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Exploring the Path of Gender Identity Development and Its Potential Influences

by

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Abstract

The current context for the LGBTQ+ community in the UK is one of turbulence and division, described by McLean (2021) as 'toxic'. The rights of the transgender population have been questioned and challenged and many transgender children and young people report feeling marginalised and oppressed (Kosciw and Pizmony-Levy, 2016). Underlying this debate are opposing fundamental beliefs around 'gender' as a construct. These contrasting theoretical positions have direct implications for law, policy, and health/social care. Chapter one outlines the context, rationale, and scope of this research.

Chapter two focuses on the way in which gender identity is measured in psychological research, as well as how an individual's gender identity develops over time. This is investigated in the form of a systematic review entitled 'What do measures of gender identity tell us about gender identity over time?'. Included in the review are 21 longitudinal studies in which measures of gender identity were used to record participants' gender identity over at least two time points. Narrative synthesis was used to compare the trajectories of gender identity development collected by different categories of measures of gender identity (e.g., self-identification, gender stereotyped preferences, intergroup bias) and compare these findings. The results of this systematic review are consistent with wider research suggesting that distinct developmental patterns can be observed when using different constructs and measures of gender identity. This implies that gender identity cannot be measured using a single dichotomous measure.

Chapter three investigates the concept of intergroup contact interventions as a means of reducing prejudice towards the gender diverse community. This is investigated in the form of an empirical research study, exploring the experiences of parents and their children when exposed to gender diversity in the form of a 'Drag Queen Story Hour' (DQSH) event. Drag Queen Story Hour UK is an organisation who deliver story time events for children in community spaces (e.g., libraries). 11 parents volunteered to engage in semi structured interviews after attending a DQSH event. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to attempt to understand the lived experiences of participants. Parents reported that the events created an engaging learning space for their children, in which they were able to access a positive LGBTQ+ role model, broadening their experience and understanding of gender. They also expressed concern about the current context for the LGBTQ+ community and conceptualised DQSH as 'important work'. These results provide initial support for the use of intergroup contact interventions to develop children's understanding of gender diversity.

Keywords: LGBTQI+, gender identity, transgender, cisnormativity, gender diversity, intergroup contact, gender, development

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I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

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6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

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Exploring the path of gender identity development and its potential influences

Key Definitions

Term or Abbreviation	Definition
Biological Essentialism	"The belief that males and females are born with distinctively different natures, determined biologically rather than culturally" (Chandler & Munday, 2011)
Cisgender	"Someone whose gender identity matches the sex they were 'assigned' at birth" (Stonewall, 2017).
Cisnormativity	"Cisnormativity describes the expectation that all people are cissexual, that those assigned male at birth always grow up to be men and those assigned female at birth always grow up to be women" (Bauer et al., 2009)
Gender	"Often expressed in terms of masculinity and femininity, gender is largely culturally determined and is assumed from the sex assigned at birth" (Stonewall, 2017).
Gender Diversity	Sex/gender roles that transcend the binary opposition of male and female; man and woman (Nanda, 2014).
Gender Expression	*"*Gender expression is how individuals enact and exhibit their gender identity" (McGuire et al., 2016). "How a person chooses to outwardly express their gender, within the context of societal expectations of gender. A person who does not conform to societal expectations of gender may not, however, identify as trans" (Stonewall, 2017).
Gender Fluidity	"Gender fluidity refers to change over time in a person's gender expression or gender identity, or both. That change might be in expression, but not identity, or in identity, but not expression. Or both expression and identity might change together" (Katz-Wise, 2020).

Gender Identity	"A person's innate sense of their own gender, whether male, female or something else (see non-binary below), which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth" (Stonewall, 2017).
Gender Malleability	Gender malleability refers to the potential for an individual's gender identity to be changed or affected by external and environmental factors.
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer (or Questioning)
Non-Binary	"Gender identities that deviate from binary conceptions of gender", "Some view their gender identity or expression as both male and female, neither male nor female, somewhere between male and female, or fluid over time. Some consider themselves part of the larger category transgender, whereas others do not" (Diamond et al., 2020)
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews
Sex	Assigned to a person on the basis of primary sex characteristics (genitalia) and reproductive functions. Sometimes the terms 'sex' and 'gender' are interchanged to mean 'male' or 'female' (Stonewall, 2017).
Transgender	"Individuals whose assigned gender at birth does not correspond to their self-defined gender identity" (Lindqvist et al.,2021)

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Researcher Background and Rationale for Engagement

I have always considered myself to be an ally of the LGBTQ+ community. Allyship can fall on a scale, moving from more passive steps (e.g., open mindedness) to active and interpersonal engagement in affecting change (Crawley, 2021). My understanding of allyship coincides with the definition proposed in the Sage Encyclopaedia of LGBT studies (2016): '*individuals who engage in social change efforts in coalition with social groups to which they do not themselves belong'* (pp. 76). I do not wish for my allyship to be passive or silent. Instead, I hope to contribute to research that has the capacity to change oppressive policies and structures.

