were found to be unique to transgender students even when compared to non-heterosexual cisgender peers, with whom they are often linked. Hence, the results of this review contribute to the current literature about transgender YP in several important ways including having implications for Educational Psychologists in supporting schools to improve their policies and practices to create safer and more supportive school environments for transgender YP.

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[1] I have prepared this for submission to the Gender and Education Journal

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is to synthesise the literature and offer insight into the educational experiences of transgender young people (YP). In this introduction, terminology is firstly explored, as language relating to gender identity can be problematic considering the historical pathologising of YP who have experienced gender incongruence. A brief examination of recent studies on transgender YP's experiences of school environments sets the scene for the SLR and provides a rationale for the key question considered in this review.

1.1.1 Sex, Gender, and Sexual Orientation

It is important here to define the concepts 'gender identity', 'gender expression', 'sexual orientation' and 'biological sex' and describe how these terms differ from each other.

In today's society, the words 'sex' and 'gender' are frequently used synonymously despite these concepts being considered distinct within the medical and psychological world since the latter part of the twentieth century (Jones et al., 2016; Yavuz, 2016). It should be understood that an individual's sex refers to their biological identity determined by their genetic chromosomes, the physical traits they were born with and their hormones (Muehlenhard & Peterson, 2011). Alternatively, gender is perceived as being psychological and socially constructed (Oakley, 1993). Gender can be broken down into two elements: 'gender identity' and 'gender expression'. Gender identity refers to a person's internal sense of how they think about and define their own gender, whereas gender expression is the outward presentation/physical manifestation of gender identity through clothing, hairstyle, behaviour, and actions. Furthermore, sexual attraction or sexual orientation indicates with whom you want to have or choose not to have romantic relationships with (House, Gaines, & Hawkins, 2019).

These four concepts are independent from one another meaning that one does not determine or relate to the other. For example, a person's sexual orientation is not reliant on biological sex nor gender identity (Jones, Coll, van Leent, & Taylor, 2019; Sullivan, 2019).

1.1.2 Understanding Gender Terminology

For most people their gender identity and expression is congruent with their biological sex (Bowskill, 2017). These people are referred to as 'cisgender' (Oxford University, 2020). Subsequently, western society mostly only acknowledges the existence of the two biological sexes and their associated gender categories of male and female (Richards & Barker, 2013). However, this view point is deemed outdated and it is becoming widely recognised that individuals can identify as a gender that is different to their biological sex (Brill & Pepper, 2008). Additionally, a person's sense of gender can be considered more complex than being able to fit into two rigid and dichotomous categories but that gender may actually fall along a spectrum (Sullivan, 2019).

The term 'transgender' refers to an individual whose assigned sex at birth does not correspond with their gender identity (Oxford University, 2020). The term can be used to encompass those individuals whose gender identity does not fit easily within the gender binary of male or female but is rather placed atypically along the gender continuum (Bowskill, 2017).

The language used to refer to transgender people, and which transgender people themselves may use, is diverse and frequently changing. I note that the language I use here is open to interpretation and is likely to evolve and date quickly. For this chapter the term transgender will refer to all individuals who do not identify as having a gender identity that corresponds with their sex assigned at birth. My decision to use this term has been influenced by its prevalence within the relevant literature. However, I am mindful that whilst some individuals may be comfortable identifying as transgender others may not. When terminology other than transgender is used to describe an individual's gender identity it is because I am using the wording from the literature I am referencing.

1.1.3 Transgenderism in the UK

Despite studies suggesting that many children recognise their gender variance before they leave primary school (Kennedy, 2008; Kennedy & Hellen, 2010) there are no official records of the number of transgender individuals in the UK (Hudson-Sharp, 2018). There are a number of different reasons that may account for this scarcity of data such as lack of parental knowledge or support regarding

their child's gender variance at a young age and the child's own understanding of or resistance to disclosing their gender variance (Hoffman, 2016).

Estimations suggests that the prevalence of transgenderism in the UK is between 1%-2% of the population (Gender Identity Research and Education Society, 2011; Glen & Hurrell, 2012; Office for National Statistics, 2009). Furthermore, the number of YP being referred to the Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS) has seen a year on year increase, with a 6% increase in referrals in 2018-19 (National Health Service, 2019) with the majority of referrals being made for school age children and YP (National Health Service, 2019). These statistics have implications for schools as it could be assumed that many teachers will educate a YP experiencing some degree of gender variance during their career. Thus, it is important that all professionals working within educational settings understand how to support this population of YP appropriately (Sullivan, 2019).

1.1.4 Transgenderism and Education

As more YP are disclosing their gender variance, schools are becoming an increasingly important source of support and information (McBride & Schubotz, 2017). However, 'school cultures' and 'school climates' have been found to be hostile for transgender YP (Jones et al., 2016; McBride & Schubotz, 2017). According to Payne and Smith (2013) a school culture reflects the structure and ethos of educational settings and those within it, whereas school climate is a manifestation of this, where the individual interactions between members of the school determine the experiences of those within it. Studies have found that the values and beliefs of schools reinforce the concepts of gender binary and cisnormativity (Jones et al., 2016; McBride & Schubotz, 2017). Additionally, school curricula that do not provide YP with adequate information about gender variance, cisnormative uniform and inclusion policies in schools all serve to impede YP's awareness of gender diversity and create a cisnormative school climate where any atypical gender behaviour or presentation is obstructed and maybe met with disdain and contempt (Boskey, 2014; Rofes, 2000).

1.1.5 Focus of this Review

Initial reading into the literature on transgender YP's experiences of education produced research that explored the experiences of transgender and sexual

minority YP as a single sample group. However, as described previously, issues of sexuality and gender are discrete thus the challenges faced by these two populations of YP are different and should not be banded together. Therefore, having established and described this topic's importance, the systematic review question: *'How do transgender and cisgender young people's experiences of education differ?'* was formulated. This review further sought to include how transgender YP's experiences of school differed to cisgender sexual minority YP as an additional layer. It is hoped that by synthesising studies that do not conflate issues of gender and sexuality the experiences of transgender youth in schools and the unique challenges they face will be better understood.

1.2 Method

This systematic literature review employs the 7 stage model described by Petticrew and Robert's (2006): see **Error! Reference source not found.**.

Table 1: The seven stage systematic review process adapted from Petticrew and Roberts (2006, p.27).

Phase	Step	Details
Phase 1: Searching	1	Clearly define the question that the review is aiming to address, or the hypothesis that the review will test.
	2	Determine the types of studies that need to be located to test answer the question
	3	Carry out a comprehensive literature search to locate those studies
	4	Screen the results of the search by sifting through the retrieved studies, deciding which ones look as if they fully meet the inclusion criteria, and thus need more detailed examination and which do not.
Phase 2: Mapping	5	Critically appraise the included studies by extracting data from studies and assessing quality

Phase 3: Synthesis	6	Synthesize the studies and assess heterogeneity among the study findings
Phase 4: Findings	7	Disseminate the findings of the review

1.2.1 Searching

To address the research question, a systematic search of the literature was conducted between July and September 2019. Four electronic databases were used: PsychINFO, Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) via EBSCO, Web of Science and Scopus. Google Scholar and academic journals: Education Psychology in Practice, and Educational and Child Psychology were further hand searched for additional relevant publications.

Search terms were generated based on the focus of the review, the research question and terms identified during the initial scoping search of relevant literature. The search strategy used in each database was based on synonyms of the primary search terms: "transgender," "school," and "experience" (see Table 2).

Table 2: Search terms use in scoping the literature

Key search terms	Synonyms
Transgender	Gender non-conforming
	Gender diverse
	Gender dysphoria
	Gender variant
	Gender incongruent
School	Education
	High school
	High school education
	Secondary school education
	College
Experience	Experiences
	Phenomenology
	Perceptions

Searches were replicated as closely as possible depending on database requirements. This combination of terms returned 887 papers. After removing duplicates and publications that were not peer reviewed, 632 papers were left for the next stage (see Table 3).

Table 3: Initial searching results

	Data bases	Number of results
Initial searches	Psychinfo	109
	EBSCO	183
	Web of Science	495
	Scopus	97
	Hand search	3
Total		887
Peer reviewed Journal Articles	Psychinfo	61
	EBSCO	132
	Web of Science	463
	Scopus	66
	Hand search	3
Total		725
Minus duplicates		632

To isolate relevant studies, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied (see Table 4). This left a total of five papers that were selected for this review.

Table 4: Exclusion and Inclusion criteria for Systematic Literature Review

Exclusion/inclusion criteria	Reasoning	Number of remaining studies
Written in English and research carried out in Western Countries	I will be able to read the study and they will have a similar context to the one I am living and working in.	501
Published within the last 10 years (2009-2019)	Studies will be relevant and reflect current social and cultural contexts.	404
Relevance to research question (through screening of titles and abstracts)	To ensure they were addressing the research question I was wanting to answer.	20
Explore YP's experience of school	This links to my epistemological view that YP are the experts of their own lives.	16
Included a cisgender population sample	Cisgender subsample by which to compare transgender YP's experiences against to consider whether YP's experiences are significantly different to one another depending on gender presentation.	12
Reports findings from transgender YP as a sample or separate sub-sample from lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) YP	Many studies conflate issues of gender with those of sexuality. I wanted to understand the perceptions and experiences of transgender YP in education exclusively.	5

1.2.2 Mapping

The selected five studies were critically appraised by extracting data from the studies and assessing quality.

Quality Appraisal

Each study was assessed using Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence (WoE) tool as a framework to analyse the quality of each study. An adapted version of EPPI-Centre (2003) guidelines for quality assessing studies' methods and data analysis was used to guide the quality appraisal process (see Appendix A). These guidelines subjected each study to twelve questions relating to methodological soundness; the answers to these were then considered when answering Gough's (2007) four WoE questions.

Table 5 presents the findings from the application of the WoE tool (Gough, 2007) and provides and overall quality rating of 'high' medium' or 'low' for each study.

Table 5: Weight of Evidence

	Atteberry-Ash, Kattari, Speer, Guz, and Kattari (2019)	Day, Perez-Brumer, and Russell (2018)	Jones and Hillier (2013)	McBride and Schubotz (2017)	McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, and Russell (2010)
A – How trustworthy are the study findings in relation to answering the study's research question?	High	High	Low/ Medium	Low/ Medium	Low/ Medium
B – How appropriate was the design and analysis used in study for answering the review question?	High	High	Medium	Low	Low/ Medium

	Atteberry-Ash, Kattari, Speer, Guz, and Kattari (2019)	Day, Perez-Brumer, and Russell (2018)	Jones and Hillier (2013)	McBride and Schubotz (2017)	McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, and Russell (2010)
C – How relevant is the focus of the study in addressing this review question?	High	High	Low	Low	Medium
D – Overall Weight of Evidence	High	High	Low/ Medium	Low	Medium

When considering the quality of each study I also considered ethicality. Three of the studies directly commented that they obtained ethical approval for their projects (Day et al., 2018; Jones & Hillier, 2013; McGuire et al., 2010). However, Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019) was the only study that stated they sought consent from schools, parents and YP themselves. McGuire et al. (2010) and Day et al. (2018) both mentioned consent with the former only obtaining it from the YP involved in the study and the latter specifying that consent was gained passively through self-participation in completing the survey. Neither Jones and Hillier (2013) nor McBride and Schubotz (2017) mentioned gaining informed consent from YP, their parents or schools.

Data Extraction

The studies were then analysed according to their aims, participants, setting, design, and data analysis (see Table 6). Jones and Hillier (2013), McBride and Schubotz (2017) and McGuire et al. (2010) used mixed methods as their research designs. However, the qualitative data presented within their research was excluded for the purpose of this review. The exclusion of this data was based on relevance to this review's research question. In all three papers the qualitative data presented only reported the views of transgender YP thus not enabling comparison to cisgender YP. Therefore, this data was also omitted from consideration when quality assessing the papers and synthesising findings.

Table 6: Mapping of selected studies

Study	Context and sample	Research Question/ aim	Research design and methods	Data Analysis	Quality of the study
Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019) School safety experiences of high school youth across sexual orientation and gender identity	Colorado, USA N=11,986 Transgender population = 232 The transgender population was also broken down into sub-samples depending on sexual orientation Transgender Heterosexual = 83 Transgender LGB = 108 Transgender questioning = 41 High School students (14 or older)	How do young people's experiences of school safety, including in person and online bullying, skipping school due to safety concern, and feeling safe at school, vary across the intersections of sexual orientation and gender identity?	Quantitative Healthy Kids Colorado Survey	Logistic regression models were ran to create adjusted odds ratio (AOR) to measure the effect being transgender has on experiences of school safety, in school and online bullying, and skipping school due to safety concern.	High

Study	Context and sample	Research Question/ aim	Research design and methods	Data Analysis	Quality of the study
Day et al. (2018) Safe schools? Transgender youth's school experiences and perceptions of school climate.	California, USA Cross-section of Californian Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) N=806,918 Transgender population = 9,281 California Student Survey (CSS) N= 31,896 Transgender population = 398 Aged 10-18 years old	What are the size of gender identity-related disparities in school experiences (i.e. absenteeism, victimisation and harassment, and academic success) and perceptions of school climate?	Quantitative CHKS CSS (weighted sample of the CHKS designed to be a representative sample of the Californian student population)	Bivariate comparisons, using unconditional models were ran on the CHKS and CSS, to test the associations between transgender and cisgender YP's school experience. These created OR to measure the effect being transgender has on experiences of school. This data is not included in this review as model were not adjusted to account for demographic characteristics. Multivariate analysis, using multilevel regression and logistic regression models were ran, accounting for demographic characteristics which are associated with biased based bullying such as: age, sex race/ethnicity and sexual orientation, to identity the size of discrepancies in school experiences and perceptions of school climate between transgender and non-transgender youth. For the logistic regression models AOR were created. For multilevel regression unstandardized beta coefficients were created.	High

Study	Context and sample	Research Question/ aim	Research design and methods	Data Analysis	Quality of the study
Jones and Hillier (2013) Comparing Trans-Spectrum and Same-sex-Attracted Youth (SSAY) in Australia: Increased Risks, Increased Activisms	Australia N=3134 Transgender population = 91 Aged 14 to 21 years old	How do trans-spectrum youth compare to cisgender SSAY in educational issues?	*Full study was mixed methods* Survey	Pearson's chi-square test	Low/ medium

Study	Context and sample	Research Question/ aim	Research design and methods	Data Analysis	Quality of the study
McBride and Schubotz (2017) Living a fairy tale: The educational experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming youth in Northern Ireland.	Northern Ireland, UK N =1939 Transgender and/or gender non-conforming n=10 Aged 16 years old	No research question was specified. The authors' aims were to examine the subjective experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming youth living in Northern Ireland.	*Full study was mixed methods* Quantitative part: 2014 Young Life and Times survey	Binary analysis between transgender and cisgender YP.	Low/ medium

Study	Context and sample	Research Question/ aim	Research design and methods	Data Analysis	Quality of the study
McGuire et al. (2010) School Climate for Transgender Youth: A Mixed Method Investigation of Student Experiences and School Responses.	California, USA N=2260 Transgender=68 Grade 6–12 Middle and High School students	What are the experiences of transgender youth in school environments, and how do they compare to other students?	*Full study was mixed methods* Quantitative data from Preventing School Harassment Survey	Independent t-tests were used to determine if there was a significant difference between the means of transgender and non-transgender youth.	Medium

1.3 Synthesis

Through a process of synthesising each paper's findings for similarities and differences, three overarching themes emerged: 'contextual factors', 'relational factors' and 'impact'. Appendix B displays a summary of the results and emerging themes from each paper. Appendix C shows the process of synthesising the findings for similarities and differences to create themes. Table 7 shows the superordinate and subordinate themes found across the papers.

Table 7: Overarching and subthemes found across the papers

Contextual Factors	Cisnormative Practices
	Support Systems
Relational Factors	Experienced Victimisation
	Teacher Relationships
Impact	Personal Perceptions
	Attendance
	Emotional and Mental Health
	School Engagement

1.3.1 Contextual Factors

Contextual factors were a dominant theme in one paper as displayed in Table 8. There were two subthemes apparent in this overarching theme 'cisnormative practices' and 'support systems'.

Table 8: Subordinate themes relating to contextual factors

Contextual Factors					
	Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019)	Day et al. (2018)	Jones and Hillier (2013)	McBride and Schubotz (2017)	McGuire et al. (2010)
Cisnormative Practices					x
Support Systems					x

1.3.1.1 Cisnormative Practices

McGuire et al. (2010) found less than half of all YP reported that their school had a bullying policy that specially included sexual orientation or gender presentation. Additionally, only 50% of the whole sample population said they had received teaching on LGB and transgender (LGBT) issues, with transgender YP reporting to have learned about these issues significantly less than cisgender students.

1.3.1.2 Support Systems

McGuire et al. (2010) also found that 66% of all YP were aware of where they could go to seek support and advice on LGBT issues. Positively, there was a large proportion of YP who reported their school had a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), a student led club whose aims are to improve the school experiences and outcomes for LGBT pupils (Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2013), however the number of transgender YP accessing their school's GSA was low.

1.3.2 Relational Factors

Within the theme of relational factors there were two subthemes: 'experiencing victimisation' and 'teacher relationships'. Table 9 displays how the subordinate themes were spread across the papers.

Table 9: Subordinate themes relating to relational factors

Relational Factors					
	Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019)	Day et al. (2018)	Jones and Hillier (2013)	McBride and Schubotz (2017)	McGuire et al. (2010)
Experienced Victimisation	x	x	x	x	x
Teacher Relationships					x

1.3.2.1 Experiencing Victimisation

This is a significant theme identified across all five papers. McGuire et al. (2010), Day et al. (2018), Atteberry-Ash et al.'s (2019) and McBride and Schubotz's (2017) all found that transgender YP were significantly more likely to experience bullying related to their gender or sexual orientation than their cisgender peers at school.

However, whilst Jones and Hillier (2013) found that generally trans-spectrum youth were significantly more likely to experience transphobic/homophobic abuse than cisgender SSAY, there was not a significant difference in the proportion of SSAY and transgender YP who reported experiencing of homophobic or cissexist abuse at school.

Additionally, McBride and Schubotz (2017) found there was a difference in YP's awareness of classmates being called transphobic names by peers and teachers with more cis-hetero and non-heterosexual respondents reporting to never have heard classmates being called transphobic names by peers and teachers than transgender YP.

1.3.2.2 Teacher Relationships

McGuire et al. (2010) found that teacher intervention in stopping negative comments was reportedly uncommon with 45% of cisgender students and only 25% of transgender students reporting seeing such teacher intervention. They also found there was no significant difference in the quality of teacher-student relationships for transgender and cisgender YP.

