



Living Between Labels: The Socio-Psychological Reality of Non-Binary Lives

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Abstract

This study examines the personal experiences of genderqueer people and deals with the psychological, and social, difficulties that they experience. The understanding of the novel experiences of non-binary people is becoming more and more critical as mainstream society is now more aware and more open to the notion of people of a wide variety of genders. The objectives of the study are to explore the psychological impact of non-binary identity on mental health and to investigate the role of societal acceptance in shaping the experiences of non-binary individuals. The research is qualitative in nature, with a snowball sampling methodology that was based on in-depth interviews of eight non-binary subjects, being the means of data collection. The researcher analysed the data with thematic analysis. The findings are that transgender people undergo major psychological suffering owing to the stigmatization by society, misgendering, and the absence of institutional recognition as the main contributing factors. A lot of participants feel anxious and depressed because the society and their peers are pressuring them to adopt the so-called correct gender configuration. The study finds that the main demand for large-scale change to give support to trans respondents is realized on the basis of the findings of this study. The educational programs which are striving to make health and educational sections know about non-binary identities are fundamental to the good work in reduction the stigma and discrimination. The legal recognition of non-binary gender equality is significant insofar as it creates the possibilities for inclusion, solidarity, and the loss of invisibility.

Keywords

Non-binary identity, Psychological distress, Societal acceptance, Gender diversity, Mental health.

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Introduction

Gender is the idea of categorizing people into two distinct sexes male and female by science which has existed since ancient times. These classifications are always based on biology, and as cultural, social, and lawful systems play their parts the categorization strengthens binary norm. However, in the last few years, these strict groupings have been faced by those whose gender identities don't match with the existing mens-womens binary. This group includes people who do not identify themselves as male, or female a common example is the non-binary category. Non-binary is a gender identity that is not included in the traditional male and female divide; it is another category of gender identity. Non-binary experiences are all over the gender spectrum. For example, many people identify as being both male and female, either, or changing between the two genders are non-binary identities.

Non-binary people's identities don't fit the cultural norms of binary gender, where individuals are required to choose either male or female gender that are defined according to their birth sex. However, non-binary people mostly create their gender outside or aside these labels. The term "non-binary" itself is an umbrella term that covers different gender identities such as genderqueer, gender fluid, agender, bigender, and so on (Richards et al., 2016). The plethora of gender identities depicts the transient and personal side of gender, which indicates that gender is neither a fixed nor a binary property but a multi-hued spectrum. However, the fact that society is only able to understand the gender varieties of certain few beings increases the difficulties of the ones who are inhabited in that area. It is happening in a way about those kids who are different from other kids they are facing experiences of would not be recognized, misunderstood, and overlook by the system.

Furthermore, apart from the institutional barriers, non-binary individuals many times also deal with interpersonal discrimination and stigmatization. Quite a few people are unfamiliar with the notion of non-binary identities or are not willing to even recognize their existence. This lack of understanding leads to micro aggressions, mis-gendering, and pure hatred. Non-binary people suffer in the regular exchange of words, like when they are wrongly addressed with pronouns or are forced to stick to the gender norms that do not fit with them (Scheim et al., 2020). The psychological consequences of living as a non-binary person in a binary-centered world are immeasurable.

This exaggerated risk of various mental problems is mostly related to the stress of city life, the oppression of society to diversity, and the absence of a proper supportive system. Minority stress theory, which is a prominent concept that has been applied in many studies explaining the prevalence of psychological problems among the sexual minority community, indicates that the long-term stress that results from discrimination and the deprivation of social inclusion contributes to mental health issues (Meyer, 2003). Social help in particular from family, close friends, and significant other is the main factor that reduces the mental strains that come with non-binary living. Research findings demonstrate that non-binary people who are approved and supported by their social networks have less chance of mental illness than those who are rejected or met with hostility (Jones et al., 2021).