The current context for the LGBTQ+ community in the UK is one of turbulence and division, described by McLean (2021) as 'toxic'. The rights of the transgender population have been questioned and challenged based on opposing fundamental beliefs around 'gender' as a construct. Underpinning this debate are two contrasting theoretical positions: biological essentialism and expansive theories of gender identity. Biological essentialism is a theory of gender development based on sexual dimorphism (de Beauvoir, 1949). This theory emphasises that humans can be categorised into two binary sexes, each with their own fundamental differences.

In contrast with the biological essentialist view, Kohlberg (1966) began to consider the possibility of a cognitive developmental approach to gender. Gender schema theory refers to a belief that children first learn about the sex that they are, and then learn to behave in a way that is congruent with societal expectations for individuals of this gender (Kohlberg, 1966; Martin and Halverson, 1981). This is based on an underlying assumption that gender is a construct formed and shaped by social experience.

Questions around whether gender is determined by biology or whether it can be shaped by social experience have direct implications for law and policy. The Gender Recognition Act, introduced in 2004, enables transgender people to apply for a gender recognition certificate, a

form of legal recognition of their expressed gender. An update to this act was proposed in 2020, with an aim to make the process of self-identification easier for the transgender population, moving further away from a biological essentialist position. Specifically, it was suggested that transgender individuals should no longer have to provide proof of persistent gender dysphoria or medical intervention. In response to the ongoing debate, the UK government invoked article 35 to block the Scottish government's planned reforms to gender recognition process in Scotland, the first time they have done so. High profile figures such as J.K. Rowling have brought this debate into the public domain and social media has been used to increase visibility of these contrasting opinions (Rowling, 2020).

Further to this disagreement about what gender is, another key concern expressed both in the academic literature and public debate is the malleability of gender and the capacity that a child or adolescent has to identify their own gender identity. Gender malleability refers to the potential for an individual's gender identity to be changed or affected by external and environmental factors. These questions have direct implications for the type of care that a child or adolescent experiencing gender dysphoria receives. Prior to my training as an educational psychologist, I worked as a teacher in a secondary special school. During a diversity training session for teachers, I was shocked to hear the lack of confidence amongst my colleagues to speak to our young people about sexuality and gender. Staff members began to express concern about how impressionable they believed these young people to be, worrying that there was a risk of malleating their gender identity or sexuality in conversations about these topics. This started my interest in how these facets of identity develop, particularly in adolescence.

1.2 Overview and Aims of the Thesis

In response to this difficult context for the transgender population, I chose to explore the academic literature surrounding gender identity development in childhood and adolescence. This systematic review (see chapter 2) aimed to explore children's self-identified gender and observable gendered behaviours over time using various gender identity measures. Combining data from 21 included longitudinal studies collected across childhood and adolescence, the current available evidence is reviewed in relation to the trajectories of gender identity

development evidenced by a variety of measures of gender identity. Narrative synthesis was used as a means of synthesising the available data interpretively into a narrative whole.

Complimenting this review of the academic literature, I chose next to explore the impact of experiences of gender diversity on the development of children and young people. I opted to investigate Drag Queen Story Hour, an organisation that provides events in public spaces (e.g., libraries) where a drag artist reads stories to children. Challenges to this idea have been voiced, linked to the question of gender malleability. In case study related to DQSH conducted by Chabot and Helkenberg (2022), those who were challenging the idea of a DQSH event referred to children as "vulnerable," "malleable," "groomable," and "impressionable", suggesting that they felt that a DQSH event could negatively affect child development. However, contrasting research has suggested that interpersonal contact with gender diverse individuals can lead to positive effects such as reductions in transphobia (Walch et al., 2012; Hoffarth and Hodson, 2018; Massey et al., 2021). Therefore, I decided to collect data from parents/carers whose children had participated in DQSH events about the impact they believed it to have on their child. This research was conducted with an aim to capture the personal narratives of attendees, as part of an initial exploratory investigation into this relatively new organisation.