1.3.3 Impact

This theme relates to the impact contextual and relational factors in school have on transgender YP. There are four subthemes that comprise this theme: 'personal perceptions', 'attendance', 'emotional and mental health' and 'school engagement'. Table 10 displays how the subordinate themes were spread across the papers.

Table 10: Subordinate themes relating to impact

	Impact				
	Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019)	Day et al. (2018)	Jones and Hillier (2013)	McBride and Schubotz (2017)	McGuire et al. (2010)
Personal Perceptions	x	x	x		x
Attendance	x	x	x		
Emotional and Mental Health			x		
School Engagement		x	x		

1.3.3.1 Personal Perceptions

This subtheme includes discourse around transgender YP's perceptions and feelings of safety when at school and their perceptions of school climate.

Two papers discussed transgender YP's feelings of safety while at school. Both McGuire et al. (2010) and Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019) found that transgender students were significantly less likely to report feeling safe at school compared to their cisgender peers. Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019) further found that transgender YP felt less safe in school than cisgender LGB and questioning YP.

Jones and Hillier (2013) also found that because of bullying at school a significant percentage of trans-spectrum YP reported hiding during break and lunch times and were more likely to say that could not go to the toilets or use the changing rooms as they were especially unsafe for them.

Although three studies mentioned school climate, only Day et al. (2018) attempted to measure this. Their findings showed that relative to cisgender youth, transgender YP were significantly more likely to report more negative perceptions of school climate.

However, more positively McGuire et al. (2010) found that when teachers intervened to stop harassment, or when schools provided information and classes which addressed LGBT issues, transgender students felt safer and reported a safer environment for their gender non-conforming peers.

1.3.3.2 Attendance

One of the main implications discussed in three papers was absenteeism. Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019) and Day et al. (2018) found that transgender YP were significantly more likely to miss school due to safety fears in comparison to their cisgender peers. Likewise, Jones and Hillier (2013) found transgender YP were significantly more likely to miss classes, days at school, move school, leave school altogether or drop out of extracurricular/sporting activities than SSAY following experiences of abuse.

1.3.3.3 Emotional and Mental Health

Jones and Hillier (2013) further found that a substantially larger proportion of SSAY said that homophobic and cissexist abuse had no effect on them at all compared to trans-spectrum YP. Additionally, significantly more trans-spectrum youth said they had self-harmed or attempted suicide due to this harassment compared to SSAY.

1.3.3.4 School Engagement

Jones and Hillier (2013) also found a highly significant relationship between abuse and lack of concentration in class for all participants. Yet, homophobic and cissexist abuse appeared to have a greater impact on trans-spectrum YP's school success than SSAY's with significantly more trans-spectrum YP reporting they could not concentrate in class and had dropped marks due to abuse. However, Day et al. (2018) found no significant difference between how transgender YP and cisgender YP described the grades they received in school.

More positively, Jones and Hillier (2013) found that a significantly larger proportion of trans-spectrum youth responded to abuse by engaging in activism in the school compared to SSAY. These acts of activism included starting a support group, making speeches, or helping with education against discrimination.

1.4 Discussion

As discussed above, I interpreted the findings of the five studies to fit into three overarching themes: 'contextual factors', 'relational factors' and 'impact'. Within the both contextual and relational factor themes, studies highlighted both risk and protective elements that transgender YP face in school. The consequent impact of these on their perception of school climate, safety within school and their access to school were then considered within the theme of impact. The synthesis of the studies' findings are expressed in Figure 1.
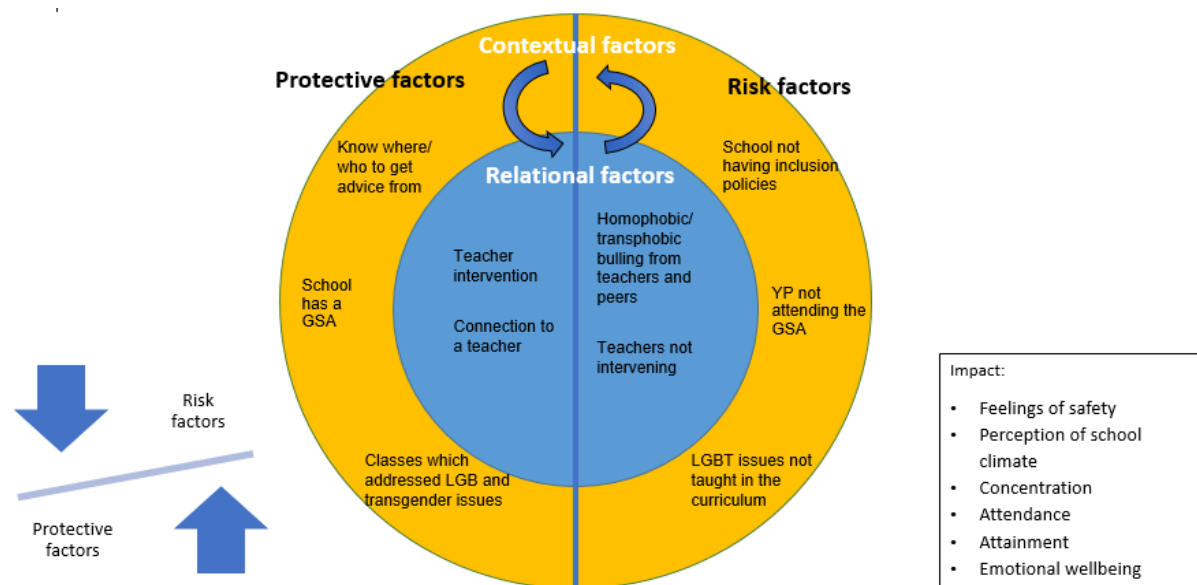
Figure 1: Visual expression of the synthesis

My synthesis model highlights how contextual and relational factors are bidirectional indicating the relationship between them in creating transgender YP's school experiences. The barrier between contextual and relation factors is a permeable membrane as I recognise the dynamic nature of schools and how teachers especially may play a relational role at an individual level but also are a key element of the contextual ethos and management of schools at an organisational level.

This contextual framework has theoretical underpinnings relating to Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic model (1979), specifically the micro- and macrosystem. The relational factors depicted in this figure map onto the Bronfenbrenner's microsystem. This figure shows that for transgender YP, how their peers and teachers respond to their gender identity is an important factor in creating positive or negative school climates for these YP. Similarly, Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem mirrors the contextual factors displayed in Figure 1, which illustrates

how the attitudes and beliefs about gender which schools reinforce impacts the school culture, thus transgender YP's overall school experiences.

I will now consider the findings outlined above in relation to the existing literature. I will then consider the implications of these findings, and the limitations of this SLR.

1.4.1 Risk Factors

Although not clearly represented in Figure 1 the prevalence of risk factors in transgender YP's school experiences was presented in each paper to be substantially more than the prevalence of protective factors. All studies found that transgender YP were more likely to experience harassment from peers at school than their cisgender peers. This mirrors the findings of other studies (Ditch the label, 2017; Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; Kosciw, Greytak, Zongrone, Clark, & Truong, 2018; Sausa, 2005) that found that harassment of transgender students was pervasive. Additionally, in the qualitative part of McGuire et al's (2010) study transgender youth reiterated that peer harassment was persistent in their focus group discussions. Further to this, three studies found that transgender students were also more susceptible to abuse by peers than LGB YP (Atteberry-Ash et al., 2019; Jones & Hillier, 2013; McBride & Schubotz, 2017). This corresponds with the large-scale national study carried out by Stonewall which found that 45% of LGBT YP, including 64% of transgender YP, are bullied on the basis of their perceived or actual sexual orientation or their gender (Bradlow, Bartran, Guasp, & Jadva, 2017). This highlights that transgender pupils are at particular risk of bullying compared to LGB pupils.

Additionally, McGuire et al. (2010) found that teacher intervention in stopping negative comments was reportedly uncommon and that transgender students recounted being equally as likely to hear negative comments being made by school staff as to hear them stopping peers from making negative comments. Likewise, in Grossman et al.'s (2009) study, transgender YP described the lack of intervention by school personnel as contributing to an inability to effect change. Furthermore, although Bradlow et al. (2017) did not differentiate between LGB and transgender students, they found that less than one third of bullied LGBT pupils said that teachers intervened when they were present during the bullying and 68% reported

that teachers or school staff only 'sometimes' or 'never' challenged homophobic, or transphobic language when they heard it.

However, none of the studies offer an explanation as to why transgender youth appear to experience a higher rate of bullying nor why they are more likely to hear peers and teachers making cissexist comments to others than their cisgender peers. One possible explanation for this could be that as a result of being more likely to experience bullying, transgender YP have become hyper-vigilant or hypersensitive to noticing these experiences (Rood et al., 2016).

McGuire et al. (2010) highlighted some further risk factors experienced by transgender students including lack of school bullying policies that specifically include gender presentation, and transgender issues not being taught as part of the curriculum. These findings correspond with those of Jones et al. (2016) and Grossman and D'augelli (2006) who found that two-thirds of participants thought that their education classes were mostly inappropriate as they did not provide support or information for gender diverse YP and transgender YP had less access to information about transgender issues in school than LGB issues respectively. McGuire et al.'s (2010) findings also reflect those of Bradlow et al. (2017) who discovered that only 41% of LGBT students report that their schools say transphobic bullying is wrong. Furthermore, they found that 77% of LGBT students had never learnt about gender identity and what 'trans' means at school. However, Bradlow et al. (2017) do not provide information about how participants were recruited and due to them using an online survey as their data collection tool there may be self-selection bias. This could mean that the individuals who chose to participate in the study were those who had more encounters of negative school experiences and therefore were more invested in sharing this information.

1.4.2 Protective Factors

Jones and Hillier (2013) and McGuire et al. (2010) also explored protective factors within school environments for transgender youth such as access to GSAs and student-teacher relationships. McGuire et al. (2010) found that when teachers actively took measures to prevent bullying situations and implemented more inclusive policies and curricula, transgender youth recounted lower rates of victimisation and recalled feeling greater school connection and safety. This is

consistent with the work of Jones et al. (2016) who found having supportive teachers and classmates were key protective factors for transgender YP. They found having good relationships acted as 'buffers' against negative experiences of bullying and harassment and reduced transgender students' feelings of social exclusion. A strength of McGuire et al.'s (2010) research is that it initially used quantitative data to find out about factors influencing the school experiences for transgender YP then followed this up with qualitative focus groups to develop a deeper understanding. However, the researchers acknowledge that their sample may not have been representative because the participants attended regular support groups and were from a state which had anti-harassment policies to protect transgender youth so they may have experienced less harassment and had better support than transgender YP from different states. In addition, some of the participants had not transitioned until after leaving school, meaning they may not have had the same experiences as those who had transitioned while still at school.

1.4.3 Impact

The impact of school experiences on attendance, feelings of safety, school engagement were explored by several papers (Atteberry-Ash et al., 2019; Day et al., 2018; Jones & Hillier, 2013; McGuire et al., 2010). McGuire et al. (2010) and Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019) found that transgender students were significantly less likely to report feeling safe at school compared to their cisgender peers. The results mirror those found by Taylor et al. (2011) who discovered transgender YP reported higher levels of verbal and physical harassment than their cisgender LGB and heterosexual peers, with 78% of transgender YP reporting that they felt unsafe at school, in comparison to 64.2% of LGB students and 15.2% of cisgender heterosexual students.

Moreover, the findings from Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019), Day et al. (2018) and Jones and Hillier (2013) regarding absenteeism were aligned with the findings of Bradlow et al. (2017) who found that 40% of LGBT students had skipped school due to bullying. Additionally, in line with Jones and Hillier's (2013) findings that significantly more trans-spectrum youth had self-harmed or attempted suicide following incidents of bullying compared to SSAY, Bradlow et al. (2017) found 84% of transgender YP had self-harmed and 45% had attempted suicide in comparison to 61% and 22% of LGB students respectively.

As the issues for transgender students in school becomes more visible, it is important that policy makers and educationalists work towards developing transgender support systems in schools (Mallon & DeCrescenzo, 2006). The specific role that supportive adult relationships at school can play in promoting the safety and wellbeing of transgender youth is not yet well known. However, some studies have found that positive student-teacher relationships, including teacher intervention when witnessing bullying, can help to lessen incidents of bullying and improve school attendance (Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001; Sausa, 2005).

Despite neither McGuire et al. (2010) or Jones and Hillier (2013) explicitly exploring the benefits of transgender YP accessing support groups in school, Jones and Hillier (2013) did postulate that 'This increased involvement in activism suggests that trans-spectrum youth possess resilience, feel empowered, and know their rights.' (p.301). This is reflective of the work done by Jones et al. (2016) who found that involvement in activism improved several elements of transgender YP's mental health and wellbeing such as feeling connected to a larger community, reduced likelihood of self-harming thoughts and behaviours, increased resilience and reduced feelings of depression. However, most studies within the wider literature focused on the importance of GSAs for LGB YP, with findings highlighting that the presence of GSAs is associated with higher school connectedness and increased positive perception of school climate for LGB students (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2013; Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, & Russell, 2011; Worthen, 2014). The benefits they may have for transgender youth is yet to be fully established and understood.

1.4.4 Limitations

A key limitation of this review is that the studies used a variety of measures to assess YP's experiences of school. This created difficulties in synthesising the studies and limited my ability to make comparisons across studies reliably as I could not be sure that each study was measuring the same aspects of school experiences.

A second limitation of this review is that it was carried out by one researcher. It is important to acknowledge that as a sole researcher it is inevitable that my own experiences and values will have influenced the outcome of this review. Thus, it is

important that this is recognised, and any biases associated with this are considered when interpreting the results.

A further limitation was that all five of the selected studies primarily focused on transgender YP's negative experiences of school. All the studies mainly asked questions relating to negative experiences and outcomes of education such as bullying, fears for their safety and absenteeism. Even though two of the studies did try to highlight positive experiences and protective factors for transgender students at school, the main body of data remained inheritably negative. Hence, due to the nature of the research methods used in these studies being chiefly focused on negative experiences, their findings may not give a true representation into the lived experiences of transgender YP in education.

1.4.5 Implications

This review has identified that transgender YP experience many elements of school differently to their cisgender peers. Specifically, this review has identified that transgender YP experience education differently to sexual minority YP, with whom they are often linked.

Such data speaks volumes about the challenges and experiences transgender YP face in education and how these compare to cisgender peers. They highlight the importance that schools consider ways in which they can improve the educational experiences of transgender students. These studies have also highlighted some protective factors for transgender YP in school. It is important that all school staff reflect on their current school environment, including the treatment of transgender YP by peers and adults and on their inclusion policies, to build in preventative measures to support them. Schools should consider risk and protective factors to be cumulative and examine their combined association that work together to create overall school climate and feelings of safety.

I believe Educational Psychologists (EPs) are well placed to consider, explore, and question challenges faced by transgender YP and support schools to become more inclusive places for these students. While still an emerging area of research, the ways in which EPs can support transgender YP are beginning to be explored (Bowskill, 2017; Yavuz, 2016). EPs can work at group and organisational levels to assess and explore with schools and teachers the risk and protective factors faced

by their transgender students. Additionally, by adding the voices of transgender YP in both research and practice EPs could be become more effective in supporting schools and teachers in identifying and addressing negative elements of the school environment and how to promote and develop protective factors.

1.4.6 Directions for Future Research

Further research is needed to address the limitations highlighted in this review. The data presented highlights that the issues faced by transgender YP should not be conflicted with issues faced by sexual minority YP, thus further research into the experiences of transgender youth, separate to the experience of sexual minority YP, needs to be explored.

Although three out of the five studies did present some qualitative data further research of this nature may be useful. The use of qualitative approaches may give further insight and deepen our understanding of how transgender youth experience school and how these experiences change throughout their educational careers and differ to their cisgender peers, including those who identify as LGB or other sexual orientation minorities.

Additionally, the majority the research reviewed, focused on negative school experiences of transgender YP and the effects these can have. However, although touched upon, there is limited research that explores the positive school experiences of transgender students. Further research in this area should aim to highlight some of the areas of support transgender YP receive at school and what transgender YP value as being effective and important to them in school.

1.5 Conclusion

This systematic literature review answered the question 'What are transgender young people's experiences of education in comparison to their cisgender peers?' The studies reviewed highlighted that transgender youth appear to have a variety of unique experiences and needs in school environments in comparison to both hetero and non-hetero cisgender peers. The findings of this review suggest that transgender YP were more likely to encounter risk factors at school resulting in negative outcomes. Consequently, the results of this review add to the current literature about transgender YP in several important ways. One key contribution being that it has emphasised that the challenges faced by transgender YP are

distinct from those faced by sexual minority YP, thus schools and researchers should not band these YP together when looking at how to improve school experiences for vulnerable groups of YP. Secondly, these findings have implications for schools and EPs in improving school policies and practices to create safer and more supportive school environments for transgender YP. Further research should look towards exploring support systems within schools that work to protect transgender youth against negative experiences and how EPs can support schools in the implementation of these.

Chapter 2: A Methodological and Ethical Critique

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a methodological and ethical critique of possible and relevant research designs and methods that have been employed in my empirical research project (Chapter 3). I have also considered and reflected upon my positionality as a researcher and how the ontological and epistemological viewpoints I espouse have underpinned the methodological and ethical decisions I have made throughout my thesis.

Throughout the remainder of this thesis, I will use the term 'gender diverse' (GD) as an umbrella term to describe gender identities that demonstrate a diversity or variety of expression beyond the binary framework. My decision to move away from using the term 'transgender' as utilised in Chapter 1, to using this term is described in Chapter 4.

2.2 Philosophical Perspectives

To maintain consistency, coherence and logic throughout this research process, my decision making was guided by consideration of a research paradigm linked to my beliefs in relation to: ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (the nature of knowledge), methodology (how knowledge may be obtained) and axiology (the nature of ethics). Therefore, my own philosophical position is central to this thesis mirroring Willig's (2013) suggestion that research questions and methodology choices are underpinned by the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions. Furthermore, it is important that I am clear about my world view in relation to this piece of research as Billington and Williams (2017) contend that research which "populates the landscape of educational psychology" should "identify and make transparent the epistemological, ontological and methodological assumptions" (p.9). Additionally, according to Grix (2002), understanding the ontological and epistemological positions of a researcher enables the reader to make an informed assessment of any presented methodology and research findings.