Objectives

1. To explore the psychological impact of non-binary identity on mental health
2. To investigate the role of societal acceptance in shaping the experiences of non-binary individuals

Review of Literature

Non-binary people's mental experiences are usually determined by preconceived ideas and the society pressure to conform to the strictest binary standards. Meyer's (2003) Minority Stress Model is a crucial theoretical tool to explain the psychological stress that non-binary individuals endure. According to the model, individuals from stigmatized groups encounter

prolonged stress as a result of discriminatory practices, prejudice as well as non-recognition of them, which comes together to have a generalized adverse impact on mental health. Non-binary persons who are out of the gender binary paradigm are especially prone to such form of stress and they are usually not acknowledged and sometimes they are refused support by social activities, their families, and institutions

Budge et al. (2013) study reviewed that non-binary people have more depression and anxiety symptoms compared to the people, who are within the gender binary. This was followed by the discussion of another study of Thorne et al. (2021) which showed that non-binary people often undergo fear with heaviness due to pressure to fulfill the binary gender norms and invisibility of non-binary identities in the society. One of the main issues that the society does not know or understand the experiences of non-binary people which leads to the main stress factor. Resulting in huge numbers of non-binary individuals facing feelings of being disconnected and misunderstood are different.

A very important aspect of the mental health problems in non-binary people to the problem of the internal conflict which comes from the fear of being rejected by society and the pressure of being 'normal' according to the binary norms. Riggle et al. (2011) explain that non-binary individuals always get engaged with the mental dilemma, their inward identity is characterized by the absence of alignment with the social norms that are imposed from the outside. Thus, this dissonance brings the individuals into higher levels of anxiety and depression when they try to fit in with the socially constructed gender norms. Contrariwise, the subjects taking part in this study reported personal struggle and uncertainty compounded by societal demands to fit into the binary dichotomy.

According to research, non-binary individuals endure psychological suffering more than their binary gender peers. McLemore (2015) suggests that misgendering and social invalidation play a big role in the feelings of invisibility and self-doubt. The constant rejection of their identity, such as being called different names and not being given access to denominationally specific facilities, leads to difficult emotions and false mental health.

Social support is a key element that helps non-binary individuals to deal with the psychological impact of minority stress. Numerous studies have confirmed the fact that non-binary individuals who get the support of their friends and family are more likely to live without any mental disorders than those who do not. Budge, Adelson, and Howard (2013) identified social support as one of the few defensive factors that help transgender and non-binary people not to be affected by depression and anxiety, among other difficulties, in their daily lives. Positive group interactions through companionship and positive evaluation of self will enable non-binary people to withstand the ridicule and rejection they often receive.

The support of the family or environment due to the absence of familial or peer relationship can severely affect the mental health of individuals who are not associated with the non-binary community. Katz-Wise et al. (2018) explored the effect of support from family on the mental wellbeing of non-binary individuals with their research yielding that those who were rejected by their families were much more prone to depression and anxiety. The report also underscored the importance of peers in supporting individuals against these negative outcomes, with people who had the companionship of a friend or a community giving a positive mental health status. In this research, the respondents articulated that the non-acceptance of their family added to the mental distress they got from the society's invalidation, which in turn compounded the suffering of alienation and loneliness.

Misgendering is one of the most common phrases people use to dismiss non-binary individuals and thus negatively impact their mental health. Among the non-binary folks, it's a significant social resistance in everyday life. As a result of the research performed by McLemore (2015), it has been discovered that inflammatory comments play a significant role in the development of psychological distress. It is noted that the individual feels both unvalidated in their gender

identity and marginalized constantly because they are part of a binary-dominated society. According to the participants, they feel misgendering as a major factor in their negative emotions, especially situations in spaces and institution settings; it makes us feel invisible and like a piece of rock.

In addition to interpersonal support, the recognition of non-binary identities by law and institutions is of supreme importance for the improvement of the welfare of non-binary individuals. Referring to Flores et al. (2021), non-binary people who could not change their legal gender markers were more inclined to confront discrimination, from healthcare to employment. The lack of legal acknowledgment also leads to the invisibility and marginalization of individuals as non-binary people are pressured in the systems that do not acknowledge or adapt to their identities. The participants in this study also expressed dissatisfaction with the absence of juridical validation, and attached that as an additional psychological burden to their already tough existence in a society that does not respect them fully.