1.3 Reflexivity and Axiology

I chose to approach this thesis from a critical realist perspective, seeking to explore the impact of cultural and societal factors on my research. Cisnormativity is defined by Bauer et al. (2009) as '*the expectation that all people are cissexual, that those assigned male at birth always grow up to be men and those assigned female at birth always grow up to be women'*. Cisnormativity is ingrained in social activities, policies, institutions, and health care practice (Bauer et al., 2009) and also permeates both psychological and educational research. Assumptions are frequently made about the attributes, abilities, preferences, and desires of an individual, based on their gender assigned at birth (Serano, 2016). Critical realism allows a researcher to not only collect data anchored in participant perceptions of reality but also take into consideration the impact of the cultural context they function within (Braun and Clarke,

2022, Willig, 2013). With the tumultuous current picture for the gender diverse population in the UK, it therefore felt particularly important to consider the impact of this context at various levels (e.g., societal ideologies, political aspects, and both historic and current policy) on participants' and researcher's sense making (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

Reflexivity is an integral part of the critical realist approach I used throughout my research. It is important to recognise that reflexivity is a necessary part of each stage of research and can be applied to methodology, analytic strategy, and researcher positionality (Whitaker and Atkinson, 2021). The researcher holds power over the aims, purpose, strategies, and representation of their research. As highlighted by Braun and Clarke (2022), every analytic method contains embedded theoretical assumptions. In both the narrative synthesis of the included studies in my systematic review and the thematic analysis of participant responses in my empirical research, I recognise that my interpretive interactions with the data and my noticing of phenomena were affected by my theoretical and substantive interests. Even the choice to use a semi structured interview methodology shapes '*the kinds of social actors or subjects implicitly preferred by the method'* (Whitaker and Atkinson, 2021).

As a researcher, I hold an expansive view of gender, moving away from the use of binary measures and biological sex. Instead, I recognise that a broad range of gendered experiences have been present throughout history and across cultures (Tompkins, 2015). However, in addition to these core beliefs, I also recognised throughout that my identity as a cisgender female has an impact on my experience of existing within the binary systems and structures in our society. I have not experienced the gendered adversities faced by the transgender community and therefore aimed to consciously examine this hidden cisnormativity in my own research as well as the research of others. I also felt it important to reflect on my membership within a community of psychological research. This forms part of my positionality, a recognition that my personal characteristics may cause '*blind spots concerning oneself and others*' (Whitaker and Atkinson, 2021).

1.4 Experiences of Conducting the Research

A key feature of the experience of conducting this research was my experience of the protests at various events as part of the summer 2022 Drag Queen Story Hour Tour. Prior to arriving at the first event, I was warned by the drag artist 'Aida H Dee', who was going to be hosting the story hour, that there had been rumours that the event would be protested. I arrived and was, indeed, greeted by a small group of protestors. At this point, they did not interact with me and there was a small police presence. It appeared that the pre-emptive security measures had meant that the situation was under control. I remember feeling that these security measures may be unnecessary, something that I later reflected on as being a sign of my privilege as a cisgender individual.

I arrived at the event and begun to enjoy the experience. About 5 minutes into the story, 2 women with a child entered the room and I got up from my seat to offer it to them. The event continued for a couple of minutes before these two women interrupted the story. They began to shout transphobic and homophobic abuse at Aida. Around me, parents began to cover their children's ears and both children and adults in the room became visibly distressed. In the seconds that passed before members of the security team removed these protestors from the room, I felt disgusted, helpless, and tearful. After being removed from the building, the protesting group continued to shout loudly through the windows of the library. In shock, I could not work out how to close the windows properly and, instead, stood up and held the windows shut for the rest of the hour. As the event ended, I began to fear for Aida's safety when leaving the building. Parents/carers were escorted out of a fire exit at the back of the building and Aida was taken in a police car to the afternoon event. I offered to buy Aida's lunch, because it was clear they would not be safe to enter a shop to buy their own, and to transport their belongings to the next venue.