2.2.1 My Axiological Approach

Axiology involves ethical considerations and the values I hold which underpin this research (Brown & Dueñas, 2020). Firstly, I think it is important to reflect upon my

motivation to explore this topic. My interest in this area initially developed through a piece of casework with a child in Year 2 who identified as a gender that was different to their assigned sex at birth. I was aware that my knowledge and competency in this area was lacking and I found the information and resources available to teachers and educational professionals to help develop their understanding to better support GD young people (YP) was limited. With increasing numbers of YP being referred to gender identity clinics (National Health Service, 2019) it is likely that teachers and Educational Psychologists (EPs) will work with GD YP across their practice. Therefore, I believed it was important to research the lived experiences of GD YP in school to gain insight into the challenges they face when at school and the positive experiences and interactions they may have to try to replicate and expand good practice across educational settings.

I am also strongly driven by the imperatives of social justice such as access and equitability of resources, education and opportunities, and participation; the right for everyone to have their voices heard and be a part of decision making processes which affect them (Miller, 1999). Thus, a further motivation behind this study is to advocate for GD YP to have their voices heard to provoke societal change within our education system.

Additionally, the prevalence of gender diversity and the challenges faced within this population has been a 'hot topic' in the media recently; including dramatised shows such as Butterfly shown on ITV and documentaries such as the Making of Me on Channel 4. GD issues have also recently had high political media coverage with the introduction of the new compulsory Relationship and Sex Education curriculum, which states that all secondary schools must teach YP about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues as part of their curriculum (Department for Education, 2019a). Furthermore, the recent High Court case Bell Vs Tavistock which questioned whether puberty blockers could be prescribed to under-18s with Gender Dysphoria has brought fresh attention to the GD community and the challenges they face (Holt, 2020). Thus, I believe this piece of research is timely and worthy of further investigation as it is an area that is gaining increasing traction both within schools and nationally within political settings and agendas. Furthermore, it is an area that is relatively under researched where professionals require additional support and information. Therefore, I hope this research will be inherently valuable in providing

insight into the lived experiences of GD YP in schools, which will inform the educational practice of professionals including EPs.

2.2.2 Research Paradigm

When considering the intentions of this research, to understand the lived experiences of GD YP in schools, I believed that adopting an interpretive paradigm would be most appropriate. An interpretive paradigm, 'is characterized by a concern for the individual' and it endeavours to 'understand the subjective world of human experience' (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018, p. 19). As such an interpretive standpoint was adopted to better position me as a researcher to understand and present how these YP make sense of their school experiences and the meanings and values they assign to events or objects.

2.2.3 Ontology

Ontology is concerned with the nature of the world and asks the question: What is there to know? (Willig, 2013). Typically, a interpretative paradigm lends itself to having a relativist ontology (Scotland, 2012). In this world view, reality is represented through the eyes of the individual and the existence of an external reality independent of theoretical beliefs and concepts is denied (Robson, 2002). However, I take a more realist ontological position meaning that I believe that reality does exist independently of our representations of it. Yet, I do not espouse naïve realism which suggests that reality can be straightforwardly and unproblematically observed and known (Willig, 2013). I therefore hold an ontological perspective, whereby I remain critical of the scientific notion of objectivity and the foundational assumption that reality exists independently of our knowledge of it but also believe that reality can be socially constructed within a certain societal or cultural context.

2.2.4 Epistemology

Epistemology is concerned with how we can find the knowledge that is out there in the world (Willig, 2013). Initially, I approached this research from a social constructionist epistemological position which argues that human experience is mediated historically, culturally, and linguistically (Burr, 2004). This stance assumes that what we know about reality must be socially created through interactions with others and that individuals create knowledge and meaning entirely through a social process of interactions and relationships with others in the specific context they

reside in (Gergen, 1999). However, upon reflection, this position did not sit comfortably with me as I did not believe that it enabled me to consider the social world as greater than people's interpretations of it, to include structural and institutional aspects of reality that can be independent of an individual's thinking (Pawson, 2014).

As such, I sought a less radical constructionist epistemological view whereby, I assume there are real things that exist in the world, but I also recognise the influence of socio-political contexts in the construction of local truths that create multiple realities. I further believe that we are only able to access or know these things through individual interpretation of others construction of meaning. Therefore, I would say that both my ontological and epistemological views are reflective of a critical realist stance. Consequently, I have approached this thesis from a critical realist position.

2.2.5 Critical Realism

Critical realism claims to merge and settle disagreements between 'ontological realism, epistemological relativism, and judgmental rationality' (Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson, & Norrie, 2013, p. xi). It '… combines the realist ambition to gain a better understanding of what is 'really' going on in the world with the acknowledgement that the data the researcher gathers may not provide direct access to this reality.' (Willig, 2013, p. 13). Hence, I do not assume that my data constitutes a direct reflection of reality; but rather I assume that knowledge is both socially constructed and influenced by aspects of an independent world such as power relations (Scotland, 2012). Therefore, data collected needs to be interpreted in relation to social, physiological and psychological factors that exist beyond the individual to further our understanding of the underlying structures in society which generate the phenomena we are trying to gain knowledge about (Willig, 2013).

Regarding my thesis, this standpoint was thought to be especially appropriate as it understands that the experiences of one GD YP may not extend to all GD YP, and that for each YP the reality of their situation and experiences may be very different. Thus, it does not claim to be a direct reflection of the real world but rather suggests the necessity of data interpretation including acknowledging the impact of history and culture on our understanding of the world around us, is needed to further our

understanding. Therefore, I believe a critical realist philosophical stance is compatible with my research question as it recognises the role of multiple and subjective realities which are given meaning through interpretation but also fully acknowledges the transient nature of knowledge and recognises that my attempts to measure this reality are fallible and open to interpretation (Maxwell, 2012; Scott, 2005).

In summary, for my empirical research I will be adopting an interpretive paradigm, and within this I will adopt the ontological and epistemological position of critical realism. Next, I will reflect upon the methodological decisions I made within my empirical research and I will provide justification for these choices.

2.3 Methodology

Following my philosophical positioning, I assume that I am best able to explore GD YP's realities; their lived experiences of education, through my interpretation of meaning that is constructed by the YP included in the research. Thus, a critical realism stance fits with an interpretivist methodology because it acknowledges that there may be multiple subjective views of objective reality (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Therefore, to coherently reflect my philosophical footings, I decided to select an interpretivist approach for my empirical research. This led to choosing a qualitative methodological approach to answer my research question. From this I chose to use Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to examine '… how people make sense of their major life experiences' (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009, p. 1), in my case to examine how GD YP make sense of their school experiences.

IPA was considered against other methodological approaches and methods of analysis such as grounded theory and thematic analysis. IPA was selected as the most appropriate methodology for my thesis based on compatibility with my research question and my philosophical stance (see Table 11).

Table 11: Comparison of different methodological approaches

Methodology/analysis type	Epistemological basis	Focus of data collection/analysis	Compatibility to research question
Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)	Unspecific epistemological basis	General qualitative analysis method, can focus on experiences but can also focus on opinions, attitudes, and perceptions. Categorises data into descriptive themes	Medium
IPA (Smith et al., 2009)	Strongly based on phemonology. Is a critical realist method.	Concentrates on experiences as experienced by the individual.	High
Narrative analysis (Murray, 2003)	Interprets data from a critical realist or social constructionist perspective	Concentrates on life story data	Medium
Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)	Unspecific epistemological basis	Provides rigorous methodological procedures for theory building	Low

2.3.1 IPA

IPA is influenced by the theoretical areas of knowledge phenomenology and hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology is the study of understanding human experience (Langdridge, 2007). Therefore, IPA assumes that YP are experts of their own experiences and are consequently in the best position to express their views to the researcher (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation. IPA goes further and recognises that understanding requires interpretation from the researcher on the sense making of others. Consequently, IPA involves a double hermeneutic because the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant, who is making sense of an experience (Smith et al., 2009).

Whilst there is an effort to get close to the YP's social world, through a critical realist lens, IPA understands that it is not possible to do this directly or entirely. This is because although IPA accepts that events exist, it also realises that our access to these events are only available through a particular lens i.e. through the perspective of the person describing the event in a particular place and time. Furthermore, access to this world is dependent upon and influenced by the researchers' own conceptions (Forrester & Sullivan, 2019).

2.3.2 Method

IPA is an idiographic method of inquiry meaning it focuses on individual experiential accounts (Shaw, 2019). On a practical level, for me, this meant capturing highly detailed accounts of school experiences produced by a comparatively small number of GD participants. Following the central principles of phemonology, which espouses that it is important 'to approach and deal with any object of our attention in just such a way that it is allowed maximal opportunity to show itself 'as itself' (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 108), I decided to use semi-structured interviews as my research method approach to generate my qualitative data. This approach aligned with my view that generated knowledge should be subjective, unique and personal and I hoped that by taking this approach I would collect rich and meaningful data which would enable me to focus on individual voices to explore their lived experiences.

All interviews were originally intended to be held at the school of the YP, however due to working conditions and local restrictions because of the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face interviews were not possible. Considerations were made as to how to

hold the interviews and whether to carry out the interviews through virtual means such a video calling platform or a telephone conversation. I decided to use internet-based video-calling technologies, specifically Microsoft Teams, for my research. This was because it allowed synchronous, visual interactions between the participants and me. This was deemed as better than telephone conversations as it gave access to visual cues, such as body language, that are important in interviews and help overcome problems of building rapport and trust to support the facilitation and communication of feelings that would otherwise not be articulated (Hanna & Mwale, 2017). It was also considered that online video-calling software allows for the easy capturing of data as the interview can be video recorded and the software will automatically provide a transcript of the conversation. This was believed to be easier than audio recording a telephone conversation and then transcribing the discussion from a Dictaphone recording.

However, these video-calling technologies rely on the internet thus can only be an effective research tool if there is good internet connection. Poor connections can be challenging for researchers and participants alike; with interruptions and delays to audio impacting the quality of data collected and disruptions to video access making building rapport, body language and facial expressions problematic (Hanna & Mwale, 2017). Therefore, whilst I judged face-to-face semi-structured interviews to be the most appropriate research method for my research, following the COVID-19 pandemic and the time constraints placed on this project, I believe that carrying out virtual interviews via Microsoft Teams was suitable in this context.

2.3.3 Data Analysis

IPA is an inductive approach indicating that the research is data-driven, and interpretations are derived from the analysis of the data. This is opposed to theory-driven, deductive research where analysis of data is tested to see if it fits into existing theory. Hence, IPA involves identifying patterns and meaning through the analysis of data rather than trying to fit the data into existing theoretical concerns (Shaw, 2019).

As the purpose of IPA is to explore how individuals make sense of their experiences, it requires the researcher to fully analyse one case before moving onto another. This ensures the right level of interpretation and richness of data is gained from each

individual participant (Smith et al., 2009). Comparisons between cases only occurs in the final stages of analysis; this procedure is different that of grounded theory which works with the whole data set at an earlier stage (Shaw, 2019).

In summary, IPA was thought to be an effective methodological approach for exploring the lived experiences of GD YP and the meaning the YP have taken from their school experiences. IPA attempts to understand how participants think about major life experiences whilst accepting 'the impossibility of gaining direct access to research participants' life worlds' (Willig, 2013, p. 260). It relies upon my interpretation as a researcher by drawing upon double hermeneutics. Semi-structure interviews were decided upon as the research method and these were to be carry out virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The data collected would be analysed using an inductive approach, in keeping with the IPA methodology. Next, I will reflect upon the ethical considerations I undertook as part of this project placing particular focus on my axiological approach, reflectivity, participation and power.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

Given the interpretative paradigm and qualitative methodological approach I have adopted for this research, it is important I take my own values into consideration and reflect on how these have affected the research process, particularly regarding ethics.

2.4.1 Participation

The United Nations outlines the rights of the child highlighting the requirement for children to participate in decisions affecting them (UNICEF, 1989). These legal rights of children and YP to express their views and contribute to decisions about issues that concern them are central to key policy and legislation relevant to the work of EPs ((The Children and Families Act 2014, Code of Practice (COP) (Department for Education, 2015), Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989)). Hence, there are clear expectations and duties on EPs as research-practitioners to take account of children and YP's views both in their daily practice and in their research. However, despite the evidence suggesting the importance of exploring the experiences of GD YP, research listening to the voices of YP in relation to their gender identity remains sparse (Bowskill, 2017). Therefore, following the quote from participant 3 in Bowskill's (2017) research "Probably the

most reasonable person to ask is the person themselves" (p. 103) I decided it was important to explore the lived experiences of GD YP with the YP themselves.

While, in my opinion, participant-led research, as defined by Aldridge (2016), is desirable, it was not possible in this project. To gain ethical approval through the University, I had to make decisions about aspects of the research in advance such as sampling criteria, approach to data collection etc. In an attempt to avoid 'tokenistic' participation (Hart, 1992), I did intend to engage the YP throughout the research process by encouraging an approach referred to as 'pockets of participation' (Franks, 2011). Therefore, whilst I did not aim to position this project as participatory, I did aim to highlight the voices of the GD YP I worked with and to empower them to share their stories.

2.4.2 Power

It is essential that issues of power are addressed, as power and status between adults and YP require careful consideration (Christensen, 2004). Hence, throughout the research process I retained an awareness of my potential power over the research and tried to equalise power between myself and the YP both before and during the interview process with the intention of creating equality within the constraints of the interview context. I also acknowledge that my role as a Trainee EP may have had an impact on the YP's willingness to be open and honest and cause a power imbalance, especially if they had encountered an EP previously. Therefore, it was important to build rapport with the YP and emphasise a genuine interest in their views. As I did not know or understand their preconceptions of the EP role or purpose, I made a conscious effort to overcome these challenges by holding an initial informal meeting with the YP prior to carrying out the interview. In this meeting I introduced myself and my research, gave them the opportunity to air any questions and to enabled them to plan and take control of some of the interview logistics such as timings. I felt my interactions with the YP were authentic and I was able to build rapport with them, though acknowledging this was within limited constraints.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has offered insight in my decision to adopt a qualitative methodology in line with my philosophical position. IPA, and the inherent complexities of the approach, has been explored regarding this specific project. This chapter has also

discussed the ethical considerations required during this thesis. In particular, the issues of power, participation, and my positioning as a researcher and how these bore an influence on how this research was conducted has been explored.

Chapter 3: An Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Two Gender Diverse Young People in Secondary School[2]

Abstract

While the exploration into the experiences of gender diverse (GD) young people (YP) is a growing field within psychological and educational research, much of the current research available has come from large scale studies which have explored the negative experiences faced by GD YP and the detrimental impact this has had on their outcomes both within school and into adulthood. This chapter reports an empirical research project involving two GD YP discussing their experiences of education. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with each participant and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to inform the analysis of the interview data to gain an in-depth understanding of how the participants made sense of their experiences and the meaningfulness of these. From the YP's accounts, four superordinate themes were identified which related to language use, relationships, school systems and moving forward. Through identifying these themes and exploring how they fit in relation to the existing literature, recommendations are made regarding how schools and Educational Psychologists can support GD YP during their time in education.

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[2] I have prepared this for submission to the Educational Psychology in Practice Journal

3.1 Introduction

This empirical research project explores the lived experiences of two gender diverse (GD) young people (YP) in secondary school. This introduction outlines the rationale behind this research, including the current context as detailed in the relevant literature. It will also consider the roles of schools and Educational Psychologists (EPs) in supporting GD YP. This section will conclude by exploring the unique contributions the current research hopes to bring to the field.

Throughout this chapter, I will use the term GD as an umbrella term to describe gender identities that demonstrate a diversity or variety of expression beyond the binary framework. My decision to use this term is described in Chapter 4. Where terms other than GD are used to describe an individual's gender this is related to terms utilised within referenced literature.

3.1.1 Context and Rationale

Although there has been mounting and noteworthy research into addressing sexual diversity and schooling (Epstein, 1994; Jordan, Vaughan, & Woodworth, 1997; Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010) a focus on transgender YP has only just started to gain attention in the field of education (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2018). Until recently, the 'T' in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) studies in education has not received equal attention or has simply been removed in studies using this acronym (Greytak et al., 2013). Additionally, in recent years we have seen a significant shift in how YP who experience gender diversity are viewed by professionals, their families and by the public generally. With a history of pathologising transgender people and likening this identity to a mental illness, there is now a growing understanding in western culture that gender variance as a natural part of human diversity (Spack et al., 2012). Pyne (2014) calls this 'a paradigm shift: from disorder to diversity, from treatment to affirmation, from pathology to pride, from cure to community' (p.1). Following this, there is a developing and growing interest in the need to generate informed knowledge and understandings about how GD students are being supported in schools (Ehrensaft, 2016; Pyne, 2014).

The results from my Systematic Literature Review (SLR; Chapter 1) highlighted that transgender YP were significantly more susceptible to negative school experiences than their cisgender peers, including those who identified as a sexual minority.

These results aligned with those from national surveys that had been carried out in western countries (Bradlow et al., 2017; Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danische, 2016; Kosciw et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2011). Thus, it appears that there is an existing dominant narrative regarding the school experiences of GD YP. Consequently, Kosciw, Greytak, and Diaz (2009) have emphasised that it is important that research begins to move beyond exploring the negative experiences of transgender YP in schools and starts moving towards looking at how supportive school environments can be established.

3.1.2 Key Legislation

In the UK, the inclusion and protection of GD YP's rights are enshrined under the Equality Act (2010; EA). The EA (2010) highlights gender as a protected characteristic, thus providing GD individuals with specific legal protection against direct or indirect discrimination. To be protected by the Act, a YP does not have to have had, or be under medical supervision or be undergoing gender reassignment; they can simply be taking steps to live in the opposite gender or be proposing to do so (Hills & Barrie, 2016). The EA (2010) makes specific reference to schools meaning that it is unlawful for them to discriminate against, harass or victimise a pupil or potential pupil in relation to admissions, inclusion and the provision of available facilities. Schools are therefore prevented from denying school admission to GD YP, and are required to provide them appropriate facilities e.g. bathrooms, changing facilities etc. The EA (2010) states schools can take special steps to meet the needs of GD pupils without being accused of discriminating against pupils who are not GD. Following this, the Department for Education (2014) published advice for schools explaining that in single-sex classes within mixed-sex schools, YP undergoing gender reassignment should be allowed to go to the class that matches their gender identity and school uniforms must not discriminate against pupils undergoing gender reassignment.

3.1.3 The Role of Schools

GD YP face many risks at school. Brill and Pepper (2008) commented:

'… children need to feel emotionally safe in order to learn effectively… This is especially true for gender-variant and transgender children, who frequently are the targets of teasing and bullying. A child cannot feel emotionally safe, and will most

likely experience problems in learning, if they regularly experience discrimination at school.' (p.153-154).