Methodology

The present study is a qualitative research. To make an in-depth and comprehensive exploration of the non-binary people's experiences, snowball sampling was chosen as the main recruitment method. This sample is composed of 8 case studies, every participant admitting to being a non-binary person and distinguishing in the age, and socio-economic status. The interviews had a semi-structured format to allow some leeway for the participants to give their personal experiences.

Thematic Analysis

Theme	Sub-themes	Participant Insights	Results
Psychological Impact of Non-Binary Identity	Mental Health Challenges	Participants reported facing a triple threat of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress, which is largely initiated by invalidation and discrimination on the societal level.	Non-binary people are more likely to get sicker mentally and become more unhappy, directly related to getting isolated and not getting enough attention from society
	Minority Stress	Some participants were stuck in the process of making choices under the condition of society's assimilation.	Non-binary individuals undergo mental stress when their personal value is not recognized, and they are constantly bombarded with social standards.
	Emotional Resilience	Virtually through self-justification, participants recouped their resilience and this was partly through the backing they got in the community.	Emotional resilience can be the result of a combination of social networks and gender-affirming environments, which are supportive.
Societal Acceptance and Social Support	Family and Peer Support	Participants shared diverse experiences, with friendships and family members being the helping hand they needed in some cases, while others had to deal with rejection.	One of the main problems that non-binary individuals who are not accepted by their community is their worsened mental health compared to those who are accepted by the society.

Theme	Sub-themes	Participant Insights	Results
	Misgendering and Social Invalidation	According to many participants, there were the experiences of being misgendered and feeling like they did not exist in the places where they found them to be	Misgendering and invalidation are common experiences that negatively affect the self-esteem and mental health of non-binary individuals.
	Legal and Institutional Recognition	Legislatures were the main issue to resolve; however, participants reported that there was a lack of recognition in official documents contributing to their invisibility	Lack of institutional and legal recognition only makes their marginalization worse and thus seriously deranges their mental well-being

1. Psychological Impact of Non-Binary Identity

- **Sub-themes:**

- **Mental Health Challenges:** The results states that the participants faced serious psychological issues like anxiety, depression, and emotional distress, mainly due to societally enforced disrespect and discrimination. The results suggest that non-binary individuals feel a very poor mental health background compared to other people due to constant exposure to rejection and exclusion.
- **Minority Stress:** The respondents frequently felt compelled to conform with norms of gender which caused stress, self-doubt and conflict within themselves. Results states that the pressure from outside societies, leads to higher minority stress, a well-known cause of mental health inequalities.
- **Emotional Resilience:** A certain number of the subjects, who demonstrated emotional resilience, managed to reaffirm their self-identity and resist societal pressures in some other ways. Resilience is the expected product of those who, with support from communities and environments, can access education, health, and social services pertinent to their non-binary identities, are psychologically protected and grow.

2. Societal Acceptance and Social Support

- **Sub-themes:**

- **Family and Peer Support:** There were diverse experiences with family and peer support. Some participants had great friends, while others were left alone. The outcome is that people who are surrounded by their loved ones feel well, but those who are abandoned may be facing more mental health issues.
- **Misgendering and Social Invalidation:** Participants of this study brought up many issues like misgendering and societal invisibility as they demanded that their voices are being heard and their self-worth is being acknowledged. These findings clearly endorse the idea that frequent misgendering and invalidation impose not only psychological stress but also indicate the violation of person's identity.
- **Legal and Institutional Recognition:** Research participants expressed the opinion that lack of recognition, in legal and institutional settings, such as official documentation or healthcare systems, intensifies their feelings of non-existence. One of the consequences of not being recognized is that non-binary individuals undergo an increase in the situations of being set apart, thus faring poorly in mental health.