This was the moment at which I went through the same realisation as was reported by many of the parents/carers that I interviewed. That Drag Queen Story Hour was impacting not only the children who attended, but the wider society. At every subsequent event that I attended, the protests continued, and tensions heightened. I was frequently shouted at by this

group in relation to my attendance. Media coverage of the events had prompted counter protests organised by the LGBTQ+ community. Security measures increased, and at one event, I was even refused entry because I had alerted suspicions by attending without a child. Prior to this experience, I had not fully appreciated the current dangers faced by the LGBTQ+ community. I had assumed, as somebody who had surrounded themselves with tolerant and inclusive people, that this kind of protest would be incredibly rare or even impossible. Without having attended these events myself, I do not think I would have fully appreciated the horror and shock that many of the participants reported feeling.

This direct experience of the adversities faced by the LGBTQ+ population was not the only experience that affected my research journey. In February 2023, my sister lost a loved one unexpectedly, following a medical procedure. This person was transgender and an active advocate of trans inclusivity in the city they lived in. Having experienced the length of the wait times to receive affirmative care through the NHS, this person had chosen to self-medicate using unregulated hormones, something they reported to the doctors in charge of their care. As their next of kin, my sister was given responsibility to collect evidence for the inquest into their death and the impact this hormonal self-medication may have had. At times through their treatment, microaggressions prevailed, and their chosen name and pronouns were not used by certain members of staff. Again, I experienced the impact of the current adversities faced by the trans community, particularly in relation to the length of time gender diverse people have to wait before being able to access affirmative care.

Having experienced these difficult events, I had to actively reflect on how these experiences were impacting me throughout the writing process. I noticed that I was focusing heavily on this social context, potentially as a reaction to these events. With the support of my supervisors, I frequently reflected on my biases and how they may be impacting on the way that I analysed my data sets. I consciously attempted to return to the psychological and theoretical underpinnings of the research without becoming too focused on the social and political debate. This helped me to broaden my focus, beyond the transgender population, to the wider spectrum of gender identities.

1.5 Dissemination Plan

Both papers that make up this thesis have been written with an intention to submit for publication in peer-reviewed journals. The systematic literature review has been written according to the style required for submission to the 'Journal of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity'. This peer-reviewed journal was selected due to its aim to '*impact practice, education, public policy, and social action*' (Journal of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity, n.d.). The empirical paper has been written according to the guidelines for submission to the Journal of LGBTQ Youth. This is a peer reviewed journal with a '*commitment to advancing knowledge and public understanding, advocacy, scholarship, and support for sexual and gender minority youth'* (Journal of LGBTQ Youth, n.d.).

Chapter 2: What do measures of gender identity tell us about gender identity over time?

Abstract

Gender identity is a multifaceted concept and is represented by wide range of measures and constructs including both self-report and researcher observations of preferences and behaviours. However, despite their similar theoretical underpinning, gender identity measures are rarely found to correlate with one another, and distinct patterns and trajectories are often found for each construct. Therefore, this systematic review aimed to present a review of the longitudinal research evidence surrounding gender identity development in the absence of formal intervention. Using a systematic search strategy, 21 studies were identified. Narrative synthesis was used to synthesise the data collected using distinct categories of measures of gender identity in these studies. Trajectories were explored for self-identification measures of gender identity, clothing preferences, peer preferences, and object/activity preferences. These distinct trajectories for each measure were then compared with one another in order to better understand the patterns of gender identity development as a whole. Overall, the results of this systematic review are consistent with wider research suggesting that marked developmental patterns can be observed when using different constructs and measures of gender identity. For this reason, the results of this systematic review suggest that gender identity cannot be measured using a single dichotomous measure.

2.1 What is Gender Identity?

Gender diverse individuals have been present throughout history and experiences outside of the gender binary are found in cultures around the world (Devor, 1997; Herdt, 1994, Tompkins, 2015). However, contrasting assumptions about the nature of ‘gender’ have led to the pathologisation of gendered expressions that do not align with westernised cultural stereotypes (Tompkins, 2015). Over time, there has been a move towards an affirmative model of care for gender diverse individuals (APA, 2015) and practitioners have been encouraged to recognise and accept varied gender expressions as a part of human diversity (Horton, 2021). However, conflicting theories surrounding gender identity development in children and the

impact of affirmative care have led to ongoing worldwide debate about how best to support transgender children and young people (McClure et al., 2022).