Schools can play an important role in providing protective factors for GD YP (Greytak et al., 2013; McGuire et al., 2010). Specifically, the development of school policies around protecting GD YP's rights has be found to be trans-affirming (Greytak et al., 2013). As more YP are disclosing their gender identity, it is imperative schools have policies and practices in place to be able support them and that school staff feel confident in their knowledge on how to do this. However, several researchers have recognised how the cisnormative[3] culture within schools has prevented educators from exploring gender diversity resulting in decreased teacher self-efficacy beliefs around their competence and confidence to deal with issues faced by their GD students (Depalma & Atkinson, 2010; Kennedy & Hellen, 2010; Payne & Smith, 2014; Riley, Clemson, Sitharthan, & Diamond, 2013). Bowskill (2017) and Riley et al. (2013) highlighted the need for additional support and guidance for professionals regarding development of educational programmes and policies that increase awareness of YP's gender variance and reduce the segregation they experience in school as a result of cisnormative educational practices and curriculum delivery. Guidance has been developed to support schools in addressing aspects of transphobic bullying, provision allocation and the well-being of GD YP (Brighton & Hove City Council, 2013; Cannon & Best, 2015; Hills & Barrie, 2016), yet my SLR findings provide a strong indication more needs to be done to help schools implement this guidance to create safe educational spaces for GD YP.

3.1.4 The Role of EPs

Recent research in the US and Australia suggests the important role school psychologists can have in supporting transgender YP in school (Bowers, Lewandowski, Savage, & Woitaszewski, 2015; Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2015). Yet, whilst still an emerging area in the UK, the ways in which EPs can support GD YP are beginning to be explored (Bowskill, 2017; Yavuz, 2016). It has been suggested that EPs are well placed to consider, explore, and question challenges faced by GD YP and support schools to become more inclusive places for these students. Yavuz

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[3] the assumption that a person's gender identity matches their biological sex, otherwise known as being "cisgender" is the norm and privileges this over any other form of gender identity.

(2016) highlights that EPs are uniquely positioned within the education system to work across three levels of child and family, school, and Local Authority (LA). She proposes that EPs can disseminate research findings, suggest evidence-based recommendations, and offer psychological knowledge through training and consultations to support GD YP in schools. Through working in this way, EPs can support the development of policies and practices at a whole school and LA level enabling them to have a further reaching impact on GD YP across schools.

3.1.5 Summary

Following legislation, such as the EA (2010), it is important that all education settings work towards creating a safe educational environment for GD YP where discrimination of any kind is challenged and acted upon. However, when reflecting on current literature, there is an apparent pervasiveness of risk factors experienced in schools by GD YP regarding tolerance and acceptance of their gender identity at both a relational level, through peer and teacher interactions, and at a systemic level, through cisnormative policies, practices and systems (see Chapter 1).

As highlighted in my SLR, current research predominantly focuses on negative experiences and outcomes. Formby (2015) emphasised that this current focus on negative experiences within the research literature "can lead (albeit inadvertently) to an assumption that to be young and LGBT means facing adversity, thus minimising the potential for shared (public) stories of love, friendship and happiness amongst LGBT young people." (p.634). This highlighted a gap in research working with GD YP. The aim of the current research is not to further add to or reject this narrative, but rather to consider how schools and EPs can effectively support GD YP to promote positive outcomes. Therefore, considering the increasing proliferation of discourses and representations of GD YP in schools, this research looks to explore the lived experiences of two GD YP with the aim of giving them a voice to have their experiences heard and listened to.

I hoped that by working together with GD YP and listening to their stories, I would be able to deepen my own understanding of their experiences to promote protective factors and reduce risk factors experienced by this population of YP in schools. By comparing their stories, I aimed to build on the current literature to produce new knowledge that could then be used to generate recommendations for educational

professionals working with GD YP. Within this chapter the following research questions will be explored:

1) What are the lived experiences of GD YP in schools?
2) How can schools support GD YP from the perspective of GD YP?
3) What are the implications for EP practice from the perspective of GD YP?

3.2 Method

This section will outline the recruitment process, data collection and data analysis used in this research. The ethics for this research were approved by Newcastle University's Research Ethics Committee. Details of philosophical assumptions, methodology and ethical considerations are presented in Chapter 2.

3.2.1 Recruitment Process

Participants were recruited via nonprobability purposive sampling. They were recruited with the support of an organisation in the north of England which provides support for GD YP. Due to the difficulties identifying GD participants for research studies (Bettinger, 2010), I believed that the youth group would provide a pre-existing, self-identified population for the current research. I provided a flyer (Appendix D) for the organisation's staff to pass to YP and their parents. I also attended the youth group virtually to introduce myself to the YP and explain who I was, what my research was about, why I was carrying it out and to give them the opportunity to ask any questions. Following this, I sent out information sheets and consent forms to both the parents and the YP (Appendix E). From this I received back three parent consent forms and two YP consent forms. As I needed consent from both the parents and the YP, only two of the YP were able to be selected to take part in this research.

3.2.2 Participants

The protection of each participant's identity was paramount throughout the research project, something especially important when working with a GD youth population as they are at increased risk of experiencing harassment and stigmatisation. Hence, it was imperative that participants could not be identified from the research so pseudonyms, which participants chose for themselves to maintain anonymity, are used throughout this research project. As GD YP are a minority community, and providing even basic information such as gender, race, age and location could be

used to identify individuals in small and rural settings (Adams et al., 2017), only basic contextual information about the YP can be found in Table 12.

Table 12: Demographics of participants

D2	**QWERTY**
• Y10	• Y11
• Identified as non-binary	• Identified as transgender female
• Pronouns they/them	• Pronouns she/her
	• Important to note that she is also a child in care.

3.2.3 Data Collection

The YP were interviewed individually using semi-structured interviews. Interviews were carried out virtually through Microsoft Teams and were recorded. Participants chose where they would feel most comfortable carrying out the interview. A discussion took place prior to the interview to ensure they had a quiet, safe room to speak in. It had been agreed before commencing the research that a leader from the support group would be available during and following interviews in case any of the participants wanted someone independent to talk to. Therefore, parallel virtual meetings were also convened with the leader waiting in the other meeting for the duration of the interview in case the YP wanted to talk to them. Upon meeting the YP, I re-introduced myself and explained my research and the process the interviews would follow. I then shared my screen showing the participants' information sheets (Appendix E), which had previously been emailed to them, and read these aloud. They were given opportunities to ask questions before commencing. The interviews followed the interview schedule (Appendix F), with questions being informed by the themes from the literature and the research questions. Follow-up questions were led by the participants' responses enabling flexibility for the YP to discuss what was important to them. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. At the end of the interview, participants were thanked for their time and I discussed the debrief sheet with them (Appendix G). This was emailed to them and parents also received an emailed debriefing sheet. They were reminded that the leader of their youth group was available should they wish to discuss anything about the research, or require any emotional support following the discussion.

3.2.4 Data Analysis

I first transcribed the video recordings verbatim. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was selected as a tool to guide data analysis. The steps from Smith et al. (2009) were used as a guide to the analytic process. The stages of analysis undertaken can be found in Table 13.

Table 13: The six steps of IPA data analysis

Step 1: Reading and re-reading	I read the transcript of D2 several times to become familiar with the account. I also watched the video recording simultaneously to immerse myself in the data.
Step 2: Initial noting	As I read the transcript, I made descriptive comments describing the content of what D2 had said. I then made conceptual notes, interpreting what D2 had said and questioning their language and meaning.
Step 3: Developing emergent themes	Using my exploratory notes, I identified the interrelationships, patterns, and similarities to create emerging themes. At this stage the themes began to reflect not only the D2's account, but also my interpretation of this. (An example displaying steps 2 and 3 can be found in Appendix H)
Step 4: Searching for connections across emerging themes	At this stage I mapped out the themes to see how they fit together. To group the themes, they were listed and clustered into superordinate themes using abstraction, contextualisation, and numeration. I did this by sticking themes on large flipchart paper. As the clusters of themes emerged, the transcript was checked to ensure the connections between themes worked.

Step 5: Moving to the next case	I adhered to the ideographic nature of the study because I was committed to understanding the individual in each personal account, thus, repeated steps 1 through 4 with QWERTY's transcript.
Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases	This was a creative exercise that involved looking for patterns across cases. I compared the themes from both cases looking for connections, seeing how themes from one could illuminate another case and which themes were most powerful. Following this, a final list of superordinate and subordinate themes were created (Appendix I).

3.3 Findings and Discussion

In this section I will present my research findings to illustrate the superordinate and subordinate themes of which they consist. I will also review the three research questions generated and explore how the findings from this study can be consolidated and linked to current literature to answer each of these questions. An evaluation of the research will then be completed.

3.3.1 What are the Lived Experiences of GD YP in schools?

Four superordinate themes emerged from the analysis: 'the importance of relationships', 'the importance of language', 'school systems', and 'moving forward'. Within these superordinate themes there were several of related subordinate themes, and these are presented in Figure 2. It is important to note that participants' responses are central to the interpretation of these results thus direct quotes from interviews have been included to support the illustration of themes. In response to research question two: 'How can schools support GD YP?' the results from this study have several implications for schools. These implications will also be explored in this section.
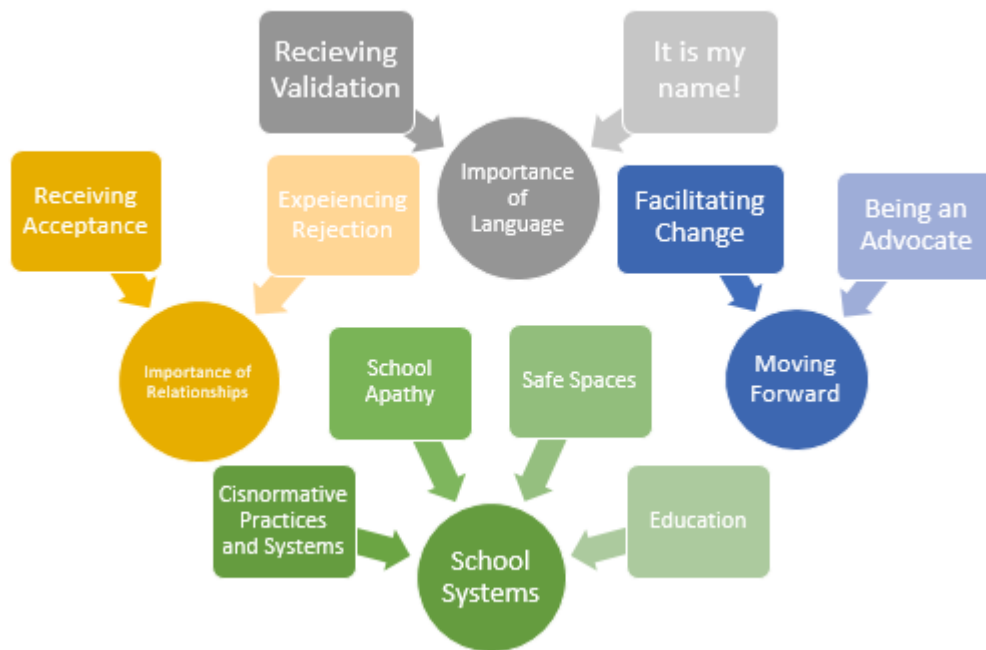
 Figure 2: Final superordinate themes with subthemes

3.3.1.1 Importance of Language

The 'importance of language' was a key theme for both participants. Two subordinate themes, 'it is my name!' and 'receiving validation' comprise this theme.

It is my name!

Studies have found that going through the social transition process associated with gender transition (i.e. changing names and pronouns) is key to the development of GD YP's gender identities (Russell, Pollitt, Li, & Grossman, 2018; Steensma, McGuire, Kreukels, Beekman, & Cohen-Kettenis, 2013).

QWERTY described how deciding her name was a crucial part of her social transitioning process:

[I] decided that I'm not gonna like try and hide it and err yeah, and then I thought I chose my name. (QWERTY, p5)

She also emphasised how the use of her chosen name by others was a noticeable sign they respected and accepted her gender identity:

When you've get when you've chosen your name, you want people to call you that (QWERTY, p14)

Contrastingly, D2 spoke about the upset caused when they were not believed about their name due to their appearance:

They just looked at me and then in my head decided that I looked too much like a boy and then told me that that couldn't be my name […] and it quite it upset me (D2, p10)

I sensed the importance for the participants to be believed and accepted as their identified gender and that they were inherently frustrated when adults challenged their identities. This reflects findings that having one's chosen name accepted and used by parents, peers, and teachers is associated with better mental health outcomes in transgender YP (Russell et al., 2018; Steensma et al., 2013). These findings could be due to the self-affirming effect it can have when others refer to GD people by the names and pronouns, they determine for themselves.

Receiving Validation

Both participants detailed experiencing confirmation of their gender identity when friends and teachers used appropriate language to refer to them:

They use nickname <u>Sam</u>[4] because my initials are <u>SM</u> […] it quite nice to just have them respecting it. (D2, p12-13)

The participants' demeanour when speaking about having their names and pronouns used by others suggested to me that language is a powerful tool in the construction of a person's gender identity which enables GD YP to feel validated and secure in

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[4] Underlined names/initials are pseudonyms I gave the participants when they used their names in the interview

their identities. These findings align with those of McCormack (2012) and Russell et al. (2018) who found the use of a transgender YP's chosen names affirms their gender identity and has a positive impact on emotional wellbeing and mental health.

However, both YP also spoke about being deadnamed[5] and misgendered at school:

I still get called a girl (D2, p4)

With QWERTY appearing almost fearful of being deadnamed by staff at school. This is especially pertinent to her as she is in stealth[6]:

[You want people to] not know any anything about your last name. You know you don't want anyone to know that person. You want to have a new life and a fresh start (QWERTY, p14-15)

This is consistent with findings from national studies in America and the UK, where being referred to by the wrong name and pronouns is something that particularly affects GD YP (Bradlow et al., 2017; Kosciw et al., 2018). This can have a negative impact on GD YP as Jones et al. (2016) found that students whose teachers used inappropriate pronouns and names experienced increased abuse from peers and suffered poorer educational outcomes compared to those whose teachers used appropriate language. This further emphasises the importance of referring to GD YP by their chosen names and pronouns.

Therefore, it is important that if a GD YP takes the steps to change their name and pronouns and wants to be known by their new name and pronouns at school, this should be clearly communicated to all staff and students and used consistently. It is important that school staff consider what changes might need to be made to reflect a YP's change in name or pronoun e.g. updating registers (Stonewall, 2020).

3.3.1.2 Importance of Relationships

This superordinate theme contains two subordinate themes: 'experiencing rejection' and 'receiving acceptance'. Both participants experienced elements of this theme to a greater or lesser extent at different parts of their life.

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[5] Deadnaming is calling a GD individual by their birth name when they have changed their name as part of their gender transition.
[6] Being in stealth relates to a GD person who has transitioned to live in a different gender and who is not informing those around them of their gender history.

Experiencing Rejection

Peers' intolerance of gender diversity was mentioned several times by both participants thus, it is assumed these experiences have played a significant role in the participants' overall school experiences.

The literature suggests GD students are more likely to be the recipient of harassment than both cisgender heterosexual and cisgender LGB peers (Atteberry-Ash et al., 2019; Bradlow et al., 2017; Jones & Hillier, 2013). This reflects my participants' experiences as they both talked at length about several negative peer altercations they experienced in school including verbal, physical and cyber bullying:

One time I got like pushed in a hole. (QWERTY, p18)

They also spoke about being othered and perceived as non-human by peers due to their lack of understanding about gender diversity:

A lot of people would call me 'it' (D2, p9)

Receiving Acceptance

However, participants did speak about having some close, secure friendships at school. An important attribute of friendship for both participants seemed to be a sense of connection and acceptance:

They just treat me like normal and just carry on as if it's just the way that it's always (D2, p14)

This is reflected in the literature, as supportive peers are suggested to be a 'buffer' against peer victimisation and social exclusion (Jones et al., 2016). Additionally, Johns, Beltran, Armstrong, Jayne, and Barrios (2018) identified that relationships with peers is an important protective factor relating to the health and wellbeing of transgender YP. However, the role of friendships in supporting GD YP is not yet well understood and research into this is lacking within the current literature.

D2 also spoke about positive relationships they had with some members of staff in school:

I do get along quite well with my head of year she is great and she is really nice and supportive and whenever thing are distressing me […] I know that I can go and can go and speak to her because she is just there (D2, p19)

This highlights that the perceived availability of the staff members and their interest and willingness to support them was key to the relationship that was developed.

However, having a strong teacher relationship was not apparent in QWERTY's transcript, I wonder if this could be because she has changed schools several times, thus it may have been more difficult for her to build relationships with staff members.

Both participants discussed times when a member of staff had supported them in challenging the views of others about gender identity:

When a teacher has like stuck up and is like yes, it is real that has really helped (D2, p18)

This emphasises the importance placed on these individual level support systems and student-staff relationships and the value the participants took from having a staff member who they considered was actively looking out for them. Similarly, Ullman (2017) discovered the relationship between perceived teacher positivity, support and an array of school wellbeing outcomes for GD students such as higher academic self-concept as well as being more confident and motivated learners.

This highlights the need for school staff to have a clearer awareness of the ways in which they influence GD students' school experiences and their sense of school connection. School staff must therefore focus on what can be done to strengthen teacher-student relationships to promote positive outcomes for GD YP. It has further stressed supportive friendships act as buffer against negative experiences at school. Hence, schools should consider how to foster these peer relationships and develop an ethos of acceptance within their schools.

3.3.1.3 School Systems

There are four subordinate themes that comprise this superordinate theme: 'school apathy', 'cisnormative practices and systems', 'safe spaces' and 'education'. Nested within the superordinate theme were the constructs of 'understanding' and 'belonging'. Understanding relates to the understanding of others about different gender identities outside of the cisnormative gender binary of male and female as

denoted by a person's birth sex, and an understanding of how to support GD YP in school. Belonging refers to the participants' sense of belonging in their school setting.

School Apathy

Both YP displayed frustration at the lack of general support they received from their schools to assist their social transition and the slowness of schools to change and adapt to their developing gender identity:

There hasn't been that much really school have done (D2, p6)

This reflects Jones et al. (2016) findings that there was a lack of structural support for GD YP in schools.