Discussion

One of the key findings the study has revealed is that many participants in the survey have reported no major depression, most of which has been a consequence of invalidation by society and non-binary identities lacking recognition. Anxious feelings, the state of depression, and other mental health issues are part of previous research that has shown a discrepancy within the non-binary population over mental health. Surveys have as well corroborated the fact that non-binary members are more prone to contributing to mental health problems due to the outside pressures like those of discrimination based on gender and condescending comments (Burge, Orovecz & Thai, 2021). These incidents often were parallel with the minority stress model that suggests that people with minority identities carry more stress because of their minority identity (Meyer, 2003). Social invisibility and invalidation were both feelings specifically described by the respondents, which in turn caused severe stress, especially when they were corrected about their gender and also when the society failed to recognize them.

The fact that minority stress causes psychological problems has been established not only from the study of non-binary experiences but from the literature itself. A study conducted by Thorne et al. (2021) found that non-binary individuals had higher levels of depression and anxiety than the ones who self-identified as cisgender, among them, the greatest part of the distress because of being rejected by society and the existence of systemic discrimination. In the research being carried out, respondents indicated dissatisfaction towards the still existing requirement of binary gender norms, thus leading to a loss of realization and mental tension. On the strength of these findings, it is shown that the insignificance of and lack of acceptance of non-binary identities in the interactions that take place every day is the main reason why mental health outcomes are bad.

Socially acceptance's role or denial remained a key obstacle to the psychological well-being of the subjects. Participants who were backed by their family, friends, and peer networks generally reported positive mental health while those who were rejected experienced a greater sense of emotional distress. These results corroborate previous work which has singled out social support as being the most potent way of alleviating minority stress. Budge, Adelson, and Howard (2013) showed that the transgender and non-binary individuals who were able to achieve supportive relationships were less prone to be suffering from negative mental health because supportive grounds function as safety nets against social rejection.

Studies demonstrated that those taking part in this research conveyed their emotions, being called names that don't match with their gender identity, and remarked that continuous misgendering in public as well as private spaces led them to feel invalidated and psychologically damaged (McLemore, 2015). The revelations from the instances demonstrated that non-binary individuals who are constantly being misgendered may suck these bad experiences, causing them to fall in their self-esteem and have more psychological problems.

In addition, the study discovered that the notion of institutional and legal recognition was a major factor in the formation of the sense of social acceptance of the participants. The lack of legal recognition of non-binary identities, for example, in gender markers on identification documents, or healthcare settings, deepened the feeling of invisibility. This corresponds to research from Flores et al. (2021), which indicated that those who could not change their gender indicators in the legal documents are at the forefront of discrimination and poorer mental health consequences. Besides, those enablers who could explore their identities were less distressed by the societal structure. The strong social and legal framework was necessary for these individuals to avoid being marginalized or excluded.

Conclusion

This study reveals the particular experiences that were lived through by non-binary individuals and that are a very crucial moment being the actor, as one is not free but bound to the barriers of identity of the human being. The findings underscore the main psychological challenges that non-binary people face such as societal rejection and misgendering. These challenges result in high levels of anxiety and depression and can even cause emotional distress, thereby pressing the need for more awareness and acceptance of non-binary identities from the community. The research has proven the fact that the participants who were involved in community activities and those who got social support were able to cope better with their mental health issues, so it can be said that the existence of such supportive contexts is of prime importance. The importance of this study is that it is seen to have an impact on practitioners, so it could help develop and evaluate the programs to contribute to the mental health of transgender individuals, practitioners, policymakers, and educators.

In short, this research strongly emphasizes the imperative of perpetual interaction and action in favour of non-binary people. A society that deals with the entire barriers they face and, on the contrary, encourages acceptance and acknowledgment can inspire a climate in which non-binary unities not only live, but also prosper, and in the end, this would lead to the improvement of mental health conditions and a more pluralist society. The future of research ought to persist in the inquiry of the various realities of the non-binary persons with the aim to ascertain the efficiency of the different mechanisms introduced for their distinctive requirements and the overall development of their mental state.

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