Cisnormative Practices and Systems

Cisnormative ideology which underpins many systems in schools seemed to be a major point of contention for both YP. D2 presented their discomfort around cisnormative teaching practices and how this made them feel their gender identity was invalid to teachers:

When you're seated in boy-girl because that order it just makes you like put into a box because that is the gender you were born as people will always see you as that gender and it makes you feel quite upset sometimes (D2, p12)

School toilets were also an issue for D2:

I also struggle a lot to go into the school's toilet because I don't want to go into the boys toilets […] I haven't been told that I can use them either and I don't really like going in the girls […] it makes me feel really uncomfortable going in them (D2, p6-7)

QWERTY believed, because of the cisnormative policies and practices her school followed, she was excluded for not complying to her associated birth gender expectations:

They didn't know how to deal with me and they erm excluded me for that and for wearing makeup (QWERTY, p23)

QWERTY thought that her exclusion was unfair and that it was due to her not conforming to gender stereotypes and rules, thus felt that she was discriminated against due to her gender identity not being cisnormative.

These experiences highlight that participants do not always believe they belong in their school setting and the systems in place did not account for their gender diversity, and consequently makes them feel excluded and their gender identities not valued.

In contrast to these findings, nongendered school uniform policies and access to gender neutral toilets increase comfort and sense of belonging feeling for GD YP (Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017; Bowskill, 2017; Sausa, 2005). Furthermore, Kosciw et al. (2018) found GD students in schools with a policy on gender identity were less likely to face gender-related discrimination from peers and staff, and issues around bathroom and changing room use. Therefore, creating facilities and policies that are inclusive for GD YP is crucial in safeguarding the wellbeing and positive educational experiences of GD YP. Bartholomaeus and Riggs (2017) suggest some actions schools could take to create an inclusive school culture for GD students including: creating mission-and-values statements that include celebration of diversity, specifically naming gender, policies outlining consequences for transphobic actions for students and staff, all options for school uniforms and dress codes available to all students, including for sports. Additionally, student facilities should be accessible to students according to their affirmed gender and "all gender" toilets/bathrooms should be available for all students to have access to if they choose.

Safe Spaces

D2 referred to their school having a 'diversity group' which was a GD friendly school club. They spoke about the positives of this group as a safe and accepting space:

It was just a nice accepting space for everyone (D2, p5)

However, it seems that priority is not always placed on keeping these support groups running for GD YP:

There was the diversity group but of course because it's not running and I can't go there (D2, p13).

These findings match those of Johns et al. (2018) who identified that the presence of gay-straight alliance groups within schools was a protective factor for transgender YP. Following this, The Stonewall (2020) guide for schools in supporting GD YP suggests schools should set up diversity, equality or peer support groups so that GD YP can meet up, have people to talk to and receive peer support. Having a support group in school has been found to help GD students feel supported, accepted, and included. They also demonstrate a school's commitment to diversity acceptance and tolerance to staff, families and students, whether they are GD or not (Stonewall, 2018).

However, there may be added complexity and nuance to YPs' willingness to attend in-school support groups, which was unacknowledged by my two participants. Many YP may not be completely 'out' at home or in school. This could be a significant barrier to them attending in-school support groups as they may be concerned that their GD status might become common knowledge, and fear that this could be communicated home. This highlights that even support groups, which are designed to create a safe space for GD YP, can become problematic because there can be a stigma or vulnerability surrounding attendance at these groups. Therefore, schools must take careful consideration about when and where these groups are held to reduce the likelihood of YP being unwillingly 'outed' due to attending (Harris, Wilson-Daily, & Fuller, 2021).

For this reason, some GD YP may find it more useful to access a support group outside of school especially if they have not yet 'come out', are unsure of their gender identity or are in stealth. QWERTY spoke about a community support group she attended. She appeared to value this as a place to share experiences with similar peers and create friendships:

I go to a LGBT group […] and erm I've made quite a lot of friends and made a few transgender friends as well and they've told me their experiences and I've told them mine. (QWERTY, p11)

This corresponds with Graham et al. (2014) who hypothesised that access to a transgender peer provides "important, unprecedented validation and affirmation" (p. 105). Therefore, it is also important that schools build links with local LGBT youth groups and have the knowledge of what groups are available in the community that

they could recommend to GD YP as well as working alongside these groups in school to deliver training and support (Stonewall, 2020).

Education

This final subordinate theme relates to the understanding of both school staff and students on gender diversity issues.

D2 commented that they received one lesson that spoke about gender diversity, but this appeared to be tokenistic and made them feel targeted rather than supported:

They had a weird lesson about gender which was a bit weird I didn't under… it was just kinda out of nowhere and everyone made fun of it and thought it was stupid and everyone knew it was because of me even though I hadn't asked for it … it was just there and everyone just thought that oh you know it's because of you because you're that weird kid in our year (D2, p6)

This mirrors Jones et al. (2016) who found that there was a lack inclusive education on gender diversity issues in schools. Furthermore, they both believed that if schools were to embed discussions around gender identity into the curriculum, peers would be more understanding of gender diversity and GD YP would experience less victimisation. This maps onto the work of Bowskill (2017) who found that the most frequent area of concern highlighted by transgender adults and professionals working with transgender YP was the current cisnormative focus of the curriculum.

Therefore, it is important school curricula integrate comprehensive understandings of gender identity (McBride & Schubotz, 2017). With the introduction of the new Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum in September 2020, it is compulsory for all schools in the UK to incorporate gender identity issues into the curriculum that reflect the diverse society we live in (Department for Education, 2019b). It is hoped that by having quality RSE teaching this will benefit all pupils, whether they are GD or not (Stonewall, 2020). Bartholomaeus and Riggs (2017) expand on this suggesting that all areas of curriculum are open to including GD content including literature and language arts, history, civics, mathematics, and visual arts.

Additionally, both participants not only spoke about the need to educate their peers on gender related issues, but also the need to educate and train school staff on gender diversity and how to best support GD YP:

I would have thought […] they would have more training but none at all (QWERTY, p14)

This corresponds with the work of Payne and Smith (2014), who found that despite the increased visibility of GD YP, many teachers have not been adequately trained to have the appropriate level of knowledge and understanding to support them effectively. Similarly, participants in Grossman et al.'s (2009) and McGuire et al.'s (2010) studies highlighted a need for school staff to be more knowledgeable about LGBT issues. Furthermore, additional training which supports staff to identify and challenge discriminatory behaviours has been identified as a need (Robinson, Bansel, Denson, Ovenden, & Davies, 2014; Ullman, 2017). This is because when teachers have an awareness of what constitutes transphobic bullying, and have self-efficacy regarding intervening when such remarks are heard, their frequency of intervening in bullying situations increases (Greytak et al., 2013). It follows that training for school staff is a key factor in creating a safe environment for GD students (Atteberry-Ash et al., 2019), and it is useful to GD YP if teachers, school leadership and support staff are trained in appropriate, supportive behaviour and language towards GD students (Jones et al., 2016).

3.3.1.4 Moving Forward

This superordinate theme contains two subordinate themes: 'facilitating change' and 'being an advocate'. Both participants had experiences of feeling empowered at some point. I was led to the conclusion participants had a sense of empowerment when they were valued and appeared to have an Internal Locus of Control. However, I believe that D2 felt this to a lesser degree than QWERTY and I wondered if this was because of some of the difficult experiences and changes QWERTY had faced throughout her life and now that she was feeling settled and secure she was more able to take control over her life choices and support others who may be facing similar challenges.

Facilitating Change

A common narrative for the participants was the desire to facilitate positive change for other GD YP in schools. Their responses within this theme mirror their reflections on their own school experiences and wanting to extend the positive experiences and reduce the negative ones. Both participants discussed strategies to make things better for others including schools teaching about gender diversity, teacher training and setting up support groups:

I'd make sure all transgender people had and all LGBT people had a safe, secure place to go and you know, make other friends and they don't feel threatened or they don't feel upset or they don't feel like they have to self-harm. (QWERTY, p11)

I think if people talked about it more especially in PHSE […]I think if we were educated enough and spoke about why people are trans and you know why people have these gender identities then they wouldn't you know be as horrible as they have been (D2, p10-11)

To make sure that we've got teachers […] that are trained and then then they know […] how to treat us better and they can give us what we would need if you're going through difficult time (QWERTY, p10-11)

This suggest that a school's motivation to develop their awareness, understanding and ability to support GD YP is important to GD YP and may support their sense of belonging in school.

These findings reflect those of Jones et al. (2016) who found that GD YP considered there was a need to make improvements in society for other GD people. This further echoes similar findings by Brill and Pepper (2008) whereby one transgender YP emphasised their desire for change saying: "If I could change one thing, it would be that all people were required to understand that there are more than two categories of gender. That way other kids won't have to suffer like I did" (p. 67).

Being an Advocate

QWERTY also spoke about her own self-determination and empowerment to stand up for her rights and to be listened to. She emphasised it is important for other GD

YP to speak out and make their voices heard to ensure they are accessing the right support:

Its good if you can speak out and like let your voice be heard 'cause I definitely did and have come so far. And I've made myself heard, it's taken a lot of effort and a lot of fighting but I'm happy to be where I am right now. (QWERTY p,24)

She also referred to some work she had done to raise awareness for GD:

I've done a few guest speakings and about my experiences and I did a project and how it feels everyday to live like a Trans person. (QWERTY p,24)

It was apparent that she hoped that this work would help other GD YP to talk about their experiences and reflected her desire to create a safe space for YP who may be experiencing similar challenges to her.

This reflects the work of Singh (2013) who found that often transgender YP have to confront schools to advocate for their rights.

3.3.1.5 Summary

The results from this study suggest that there are several risk and protective factors that influence GD YP's school experiences. Risk factors included peer bullying, invalidation from others of their gender identity, and cisnormative practices and facilities. However, the YP were also able to identify what had supported them in school and they had clear ideas about how they could be better supported in school too such as GD inclusive support groups and improved education and training for students and staff. Consequently, there are several implications for how schools can support GD YP. These include calling YP by the names and pronouns they have chosen for themselves, supporting secure relationships with peers and staff, having access to GD inclusive support groups, eliminating cisnormative teaching practices and systems, whole school staff training and teaching YP about GD issues across the curriculum. I presented several strategies to support GD YP in school, however it is important not to view these as separate entities, but rather individual aspects of a whole-school approach to supporting GD YP.

3.3.2 Relating Findings to Theory

To further synthesise the research findings and to consider how to best support GD YP, I reflected on and adapted Figure 1 presented in Chapter 1 and Johns et al

(2018) review of the literature that theorised protective factors for transgender people in relation to the four levels of Bronfenbrenner's socioecological model – individual, relationship, community and society. Analysis of my participants' interviews found factors relating to the individual, relationship, and contextual levels of the socioecological model; however whilst the YP did not specifically mention factors at the societal level I have included them in Figure 3 based on my findings from scoping the relevant literature. Consideration of risk and protective factors within this model highlight the dynamic relationship between factors at each level and how they collaboratively influence GD YP's school experiences. The bidirectional nature of these systems, which a YP is living in, highlights that there are multi-level pathways through which interventions may best improve GD YP's school experiences. This figure emphasises that interventions that primarily focus on relational aspects of GD YP's experiences put too much focus on the behaviours of individuals without addressing the surrounding school culture and cisnormative values that schools, or wider society hold. This is aligned with the concerns of Payne and Smith (2013) who were critical of interventions that concentrated on concerns about school climate and ignored issues with the school culture 'Niceness cannot erase the stigma – it merely asks students in the dominant majority not to be unkind to those they deem deviant' (p.12). Therefore, to change the school experiences of GD YP, a shift in school culture needs be at the centre of any action taken. Without confronting the underlying cisnormative structures promoted in schools, attempts to stop discrimination are likely to be ineffective as the contextual factors create an environment where disdain and harassment can occur.
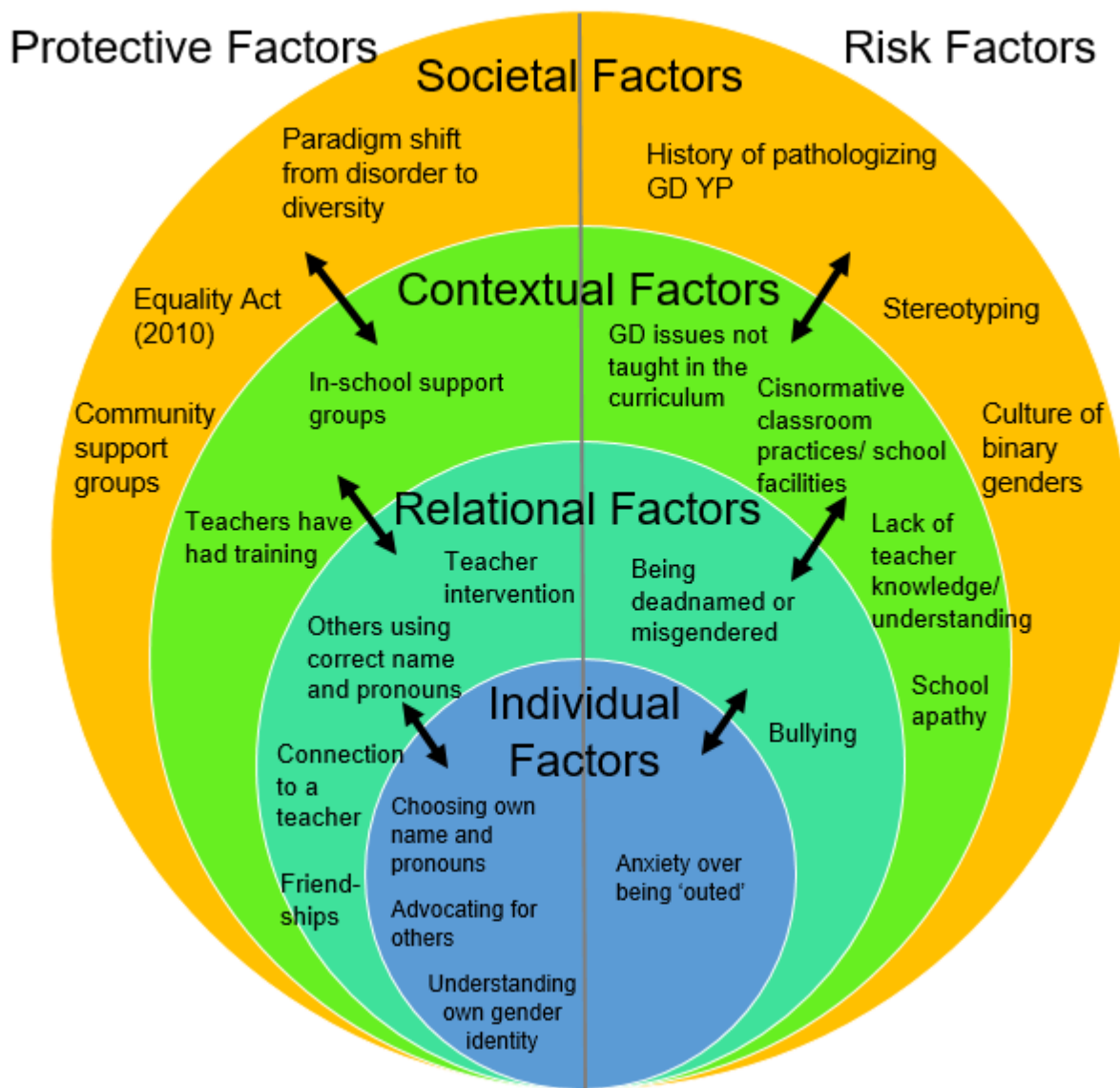
Figure 3: Adapted version of Figure 1 and Bronfenbrenner's socioecological model as cited in Johns et al (2018)

Despite this research and much of the available literature concentrating on adolescent GD YP, studies which focus on gender development suggest that GD children and YP develop their gender identity and an awareness of their gender diversity from their sex assigned at birth before they leave primary school (Kennedy, 2008; Kennedy & Hellen, 2010). Sullivan (2019) suggests that Kohlberg's (1966) psychological theory of gender development is "a useful lens by which to study the trajectory of trans individuals ..." (p. 4). Kohlberg suggested that each individual progressively passes through three stages of gender development between the ages of two to six: gender identity, gender stability and gender consistency (Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002). Studies have found that the gender development of cisgender

and GD children is predominately the same, with GD children exhibiting signs of gender development associated with their current gender and not their sex assigned at birth from a young age (Gülgöz et al., 2019). Research has found that transgender children will clearly and consistently identity with their current gender not their assigned sex at birth, indicating feeling more similar to peers of their own gender and dissimilar to peers of the opposite gender and show equally strong implicit gender identification, from being as young as three years old (Fast & Olson, 2018; Olson, Key, & Eaton, 2015). Additionally, as with cisgender children, transgender children display robust gender preferences for toys, clothing, and peers that are associated with their gender, not their biological sex (Fast & Olson, 2018; Olson et al., 2015). When exploring gender constancy researchers have found that preschool transgender children indicated that they would remain as their current gender group into adulthood at the same rate as cisgender children (Fast & Olson, 2018; Ruble et al., 2007). Thus, whilst the current research only explored the experiences of secondary aged GD YP, Kohlberg's (1966) psychological theory of gender development and studies which explore gender development highlight that the findings from this research may have wider scoping implications in supporting the school experiences of GD children from a much younger age. It is therefore important that educational professionals working with children and YP of all ages understand gender diversity and how they can change the different systems around these children and YP to create more supportive school environments for them as they grow up.

3.3.3 Implications for Educational Psychologists

Although this research cannot be generalised (as discussed below) and I have only collated the voices of a small number GD YP, there are implications for the findings of this research that are valuable. Martino and Cumming-Potvin (2018) emphasise that educational professionals need to focus on creating spaces within educational frameworks to enable the experiences and perspectives of GD YP to be expressed and that the systems around them must work in such a way that enable these views to be acknowledged and acted upon. They also highlight an epistemological need for professionals to prioritise gender studies and the insights these pieces of work offer. As research-practitioners I believe that EPs are in a good position to support the empowerment of marginalised YP, including GD YP, in the education sector. This is

because EPs work to redress power imbalances within systems that could seek to diminish the outcomes for vulnerable and marginalised children and YP (CYP) if left unattended. Furthermore, EPs demonstrate an understanding of whole-system level working to promote anti-oppressive practice for all CYP including those who are GD.

The role of EPs in supporting schools with GD YP has been highlighted in the literature, including delivering training on gender identity and theory, disseminating research into schools, and supporting schools in creating gender-inclusive classrooms, policies and practices (Bowskill, 2017; Yavuz, 2016). However, it has been suggested that EPs may lack understanding of issues related to GD CYP which are necessary to work with them and to support schools (Bowskill, 2017). With increasing numbers of CYP identifying as GD, it is likely that EPs will work with them in the future. Going forward, it will be important that any support is considered within an ecosystemic model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to ensure that interventions are placed at the appropriate level to support GD YP most effectively. Additionally, it will be important that as a profession, EPs continue to explore their own competencies when working with GD CYP. Additionally, it is important that EPs have knowledge of gender identity support services, such as charities, to which they can signpost YP, their families and schools to for specialist support.

3.3.4 Evaluation of this Research

There is limited research that explores the views of GD YP separately to sexual minority YP and uses qualitative methodology. Therefore, the methodology and research methods used in this study are a strength of this research that can provide key insights into the school experiences of GD YP that existing literature does not. Furthermore, both my participants were still in secondary school which is not the case in some studies where YP who are past school age are included in the study. This is because accessing and recruiting YP from the GD population is notoriously difficult (Bettinger, 2010) so many researchers will use the participant pool most accessible to them. Therefore, the experiences recounted from my participants may be more relevant than those expressed by older participants in other studies. This is because due to the rapidly changing social world we live in and increased awareness of GD issues older participants may have had significantly different school experiences to current school aged YP. Additionally, although the sample size was small, there was some diversity amongst the participants, including

socioeconomic status and ethnicity. In addition, the YP attended different schools, including a mainstream secondary school, a special provision for YP with Social, Emotional and Mental health needs.

However, this study also has several limitations. Firstly, the research has a very small sample size, with only two participants. Although IPA allows for small sample sizes, I had hoped to recruit more participants but I found the recruitment process difficult as discussed in chapter 4. Moreover, the use of an IPA methodology presents with its own limitations in that due to its idiosyncratic nature results cannot be generalised. Therefore, the interpretations I have made from the accounts of my participants are specific to the time they were heard and thus I cannot claim transferability.

In addition, it may be that by selecting YP from an already active group within the community I encountered selection bias by working with YP who have previously been involved in activism and community projects. This is especially relevant for QWERTY who in her interview told me that 'I've done a few guest speakings and about my experiences and I did a project on how it feels every day to live like a Trans person' (p.24).

3.4 Conclusion

This research explored the lived experiences of two GD YP in secondary school. I hoped to create new knowledge and understanding about GD YP's school experiences by working together with them, listening to and comparing their stories. The results from this research suggest that there are several risk and protective factors that influence GD YP's school experiences. Risk factors included peer bullying and harassment, invalidation from others around the YP's choice of name and pronouns and cisnormative teaching practices and school facilities. However, the YP were also able to identify what had supported them in school and they had clear ideas about how they believed they could be better supported in school too. These factors included incorporating gender identity into the teaching curriculum, having teachers that are trained and understand about different gender identities and how to support GD YP and having a support group in school that is inclusive for GD pupils. These findings should be used to inform the work of schools and EPs, as such, the factors raised within this research process have clear implications for the practice of all educational professionals.

Chapter 4: A Reflective Synthesis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will reflect on the professional and academic learning I have acquired in completing the Doctoral thesis. It will explore some of the critical thinking processes I went through when thinking about the terminology used in my research project and the challenges I faced particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. It will also demonstrate what the work has meant to me as a practitioner and researcher and what the implications of this research will be for me as a fully qualified Educational Psychologist (EP).

4.2 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an important factor in the evaluation of all qualitative research; however, it could be perceived as fundamental when working with a group of individuals whose experiences and identity are different to your own. When working with transgender youth in particular, Swann and Herbert (2009) recommend that, irrespective of their previous experiences within the transgender population, researchers should be mindful of their own biases and belief systems, and how these may impact their relationships and engagement with transgender young people (YP). Therefore, reflexively, as a cisgender female, I understand that I can never truly understand the lived experiences of gender diverse (GD) individuals, so all interpretations must acknowledge my biases and experience.

In relation to my ontological and epistemological position as explored in chapter 2, I believe that our knowledge of the world is based on our own understanding of our lived experiences and personal interpretation, influenced by history and culture. Therefore, rather than try to distance myself as a researcher and view the research from an outsider position, I recognised the impact my presence, beliefs and values would have on shaping the research and its findings. Consequently, I acknowledge that I am bound into the research process, from design to implementation and beyond and subsequently, my decisions within this research process have been guided by my experiences.

4.3 Gender Terminology

Throughout this research process I have reflected many times on different terms such as transgender, gender minority, gender variant, gender non-conforming and GD. During the course of writing my thesis, my understanding has evolved which is why I have used different terminology in Chapter 1 compared to the rest of my thesis. The development of my thinking and the process choosing the most appropriate terminology for this research project is described below.

I quite quickly decided that I did not feel comfortable with the terms gender variant and gender non-conforming. For the former I believed the term 'variant' could be associated with negative connotations due to its use within medical discourse when talking about variants in DNA/ genetics or topically in virus mutations such as discovering new COVID-19 variants. While I understand that not all medical variants are bad, and some may be beneficial I did not believe it was the most appropriate term to use to refer to the YP in this study. Similarly, I was uncomfortable with the term gender non-conforming as I did not view this as a gender identity but rather believed that it related to gender expression. Hence to me it means how a YP choses to dress and behave and how these conform or do not conform with societal expectations of masculine or feminine gender norms. Therefore, it was not an appropriate term to use in this study because I was focusing on gender identity (Sian Ferguson, 2021).

Many researchers use the term transgender as an umbrella term which covers a complex and fluid spectrum of gender presentation (Bowskill, 2017; Hudson-Sharp, 2018). The prevalence of this term within the relevant literature was the primary reason for me adopting it in Chapter 1. However, my understanding of gender terminology has evolved while writing my thesis. Consequently, my personal understanding of the term 'transgender' has also changed. My conceptualisation of the term 'transgender' is that it implies that YP have or are in the process of changing their gender from male to female or vice versa. Therefore, my view is, that the term 'transgender' seems to create a new binary because to me a YP who identifies as transgender is either transgender male or female, rather than somewhere along the gender continuum. This could become an issue because it may suggest to YP who do not feel comfortable with their gender that the only option is to identify as the opposite gender, potentially limiting their freedom to explore their

gender identity more, including the option of being non-binary or somewhere else on the gender spectrum. Thus, following my developing understanding of gender terminology throughout writing my thesis, I chose not to use this term in my empirical research project to describe my participants. I believe this decision was especially pertinent as D2 did not identify with a male or female gender, therefore their gender identity was not consistent with my conceptualisation of what the term 'transgender' means.

For a long time I also considered the using term gender minority as the definition of "Individuals whose gender identity (man, women, other) or expression (masculine, feminine, other) is different from their sex (male, female) assigned at birth" (Childhood Centers for Disease and Prevention, 2019) did sit comfortably with my personal viewpoint. However, I believed that the term 'minority' did possibly hold some negative associations with being different to the social majority and being discriminated against which I did not believe the term 'diverse' had.

Therefore, I believed that the term GD exposed the limits of the gender binary and was an appropriate umbrella term to describe gender identities that demonstrate a diversity or variety of expression beyond the binary framework. Additionally GD is the term used by Mermaids, the UK's leading gender identity charity (Mermaids, 2021).This term also seemed most appropriate in this study as one YP identified as transgender and other as non-binary thus it was important that I use a term that represented both their gender identities. Furthermore, both participants indicated that they felt more comfortable with the term, 'gender diverse' than they did 'gender minority' to represent both their gender identities. Hence, this is the term I decided to use within my research.

4.4 Challenges Faced During the Research

Mirroring the conclusions drawn by Bettinger (2010) one of the greatest challenges faced in carrying out this research was identifying and assessing the target population of GD YP. Therefore, before the research started, I identified a pre-existing GD support group that had a potential pool of participants. However, it was at this time in my research process that the first national lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. This made my communications with the leader of the support group more difficult as they were focused on setting up virtual means to

continue providing support to their YP. Here my recruitment process stalled for a few weeks as the group worked to establish their virtual meetings. I remained in contact with the leader of this support group and once the meetings were running again, he asked the YP if I could come and talk to them about my research project. I was then invited to attend the group and introduce myself and my research project. From this initial meeting there seemed to be quite a lot of interest in my research project with the majority of YP in the group saying they would be happy to participate and that they thought it was a much needed piece of research in an area that is not yet well understood in schools. However, another major stumbling block I encountered was getting consent forms back from the YP and their parents. Again, I wondered how the COVID-19 pandemic and government restrictions impacted this as my consent forms required a signature. Many YP and their parents may not have electronic signatures so access to a printer and scanner would have been needed to sign the document and send it back to me. I believe this is one reason for having a limited number of participants and that potentially if the support group was running in person and I could have attended with paper copies of consent forms for YP and parents to sign I may have had a better take up with this research project.

As discussed in chapter 2, when working with a vulnerable population it is important to ensure that participants felt safe during their interviews and had access to appropriate support should they need it. It was for this reason that interviews took place in a location of their choosing and at a time when a leader of the support group was available to provide emotional support if needed. However, this did limit the potential times for interviews and required a lot of advanced planning. This created a challenge with timescales and research deadlines I was expected to meet.

4.5 Implications

The process of carrying out this research has been a valuable learning opportunity for me. As a cisgender female I had never considered my own gender development in detail. However, through this research I have come to learn about my own gender identity and expression and how this may subconsciously impact my practice as an EP. By engaging in this research, I have developed a deeper understanding of the experiences of GD YP, although I am conscious that I can never fully understand them, and what actions they deemed to be supportive in school. Following this work, I strongly believe that if I am asked to work with a child or YP who is experiencing

gender incongruence I will have a good level of knowledge and understanding to be able to empathise with their experiences and support them, their families and school in developing strategies to support them and challenge any stigmatising beliefs held by others. Furthermore, as explored briefly in chapter 2, it is a core value of mine that children and YP (CYP) are supported to meaningfully participate in decision-making processes that involve them, therefore I aim to expand this into any work I do with GD YP. Hence, whilst the suggestions made in chapter 3 will be helpful generally in providing schools with approaches to supporting GD YP, in my work, I will endeavour to include GD YP in discussions about support strategies to ensure that their voices are heard and any provision put in place to support them is appropriate and will have an impact on their school experiences and outcomes. Likewise, I believe it would be beneficial for future research to use participatory approaches to support GD YP to share their voices to incite systemic change within schools.

Furthermore, for the purpose of this research some data, which did not directly relate to the research questions I was asking, was excluded. This included data about how the YP began to form their gender identities, the process and complexities of socially transitioning and homelife including parental/carer acceptance and support. Homelife was a particularly pertinent subject to QWERTY who was a YP in care and had experienced several different placements. Therefore, it may be important in the future for researchers explore the lived experiences of GD YP in care as these are particularly vulnerable YP within our society, thus understanding how to support these YP in their foster placements as well as in school is vitally important.

Following the submission of this research, it will firstly be shared with my two participants, their families and their support group to enable them to see the outcomes sharing their views with me had and for them to be able share this with those who are closest to them. Moreover, by embarking on this research process I have come to realise that gender diversity is a gap in knowledge amongst many EPs. With the prevalence of YP identifying as GD increasing yearly the probability of EPs encountering GD CYP through their work is highly likely, thus EPs need to develop the knowledge and competency to be able to support these YP appropriately. Therefore, my work will also be shared with my Local Authority (LA) Educational Psychology Service and it is my intention that my research to be written

up and published so that the findings and recommendations can be shared wider within the EP profession. It is hoped that by doing this EPs' will develop their own knowledge that can then be shared across schools and LAs.

4.6 Final Reflection

This research process has been a learning journey for me in several ways; learning how to carry out research, learning about the GD community and learning about myself. I hope that my work in researching and supporting GD YP has only just begun because I believe that this is an often unnoticed area in education and that only by continuing to listen to the experiences and voices of GD YP can we as educational professionals begin to facilitate positive systemic change that will impact the experiences and outcomes of GD YP. I believe that my role as an EP will place me in a good position to be able to undertake this challenge and I look forward to working with more GD YP and their families to build on the work we have started here.

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Appendix A: Weight of Evidence for Quality of Methods and Data of Selected Studies

	Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019)	Day et al. (2018)	Jones and Hillier (2013)	McBride and Schubotz (2017)	McGuire et al. (2010)
1. Are there ethical concerns about the way the study was done? *Consider consent, funding, privacy, etc.*	**Some** This study was determined to be exempt from the primary authors institutional review board. Described how contained consent from schools, parents and YP.	**Some** Ethical approval obtained. Formal consent not obtained. Used passive consent as used secondary data.	**Some** Ethical approval obtained. Does not specifically mention consent but describes that you self-selected to participate.	**Yes** Does not mention ethical approval or participant consent.	**Some** Ethical approval obtained. Did not obtain parental consent.
2. Were students and/or parents appropriately involved in the design or conduct of the study?	**Some** Not in the design – data was drawn from a state wide biennial survey. Adolescent self-rating scales were used.	**Some** Not in the design – data was drawn from two state wide surveys. Adolescent self-rating scales were used.	**Some** Not in the design. Adolescent self-rating scales were used.	**Some** Not in the design. Adolescent self-rating scales were used.	**Some** Not in the design. Adolescent self-rating scales were used.

	Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019)	Day et al. (2018)	Jones and Hillier (2013)	McBride and Schubotz (2017)	McGuire et al. (2010)
3. Is there sufficient justification for why the study was done the way it was?	**Yes** Clear rationale due to previous research and lack of understanding of experiences for those YP in different intersections of sexual orientation and gender identity.	**Yes** Clear rationale due to previous research and lack of understanding disparities in experiences of transgender and cisgender youth.	**Some** Make links to previous research and gaps in the literature are transgender youth experiences. There could have been more in depth review on transgender YP's perspectives about the experiences this study focuses on.	**Yes** Thorough research background, links to socio-political context and rationale for chosen measures.	**Yes** Clear rationale due to previous research. Good rationale for method chosen
4. Was the choice of research design appropriate for addressing the research question(s) posed?	**Yes** Logistic regression model used on each population of YP enabling comparison across different intersections of sexual orientation and gender identity	**Yes** Logistic regression model used on each population.	**Some** Had three research questions, each were not sufficiently addressed.	**Some** No research questions directly posed. Only percentages quoted, no further analysis was done to establish if the results were significant.	**Some** Use of t-tests not appropriate for ordinal data.

	Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019)	Day et al. (2018)	Jones and Hillier (2013)	McBride and Schubotz (2017)	McGuire et al. (2010)
5. Have sufficient attempts been made to establish the <u>reliability</u> of data collection methods and tools?	**Some** Use state wide survey which is accessible to others researchers and reported questions and response options. Described process for attaining final analytic sample.	**Yes** Both surveys accessible to other researchers. Detailed descriptions of survey questions and response options. Cronbach alpha used on some measure internal consistency	**Some** Data gathered from the third in a series of national studies taking place every six years, so access to same questionnaire is available.	**Some** Used an annual nation survey which other researchers could access. No descriptions of questions used in survey.	**Yes** Clear description of measures used. Clear procedure.
6. Have sufficient attempts been made to establish the <u>validity</u> of data collection tools and methods?	**Some** Independent variables were tested for collinearity	**Some** Staff provided with training to standardise implementation. Multiple measures used.	**No** No information provided on what questions were asked or response options. No attempt to provide validity information for measures used.	**No** No information provided on what questions were asked or response options. No attempt to provide validity information for measures used.	**Some** Multiple measure used to explore each concept.

	Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019)	Day et al. (2018)	Jones and Hillier (2013)	McBride and Schubotz (2017)	McGuire et al. (2010)
7. Have sufficient attempts been made to establish the <u>reliability</u> of data analysis?	**Yes** Detailed their use of Stata 15.0 software and the test they ran and rationales as to why.	**Yes** Clear, detailed descriptions and rationales for data analyses.	**Some** Use of Pearson chi-squared. No explanation of expected frequencies.	**No** Only percentages reported.	**Some** Used two tailed t-tests.
8. Have sufficient attempts been made to establish the <u>validity</u> of data analysis?	**Yes** Use adjusted odds ratios. Detailed 3 different p-levels.	**Yes** Use adjusted odds ratios. Used multilevel regression and unstandardised beta when analysing more than one dependant variable. Detailed 3 different p-levels.	**Some** Provided with chi-squared statistics and detailed 3 different p-levels.	**No** Present percentages on ordinal data. Did not consistently provide data for cisgender group.	**Some** Only mean responses given for analytic sample not for separate sub samples. Detailed 3 different p-levels. Effect sizes could not be calculated
9. To what extent are the research design and methods employed able to rule out any other sources of error/bias	**Some** Dichotomised dependant variables when produced errors or violated proportional odds assumptions.	**High** Presents results of a weighted subsample designed to be representative of state population and results from larger	**Some** Survey carried out annually, possible to access results to see for stability over time	**Some** Recognition of methodological limitation. Undertook advise from experts as to wording of	**Low** Students could self-administers the survey in various ways – not a consistent process.

	Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019)	Day et al. (2018)	Jones and Hillier (2013)	McBride and Schubotz (2017)	McGuire et al. (2010)
which would lead to alternative explanations for the findings of the study?	Independent variables were tested for collinearity	unrepresentative survey.		questionnaire.	
10. How generalisable are the study results?	**Some** The use of representative data allows findings to be generalized to high school students in Colorado. However it was a cross-sectional survey which made inferences about populations at one point in time thus, these results might look different at different points in time, or longitudinally.	**High** By utilising a representative sample generalizable to a broader population, this study elucidates the size of gender identity-related disparities, independent of sexual orientation	**Low** Unclear research design and data analysis.	**Low** Poor statistical analysis	**Low** Small sample of transgender youth

	Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019)	Day et al. (2018)	Jones and Hillier (2013)	McBride and Schubotz (2017)	McGuire et al. (2010)
11. Have sufficient attempts been made to justify the conclusions drawn from the findings so that the conclusions are trustworthy?	High trustworthiness	High trustworthiness	Low/medium trustworthiness	Medium trustworthiness	Medium trustworthiness
12. In light of the above, do the reviewers differ from the authors over the findings or conclusions of the study?	No	No	Some	Some	Some

Appendix B: Synthesis of Results and Emerging Themes from Each Paper

Study	Results Data	Descriptive summary of results	Emerging Themes
Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019)	Being transgender had a significantly negative effect on feeling safe at school: Transgender Heterosexual (AOR = 0.22 [0.14, 0.36] ***) Transgender LGB (AOR = 0.14 [0.10, 0.21] ***) Transgender questioning (AOR = 0.22 [0.11, 0.43] ***)	They found that transgender YP were 81% less likely to report feeling safe at school compared to their cisgender heterosexual peers.	Feel unsafe at school
	Although cisgender LGB YP were significantly more likely to report feeling unsafe at school than cisgender heterosexual YP this was not as significant an effect as being transgender Cisgender LGB (AOR = 0.55 [0.45, 0.68] ***) Cisgender questioning (AOR = 0.62 [0.46, 0.86] **)	Transgender YP were also reported to feel less safe in school than other samples of YP who are seen as vulnerable such as students who reported that they did not know if they were transgender and cisgender LGB and questioning YP who were 64% and 42% less likely to report feeling safe at school compared to their cisgender heterosexual peers respectively.	
	Being transgender also significantly increased the odds of being bullied at school, and bullied electronically: Transgender Heterosexual (AOR = 3.38 [2.13, 5.35] *** and AOR = 3.19 [1.91, 5.32] ***) Transgender LGB (AOR = 4.21 [2.86, 6.20] ***, and AOR = 3.80 [2.54, 5.70] ***) Transgender questioning (AOR = 5.3 [2.74, 9.60] ***, and AOR = 6.13 [3.24, 11.61] ***).	Transgender YP were approximately 4 times more likely to experience any form bullying than their heterosexual cisgender peers.	Experience bullying

	Transgender YP were also more likely to experience being bullied at school, and bullied electronically than cisgender LGB YP and cisgender questioning YP Cisgender LGB (AOR = 2.24 [1.93, 2.60] ***, and AOR = 2.01 [1.71, 2.37] ***) Cisgender questioning (AOR = 1.48 [1.16, 1.89] ** and AOR = 1.29 [0.98, 1.70])	Transgender YP were also more likely to experience bullying than cisgender LGB YP and cisgender questioning YP who were approximately twice as likely to experience any form bullying than their cisgender peers.	
	Being transgender also significantly increased the odds of skipping school due to safety fears: Transgender Heterosexual (AOR = 10.42 [6.42, 16.91] ***) Transgender LGB (and AOR = 11.21 [7.34, 17.11] ***) Transgender questioning (AOR = 9.95 [5.00, 19.78] ***).	Transgender YP were approximately 10 times more likely to miss school due to safety fears in comparison to their cisgender peers.	Miss school due to safety fears
	Transgender YP were also more likely to skip school due to safety fear than cisgender LGB YP and cisgender questioning YP Cisgender LGB (AOR = 2.42 [1.88, 3.13] ***) Cisgender questioning (AOR = 1.58 [1.01, 2.46] *) Odd ratios were adjusted for other predictors in the model. * p ≤ 0.05, ** p ≤ 0.01, *** p ≤0.001.	Transgender YP were also more likely to skip school due to safety fear than cisgender LGB YP and cisgender questioning YP who were approximately twice as likely to miss school over safety fears than cisgender heterosexual peers.	

Day et al. (2018)	Logistic regressions found that being transgender has a significant effect on the likelihood of missing school because of truancy (AOR = 1.53 [1.21, 1.93] ***), feeling unsafe (AOR = 3.33 [1.91, 5.80] ***) and because of alcohol or drug misuse (AOR = 3.23 [1.90, 5.51] ***). However, being transgender did not significantly affect the likelihood of missing school because of feeling depressed (AOR = 1.22 [0.79, 1.87]) or being suspended (AOR = 1.51 [0.82, 2.76]).	Transgender YP were that more than three times more likely to miss school due to feeling unsafe or alcohol or drug misuse than their cisgender peers. Compared to their cisgender peers, transgender YP were more likely to be truant (p<0.001). However, transgender YP did not significantly differ from cisgender YP in missing school due to feeling depressed or because they were suspended.	Missing school due to feeling unsafe, truancy and alcohol and drug misuse.
	Being transgender also significantly increased the odds of experiencing homophobic bullying (AOR = 2.27 [1.22, 4.25] ***) and gender-based bullying (AOR = 3.71 [2.42, 5.68] ***). Furthermore, when measured as a single variable: did or did not experience homophobic or gender-based bullying, there was a significant increased risk with transgender YP compared to cisgender YP (AOR = 2.34 [1.35, 4.07] **)	Transgender YP were more than twice as likely to experience bullying related to their gender or sexual orientation than their cisgender peers.	Experience bullying
	Results from the multiple regression models found that being transgender had a significant effect on a YP's likelihood of experiencing victimisation (b = 0.86, SE = 0.13 ***).	Additionally, their likelihood of experiencing general victimisation was significantly higher than that for cisgender YP.	Experience Bullying

	They also found that transgender YP perceived their school climate more negatively than their non-transgender peers (b=0.20, SE = 0.04 ***).	For frugality, the authors used a summary variable of school climate based on the YP's average across the 14 items (α= 0.89). They measured school climate using 14 items which assessed the developmental supports within schools related to positive academic, social-emotional, and health related outcomes. These were grouped into four subcomponents: (1) school connectedness; (2) having caring relationships with adults at school; (3) opportunities for meaningful participation; and (4) teachers having high expectations of students. When summarised into a single variable relative to cisgender youth, transgender YP were significantly more likely to report more negative perceptions of school climate (p<0.001).	Poor perception of school climate

Good perceived grades |
| | There was no significant difference between how transgender YP and cisgender YP self-reported grades (b=0.06, SE = 0.11).

* p ≤ 0.05, ** p ≤ 0.01, *** p ≤0.001. | There was no significant difference between how transgender YP and cisgender YP described the grades they received in school. | |
| Jones and Hillier (2013) | Trans-spectrum YP generally experienced significantly more physical homophobic and cissexist abuse (χ^2=10.271, *df*=1 ***) and other types homophobic and cissexist abuse (χ^2=6.459, *df*=1 **) than cisgender SSAY. Trans-spectrum YP were also significantly | Although not significantly different the percentage of YP who reported experiencing of homophobic or cissexist abuse at school was higher for transgender youth (81.25%) than SSAY (79.71%). However, there was a significant difference | Experienced bullying |

	more likely to experience abuse at home (χ^2=11.062, *df*=1 **) and on the street (χ^2=8.608, *df*=1 **) than cisgender SSAY. However, compared to cisgender SSAY, trans-spectrum YP were not significantly more likely to experience abuse in school, (χ^2=0.114, *df*=1) or at sporting events (χ^2=3.175, *df*=1).	in generally experiencing homophobic and cissexist abuse with 49.17% of trans-spectrum youth saying they had experienced physical homophobic and cissexist abuse compared to 29.1% of SSAY, and 24.52% of trans-spectrum youth saying they had experienced other forms of homophobic and cissexist abuse compared to 15.32% of SSAY.	
	Significantly more trans-spectrum YP had self-harmed (χ^2=10.695, *df*=1 **) and attempted suicide cc than SSAY due to homophobic and cissexist abuse.	46.15% of trans-spectrum youth said they had self-harmed due to homophobic and cissexist abuse compared to 30.12% of SSAY, and 27.47% of trans-spectrum youth said they had attempted suicide due to homophobic and cissexist abuse compared to 16.1% of SSAY.	Impact of homophobic and cissexist abuse: Self-harm and suicide
	In response to questions about the impact of homophobia and cissexism on schooling:	The impact of homophobia and cissexism on schooling appears to affect trans-spectrum youth significantly more than it affects SSAY.	Impact of homophobic and cissexist abuse at school:
	The proportion of transgender YP who reported poorer concentration (χ^2=8.774, *df*=1 **), worse marks (χ^2=11.548, *df*=1 **) following homophobic and cissexist abuse was significantly greater than for SSAY	Homophobic and cissexist abuse appears to have a greater impact on trans-spectrums YP's school success than SSAY's with 40.66% of trans-spectrum youth saying that they cannot concentrate in class due to homophobic and cissexist abuse compared to 26.66% of SSAY, and 32.97% of trans-spectrum youth saying that they had dropped marks due to	Poor concentration Lower academic marks Moved schools Left school

Significantly more trans-spectrum youth moved schools (x^2=15.872, *df*=1 ***), dropped out of school completely (x^2=27.427, *df*=1 ***), missed classes (x^2=15.353, *df*=1 ***), missed days at school (x^2=11.352, *df*=1 **), and dropped out of sport/ extracurricular activities (x^2=7.925, *df*=1 **), as result of abusive experiences than cisgender SSAY.	homophobic and cissexist abuse compared to 18.74% of SSAY. 20.88% of trans-spectrum YP moved schools and 21.98% dropped out of school altogether following bullying compared to 8.71% and 7.19% of SSAY respectively. Trans-spectrum YP were also significantly more likely to miss classes and full days at school compared to cisgender SSAY (trans-spectrum 35.16% and 34.07% compared to 18.74% and 19.7% for SSAY respectively).	Missed time at school Dropped out of sport/ extracurricular activities
The proportion of transgender YP who reported hiding at recess and lunch times (x^2=13.287, *df*=1 ***), not being able to use the toilets (x^2=20.404 *df*=1 ***) of changing rooms (x^2=26.628, *df*=1 ***), following homophobic and cissexist abuse was significantly greater than for SSAY.	30.77% of trans-spectrum YP reported that they hide during break and lunch times compared to 16.3% of SSAY. Trans-spectrum YP were also significantly more likely to say that couldn't go to the toilets and couldn't use the changing rooms as they were especially unsafe for them compared to cisgender SSAY (trans-spectrum 21.98% and 34.07% compared to 8.38% and 14.45% for SSAY respectively).	Hid at break and lunch times Couldn't use facilities
Significantly more trans-spectrum YP became involved in activism than SSAY following homophobic and cissexist abuse (x^2=18.995, *df*=1 ***), Transgender YP were also significantly less likely than cisgender SSAY to report that their experiences of homophobic/cissexist bullying had no impact on their schooling (x^2=13.938, *df*=1 ***).	27.4% of trans-spectrum youth responded to abuse by engaging in activism in the school compared to 12.1% of SSAY.	Became involved in activism

	* p ≤ 0.05, ** p ≤ 0.01, *** p ≤0.001	Similarly, a significantly larger proportion of SSAY (40.32%) said that homophobic and cissexist abuse had no effect on them at all compared to trans-spectrum YP (20.88%)	Bullying impacted on mental health
McBride and Schubotz (2017)	58% of cis-hetero identified females and 29% of cis-hetero males, reporting they were never called homophobic names by their classmates compared to just 20% of transgender respondents. This is also less than the proportion of LGB YP who reported to have never have been called homophobic names by their classmates which was 30%

A third of transgender YP said homophobic name calling happened almost daily compared to 5% of cis-hetero identified females and 16% of cis-hetero males who said the same.

40% transgender respondents said they had been called homophobic names by their teachers, compared to 18% of cisgender non-heterosexual YP and 7% of cis-hetero identified females and 14% of cis-hetero males.

Transphobic name-calling and insults rarely occurred in school with 89% of cisgender YP and 50% transgender YP having never being called transphobic names by other pupils. | Survey findings revealed that transgender and gender non-conforming youth are more likely to experience, experience more frequently, and be more sensitive in identifying homophobic and transphobic bullying by peers and teachers compared to cis-hetero and cis-LGB peers.

They found that more than twice the proportions of transgender respondents said they had been called homophobic names by their teachers, compared to cisgender non-heterosexual YP. | Peers making homophobic comments

High frequency of homophobic bullying experienced

Teachers making homophobic comments

Peers making transphobic comments |

	68% of cis-hetero YP reported to never have heard classmates being called transphobic names compared to 50% of non-heterosexual respondents and 10% of transgender YP. Almost all cis-hetero respondents (97%) said they had never been called transphobic names by teachers, whereas only 70% of transgender respondents said this.	They also report that transgender YP were much more likely than cis-hetero YP to say that teachers had used transphobic terms against classmates and that teachers were called transphobic names by pupils. Furthermore, almost all cis-hetero respondents said they had never been called transphobic names by teachers, whereas only 70% of transgender respondents said this.	Hearing peers make transphobic comments Teachers making transphobic comments
McGuire et al. (2010)	T-tests found that there was a significant difference between the means of transgender and non-transgender YP experiencing students making negative comments (t(2258) = -3.08 **) with transgender PP experience hearing this significantly more than there cisgender peers. Additionally, transgender YP are significantly less likely to hear teachers intervening and stopping gender-based slurs and comments than their cisgender peers (t(2258) = 2.80**) and teachers making negative comments (t(59.48) = -3.74 ***) with transgender PP experience hearing this significantly more than there cisgender peers.	Negative comments based on gender presentation were common: 60% of cisgender YP and 82% of transgender students reported hearing negative comments based on gender presentation from students "sometimes or often." Teacher intervention in stopping negative comments was reportedly uncommon with 45% of cisgender students and only 25% of transgender students reporting such teacher intervention. Moreover, transgender students were as likely to hear negative comments being made by school personnel (31% say sometimes or often) as to hear school personnel stopping peers from making negative comments (25% say sometimes or often).	Peers making negative comments Teacher not intervening Teachers making negative comments

Transgender YP were just as likely as cisgender YP to have a secure relationship with at least one adult in school (t(2258) = -0.37).	They also explored the quality of student-teacher relationships. They used four items focusing on 1) acre, 2) listening, 3) noticing and 4) fairness, to create a single scale to assess connection to an adult at school (α = 0.87). Their findings showed that there was no significant difference in the quality of teacher-student relationships for transgender and cisgender YP.	Connection to an adult in school
There was no significant difference between transgender and cisgender YP reporting that they had a school policy which specifically includes sexual orientation (t(2258) = 0.49) or if they wanted to get information or support on sexual or gender identity issues they would know where to go (t(2258) = 0.02).	Only 47% of the whole sample population said that their school had a bullying policy which specifically included sexual orientation and 66% said that they would know where to go if they needed information or support on sexual or gender identity issues.	School does not have inclusive policies YP know where to get information from
There was a significant difference between the number of transgender YP saying they had not being taught about LGBT issues in the curriculum (t(61.38) = 2.36 *) compared to cisgender peers.	50% of the whole sample population said that they had received teaching on LGBT issues, however transgender YP reported to have learned about these significantly less than cisgender students.	LGBT issues taught in the curriculum
There was no significant difference between transgender and cisgender YP reporting that their school had a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) (t(62.56) = -1.62), however there was a significant difference between transgender and	More than 80% of YP reported that their school had a GSA however the number of transgender YP accessing their school's	Schools have a GSA

cisgender YP being part of a Gay-Straight Alliance at school (t(61.58) = 5.44 ***).	GSA was significantly less that the cisgender subsample assessing the GSA.	YP not attending GSA
Transgender YP reported feeling significantly less safe in school than their transgender peers (t(60.22) = 3.89 ***) and transgender YP were significantly more likely to report that there school was unsafe for gender nonconforming students (t(2258) = 2.08 **) than cisgender YP. * p ≤ 0.05, ** p ≤ 0.01, *** p ≤0.001	There was a significant difference between how safe YP felt at school with transgender YP reporting they felt significantly less safe than their cisgender peers. There was also a significant difference in the two samples perceptions of how safe their school climate was for gender non-conforming students with cisgender students perceiving the school climate to be significantly safer for these students than transgender YP did.	Not feeling safe at schools Schools not safe for other gender non-conforming YP

Appendix C: Table Showing the Development of Overarching and Subthemes

Contextual factors	Cisnormative Practices	School does not have gender inclusive policies
		LGBT issues not taught in the curriculum
	Support systems	YP know where to get information from
		School has a GSA
		YP not attending GSA
Relational factors	Experienced victimisation	Experienced bullying
		Peers making homophobic/transphobic comments
		High frequency of homophobic bullying experienced
		Teachers making homophobic/transphobic comments
		Peers making negative comments
		Teachers making negative comments
	Teacher relationships	Teachers not intervening
		Connection to an adult in school
Impact	Personal perceptions	Feelings of safety
		Belonging: hiding at lunch/ facility use
		School climate
	Attendance	Missing school
		Leaving school altogether
		Moving school
		Dropping out of sports/extracurricular activities
	Emotional and mental health	Self-harm/suicide
	School engagement	Academics
		Poor concentration
		Activism

Appendix D: Research Poster

Appendix E: Information Sheets and Consent forms

Information Sheet and Consent Form for the Young Person

Dear (insert name),

My name is Natalia. I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist studying at Newcastle University. As part of my studying I am carrying out a piece of research which focuses exploring the educational experiences of young people who identify as a gender diverse i.e. young people who identify with a gender outside of the binary concepts of male and female. I'm writing to you to invite you to take part in my research project. Before you decide, it's important that you read my letter and talk to your parents/carers about it.

The title of my research project is:

What are the lived experiences of gender diverse young people in education?

This study will explore the school experiences of gender diverse secondary aged pupils. I want this research to highlight the positive and negative school experiences of gender diverse young people in the hope that this will help to promote positive interventions support them in the future. I am doing this project to try and help schools be a happier and safer place for gender diverse young people.

If you are happy to take part in this research then I would like to have a conversation with you about your experiences at school. Due to the restrictions following the COVID-19 pandemic interviews will take place via a video-conferencing platform. I will not write your name on anything so no-one will find out what you have said unless it is something important that we need to tell an adult to make sure you are safe.

Nobody who reads my research project will be able to tell who you are. Nor will they be able to tell who your teachers, school or youth group are or anyone else we talk about. I will give everyone fake names. I will keep all the information about you

safely locked away. If you decide to take part in my project, you can change your mind and pull out any time before it's finished. Just ask your parents/carers or youth group leader to email me to let me know.

We can stop talking about things whenever you want to, or you can say you do not want to answer anything I ask you. I want to remember all the important things you say so I will be recording our interview using the video-conferencing platform, but when I write up my research no-one will know it is you.

I am aware that discussing your experiences of education may bring up upsetting topics. A member of staff from your youth group will available to speak to on the phone if you want to talk to them before, during or after our conversation.

Thank you for reading my letter. If you are happy to participant in this research, please complete the consent form below.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions. My email address is n.hall@newcastle.ac.uk.
Alternatively, you can email my supervision Dave Lumsdon, Tutor at Newcastle University, dave.lumsdon@newcastle.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Natalia Hall

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Newcastle University

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences
Newcastle University,
King George VI Building,
Queen Victoria. Road,
Newcastle,
NE1 7RU

Consent Form

Title of study:

What are the lived experiences of gender diverse young people in education?

Researcher: Natalia Hall

Email: n.hall@newcastle.ac.uk

☐ I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for this study.

☐ I have been given an explanation of the research and what's involved.

☐ I have had the opportunity to ask questions and these have been responded to.

☐ I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time, up until the point of data analysis

☐ I am aware that all data collected will be kept confidential and then destroyed once the research project is complete.

☐ I am happy to take part in this research rand give my informed consent

Print your name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Information Sheet and Consent Form for Parents

Dear Parent/Carer,

My name is Natalia. I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist studying on the Doctorate for Applied Educational Psychology programme at Newcastle University. I am also currently working on placement in Kirklees Local Authority. As part of my doctoral programme I am carrying out a piece of empirical research. For my research project I am interested in exploring the educational experiences of young people who identify as a gender diverse i.e. young people who identify with a gender outside of the binary concepts of male and female.

The title of my research project is:

What are the lived experiences of gender diverse young people in education?
Below I provide you with some background information and details of my research proposal. I hope you and your child can see the benefits the research may provide for gender diverse young people in school and will be able to support me.

Introduction

This study will explore the school experiences of gender diverse secondary aged pupils. Current research suggests there are many risks for gender diverse young people within education, and the outcomes these have had on their physical, social and emotional well-being (Hatchel, Espelage, & Huang, 2018; Johns et al., 2019; McGuire et al., 2010). Therefore, I want this research to add to this field by highlighting the positive school experiences of gender diverse young people in the hope that this will help to promote positive interventions that will influence the educational experiences of gender diverse young people. This will be important so that in the future, schools and teaching staff feel capable to address gender identity and that gender diverse young people themselves feel safer, more secure and happier throughout their education.

If you and your child consent to taking part in this research then I will carry out an interview with your child about their school experiences using some pre-set

questions. Due to the restrictions following the COVID-19 pandemic interviews will take place via a video-conferencing platform. To ensure I do not miss any important information the interview will be recorded. All of the information collected during the interview will be kept safe and secure on a password-protected hard drive on the Newcastle University system and will permanently deleted following the write up of the research. Only my supervisors and I will have access to the raw data collected. Your child, their school nor the youth group they attend will be identifiable within the research. Should you or your child decide not to participant in the research, then you have the right to withdraw at any point up to data analysis.

I am aware that discussing experiences of education may bring up sensitive topics for some young people. Therefore, your child will be made aware that they do not have to answer any question if they do not feel comfortable and that they can withdraw from the interview at any time. I will also provide a debriefing sheet detailing avenues for support if required. A member of staff from their youth group will also be contactable via the phone, during and after the interview, to provide support should they require it.

If you are happy for your child to participant in this research, please complete the consent form below.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions. My email address is n.hall@newcastle.ac.uk.

Alternatively, you can email my supervision Dave Lumsdon, Tutor at Newcastle University, dave.lumsdon@newcastle.ac.uk.

I hope you feel you will be able to support me in doing this research.

Yours sincerely,

Natalia Hall

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Newcastle University

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences
Newcastle University,
King George VI Building,
Queen Victoria. Road,
Newcastle,
NE1 7RU

Consent Form

Title of study:

What are the lived experiences of gender diverse young people in education?

Researcher: Natalia Hall

Email: n.hall@newcastle.ac.uk

☐ I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for this study.

☐ I have been given an explanation of the research and what's involved.

☐ I have had the opportunity to ask questions and been given satisfactory responses.

☐ I understand that my child's participation in this research is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time, up until the point of data analysis

☐ I am aware that all data collected from interviews will be kept confidential and then destroyed once the research project is complete.

☐ I give consent for my child to take part in this research regarding their experiences of education

My child's name: _____

Print your name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F: Interview Schedule

1. Can you tell me about when you began to question your gender?
2. How did the transition process occur for you at school?
3. Do you believe that being a gender minority has effected your life at school?
4. When you think about school or imagine in your head walking through the school gates, what thoughts and emotions come to you mind?
5. Have you ever experienced any negative or unhelpful responses in school about your gender expression?
6. Are there any parts of school/ or people within the school that help you to feel included and like you belong?
7. Looking back on your school life, can you describe what kind of support you believe you would have found helpful or would find helpful now?
8. Would you like to share a positive experience you have had at school?
9. Can you describe what your ideal school would be like?

Appendix G: Debrief sheets
Young Person Debriefing Sheet

Dear (insert name),

Thank you for taking part in this research. The time you have taken to share your own views and experiences is valued and sincerely appreciated.

The main purpose of this studies was to explore the experiences of minority gender young people in education, with the aim of identify issues and positive actions that that influence their school experiences.

Hopefully, the information you have shared will open up our understanding of systems schools and school staff can put into place to make school a happier and safer place for minority gender young people.

My final report will collate the feedback from all participant interviews, with all comments fully anonymised. This means no one will be able to identify what you have said. Your name will not be included in any reports or presentations from this research.

If you decide that you no longer want the information from your interview to be included in the research, please let me know before the (date tbc) using the contact details below. As a reminder, all of the information collected during your interview will be kept safe. Only my research supervisor and I will have access.

If you have any further questions or would like an update regarding the research then please do not hesitate to get in contact. My email address is n.hall@newcastle.ac.uk. Alternatively, you can email my research supervisor, Dave Lumsdon, Tutor at Newcastle University, at dave.lumsdon@newcastle.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,

Natalia Hall

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Newcastle University

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences
Newcastle University,
King George VI Building,
Queen Victoria. Road, Newcastle, NE1 7RU

Parent Debriefing Sheet

Dear Parents/ Carers,

Thank you for taking part in this research.

The main purpose of this studies was to explore the experiences of minority gender young people in education, with the aim of identify issues and positive actions that that influence their school experiences. Hopefully, the information your child has shared will open up our understanding of systems schools and school staff can put into place to make schools a happier and safer place for minority gender young people.

Your child's contribution to this study is therefore very valuable and very much appreciated.

My final report will collate the feedback from all participants interviewed, with all comments fully anonymised. This means no one will be able to identify what your child has said and their name, school and youth group will not be named in any reports or presentations from this research. As a reminder, all of the information collected during your interview will be kept safe. Only my research supervisor and I will have access.

Should you or your child decide you do not want to take part in this research it is possible to withdraw your child's data from the study up to (date TBC). If you do withdraw all data received from your child will be deleted.

If you would like more information, or have any further questions about any aspect of this study, or would like to read the final research paper, then please feel free to contact me or my Supervisor, Dave Lumsdon at:

n.hall@newcastle.ac.uk or dave.lumsdon@newcastle.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,

Natalia Hall

Trainee Educational Psychologist, Newcastle University

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences
Newcastle University, King George VI Building, Queen Victoria. Road, Newcastle
NE1 7RU

Appendix H: Extracts showing steps 2 and 3 of data analysis

Emergent themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory comments
Power of sharing similar experiences Confused about gender identity Parent rejection Complexity of understanding gender identity Label are not always necessary	D2: Err I spoke to my friend about it because he identifies as a boy but he was born a girl and I remember telling him when I was just like I think I might be trans as well and he just said ok and nothing much else and we just really left it at that and we didn't really do much about it and my mum asked me if I wanted to be a boy and I remember saying I'm … I'm not sure I wasn't sure if I did or if I didn't and I had got along quite well with a lot of boys when I was younger and I always spent time with them but I never really I saw myself more like them then I did with the girls back then because all the girls wanted to play fairies and I wanted to play cricket and I remember my mum just asking me and I said I didn't know and at one point I think I did tell her and she said that it was I was too young to know that then so I think I got a bit upset but then I realized that I wasn't a boy and it was a little bit you know too soon and I understand it why she would have said that because it's a bit hard to just say you know I am this and you know the future realise that you're not that you know it feels weird to put yourself into a box when it isn't needed.	Came out to a friend with a similar experience *I'm not sure I wasn't sure* Reflects uncertainty about their gender identity CYP recognise their gender incongruence from a young age - these feeling should not be dismissed They reflect on how it is hard to know how you will feel when you are older and that putting a label on gender identity at a young age isn't needed I wonder if D2 at this age did not have the understanding/language to label their gender identity and that they did not wholly feel that transgender label fit them

Emergent themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory comments
Slow social transition at school Changing pronouns Peers reacted negatively	Researcher: Erm so, how did the transition process occur at your school? I imagine I'm not sure if you're still going through the transition process at school. How did that happen? D2: We still kind of are erm remember my mum came into school and asked them to try and not identify me as male or female or like to you know put me into groups of being a boy or a girl or like make anything about gender because it just made things into a whole other issue because of a lot of the kids at school didn't react very well to it and they'd start … they just name every boys name that they could think of and ask me if that was my name and I'd ignore them and then they just keep calling me different names and it was just like a bit strange to be honest. Then so we went into school and asked the teachers to not you know, call me a boy or a girl and they … they do try especially my head of year they, she tries very well erm a lot of my teachers try but I think it's because they have so many other students they often forget and I still get called a girl and things and you know there's still kids at school that will be like are you a boy or a girl and I don't need answer that to you and it will be people that I haven't even met and I've asked … I've asked my mum a few times if I could	Still going through the process of socially transitioning at school. School were slow to react to their transition. Their peers at school did not react well to their transitioning
Importance of language Misgendered Wanting removal from old self		The words *try* and *forget* make me wonder if D2 feels their teachers are making and effort to address them appropriately but is frustrated that this does not always happen. It seemed that D2 accepted this reluctantly and made excuse as to why this happens but I feel this is not good enough from the school

Emergent themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory comments
Importance of a new name Concerns about the reaction of others Changing gender identity	change my name and she said that at the moment she wouldn't because of how people have reacted purely to me saying that I don't want to be male or female and you know if … if I changed it now everyone like in my year would you know be like really awful about it so at the moment we've only really said that to them just not calling me male or female	Wanting to removal from old self but this is met with resistance Not supporting them to identify how they choose based on beliefs on how other people may react. Why is this? Is she trying to protect D2 from what other may say? Will this have a negative impact long term later in D2's life? What is the relationship like between mum and D2? Is mum supportive? *We've* sound like they made the decision together to keep name at birth. I question D2's agency and autonomy in making this decision
	Researcher: OK, were there any erm things or systems that school put in place to sort of help you or support you with your transition or a system to talk about it?	
Lack of school support Previous support group in school	D2: err no not really we had a diversity group which I would now be the leader of it was still going on but I'm not erm because it isn't going on but we had we had that and it was run by Year 11s last year and they were really nice and you sat there and you went round and everyone said the name that they wanted to be	School had a support group to support gender diverse YP but not running due to covid

Emergent themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory comments
Support group was a safe space	called there and their pronouns and their age and <mark>it was just a nice accepting space for everyone</mark> to have and we'd just talk about our issues or we just had fun and it was a very nice space but because of Corona we haven't been able to do that recently and other than that <mark>there hasn't been that much really school have done</mark> because you know <mark>they had a weird lesson about gender</mark> which was a bit weird I didn't under… it was just kinda out of nowhere and everyone made fun of it and thought it was stupid and everyone knew it was because of me even though I hadn't asked for it … it was just there and <mark>everyone just thought that oh you know it's because of you</mark> because you're that weird kid in our year and things.	Was a nice supportive, accepting group – a safe space to talk about issues or have fun. <u>Dignity and respect seemed important here</u> school did not support them Peculiar lesson on gender that came out of nowhere and peers made fun of it and linked it D2
Lack support at school Poor gender identity teaching		
Gender identity not embedded into curriculum		
	Researcher: OK Do you think that your erm your experience of school has been different because erm of your gender expression in comparison to your peers who are cisgender?	
Others questioning their gender and name	D2: Yeah, I think a bit because I a lot of the time <mark>I do still get people asking me if I'm a boy or a girl or like ask me what name I go by</mark> and asking random things and it sometimes I even get it	Unhelpful when other's question their gender Struggles going to the toilets at school

Emergent themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory comments
Struggles to use toilets at school Feels uncomfortable in school toilets Negative reaction to gender non-conforming behaviour Came out to friends	from people I don't even know they'll ask me if I'm a boy or a girl and I don't want to answer that I also struggle a lot to go into the school's toilet because I don't want to go into the boys toilets 'cause it smells and I don't really like the people in the boys toilets because a lot of the boys are just horrible and if they saw me they'd start shouting at me and you know we haven't … I haven't been told that I can use them either and I don't really like going in the girls because if you know if it's someone that doesn't know who I am always they start being like oh why is there a boy in the toilets and you know and it makes me feel really uncomfortable going in them as well because a lot of the time there's like a group of girls are just sitting in there and speaking to each other and then I'm just there. Researcher: Would you be able to tell me about a particular maybe negative or unhelpful response you have maybe had during school career, whether that be from teachers or peers? D2: I think when I'm first cut my hair I hadn't really told anyone how I felt and like I'd told two of my friends and everyone was like	Doesn't like boys toilets as it smells and the boys would be unkind to them *I haven't been told that I can use them either –* <u>waiting for adults to recognise gender identity and tell them they are allowed to use certain toilets – almost like they don't know where they belong. This is a systemic issue raising concerns over acceptance and understanding of gender diversity – cisnormative layout of the school – no gender neutral toilets.</u> Gender non-conforming behaviour was met with distain.

Emergent themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory comments
Sexual and gender identity was questioned by peers Labelled as non-human by peers Cisnormative teaching practices Teacher dismissive of their name	are you a lesbian and I said no and they said are you a boy now and then everyone would be like it's a boy now and a lot of people would call me it as well and then teachers would tell me to move and tell me to sit in boy-girl and either way then if they told me especially then tell me to go and sit in between two boys and they'd say that it had to be boy-girl and I'd … it's just I think that's a bit … it's just makes no sense to me that all boy girl system anyway and a lot of the time you know people when I've had my name read out on register and the teacher is like an I say here like then the teacher just looks at me and goes don't play games with me like especially when it's a substitute teacher like I remember one time I was … they called out my name and I said here and they looked at me and said don't … don't mess with me today and I was like I'm not … I'm not joking that is my name and it was just a bit like wow cause you know I wouldn't actually lie especially in attendance cause I know how important it is in case a fire goes off and for safeguarding issues. Researcher: So how does it make you feel when this happens?	Lack of peer undersating about gender identity and sexuality differences *It's a boy not … a lot of people would call me it* - was objectified as an inaminate object and labelled as non-human by peers – othered Teachers used cisnormative teaching practices made them feel uncomfortable cisnormative teaching practices do not respecting their identifying gender but rather labels and categorises them as their birth sex even though this isn't how they identify. Has not been believed before when a teacher has read their name out on the register, this was very upsetting for them

Emergent themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory comments
Judged on appearance/ stereotypes Importance of language	D2: it made me feel like really awkward cause I really don't really like it and especially when it is substitute teacher and when they and when they just looked at me and then in my head decided that I looked too much like a boy and then told me that that couldn't be my name … you know having to prove to them that is my name and that I'm not kidding like I … I thought I was going to be in trouble for it as well err and it quite it upset me that was last year though	Feels awkward when is misgendered and their name is not believed to be theirs because they look to much like a particular gender stereotype. Lack of teacher understand about difference between gender identity and gender expressions Having to prove what their name is emotionally distressing

Appendix I: Process of developing superordinate and subordinate themes

Experiencing Rejection

Bullying

Othered

Impact

Importance of relationships

Family acceptance/response

Friend acceptance

Wider community support

Teacher Support

School systems

General support
School apathy

Heteronormative practices / Cisnormative systems

Gendered facilities

Education/training

Safe spaces
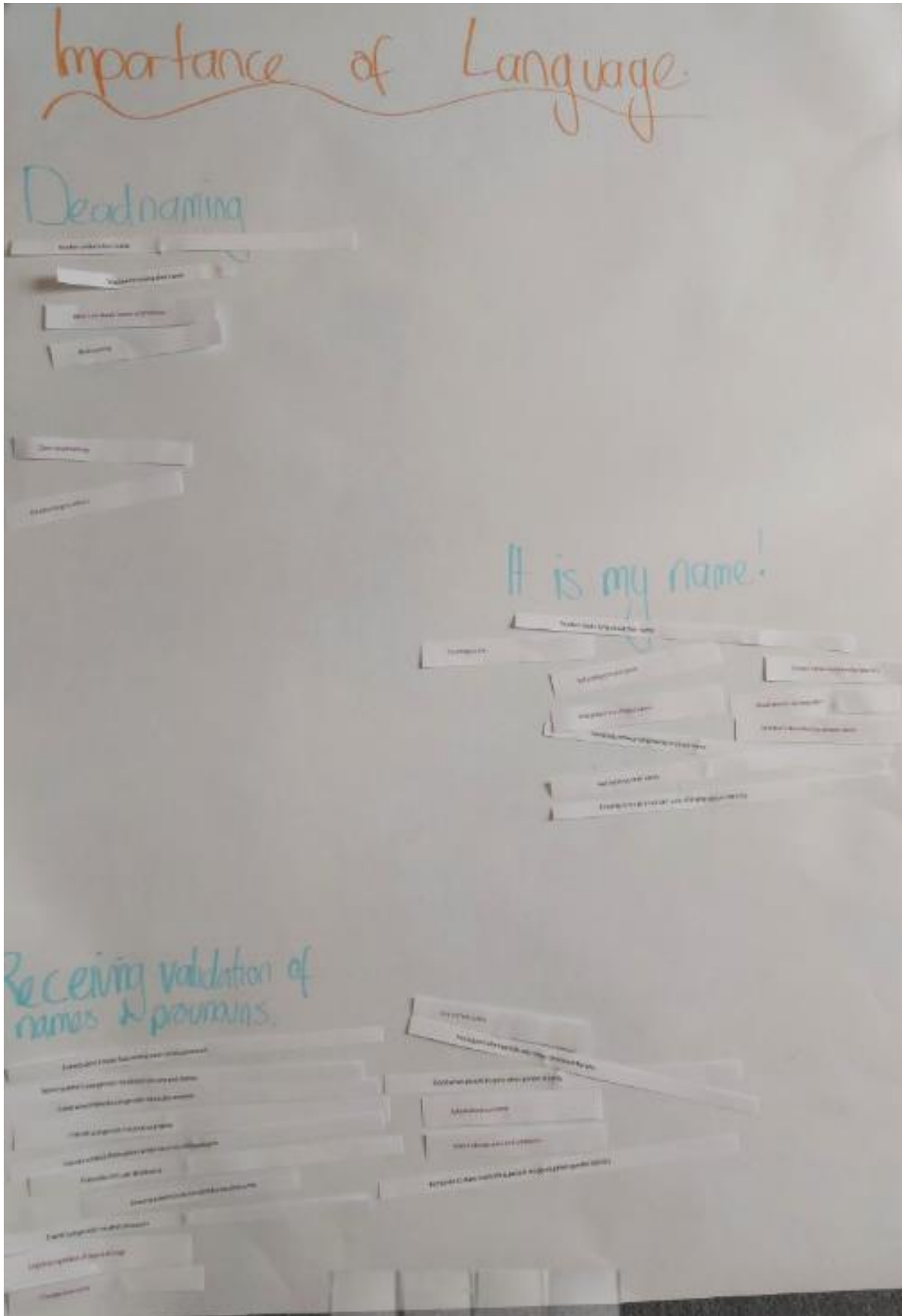
Moving Forward

Looking to the future

Facilitating Change

Being an advocate