There are a range of underlying assumptions about what 'gender' means and this can vary based on cultural and societal norms. Morgenroth and Ryan (2018) argue that conceptual understandings of gender fall into 3 categories: (1) evolutionary understandings based on biological sex, (2) social structural approaches based on societal norms and structures, and (3) social identity approaches based on gender as a social category with which an individual identifies. Across the research literature, 'sex' is often used to refer to the biological characteristics of an individual (e.g., chromosomes), while 'gender' typically refers to the societal and cultural meanings associated with femininity and masculinity (Lindqvist et al., 2021). The term 'transgender' is operationalized by Lindqvist et al. (2021) as "*individuals whose assigned gender at birth does not correspond to their self-defined gender identity*". These 'assigned genders', given to infants at birth, are often based on a dichotomous binary categorization of gender and sex. Some cultures hold on to the beliefs that gender is a binary system and there are distinct differences between men and women. This can lead to discrimination, self-stereotyping, stereotype threat and institutional biases (Hyde et al., 2019).

With rising numbers of individuals whose experience cannot be defined using these binary categories, research has developed to include a range of measures that attempt to capture more nuanced data to represent participants' gender identity. Theories of gender identity have broadened, reflecting ideas of gender as a spectrum (Gulgoz et al., 2022) with multiple co-occurring constructs (Ho and Mussap, 2019). These perspectives date back to earlier works by Butler (1990) and West and Zimmerman (1987), who argued that 'gender' is a performance that we 'do' repeatedly based on societal stereotypes, reinforcing an illusion of binary sex. Viewing gender as a societal construct rather than a characteristic that is determined by biological sex, has led to an affirmative model of care being used internationally with gender diverse individuals, supporting an individual to consolidate their expressed gender (APA, 2015). These models are based on research suggesting that societal expectations and felt pressure to conform to gender norms have a negative impact on adjustment and psychological

outcomes (Egan and Perry, 2001; Hidalgo et al., 2013). Recent research supports this idea, with transgender children who have been affirmed in early childhood demonstrating improved levels of well-being (Olson et al., 2016; Russell et al., 2018; Austin et al., 2022). Consequently, there has been significant criticism of models that attempt to influence children to accept their gender assigned at birth (Olson et al., 2016).

However, in contrast to this perspective, concerns have been expressed about the impact of more fluid gendered expectations on children and young people while they are forming and consolidating their own identity. Some believe that exposure to gender diversity and an absence of clear-cut binary gendered expectations may negatively impact a child's understanding of their own gender (Zucker, 2019). This may suggest that affirmative responses to gender dysphoria could perpetuate identity formation difficulties and blur expectations. To further understand how these experiences may or may not affect gender identity development, researchers have used a variety of measures to explore cisgender and transgender development over time, exploring stability or changes in individual trajectories of gender identity.

2.2 Measures of Gender Identity

Gender identity is a multifaceted concept and is represented by wide range of measures and constructs. Bates et al. (2022) note that these measures of gender identity often ask questions about a person's internal understanding of their own gender, as well as their gender expression and how this is perceived by others. Wood and Eagly (2012) describe a biosocial model of gender in which an individual's gendered psychological attributes "*emerge flexibly from a dynamic interaction among biological and social factors".* Reflecting this complexity, researchers frequently use a combination of measures, based on self-report and objective observational methods.

2.2.1 Self-Identification

Self-identification measures of gender identity are based on descriptive categorization of self rather than interpretative accounts of personality or behavioural gendered traits (Wood and Eagley, 2015). An individual is thought to develop a summary judgement of their overall

gender identity based on attributes and preferences and the salience and importance each of these attributes hold (Spence, 1993). To self-identify as part of a group, an individual must be able to reflect on the features of this collective identity and categorize themselves as a group member (Turner et al., 1987). Contributing to this overall summary judgement are concepts such as gender typicality and gender contentment, and attitudes to gender groups (Egan and Perry, 2001; Ashmore et al., 2004). Rather than relying on assumptions and judgements of researchers, participants engage in self-stereotyping, identifying gendered ingroup attributes in oneself as well as differences from the outgroup (Turner et al., 1987) to label themselves and report directly on their feelings of group membership (Wood and Eagley, 2015).

For this reason, many researchers have attempted to explore the age at which a child is able to recognize their own gender and notice the gender of others in order to make this 'summary judgement'. Research suggests that children generally are able to label their own gender by the age of 2 (Thompson, 1975). When asked to label the gender of others, children have been found to justify their choices using physical gendered cues such as hair or clothing choice (Conn and Kanner, 1947). Use of these gendered cues can affect a child's judgements in relation to gender constancy. Gender constancy was a popular measure used by gender researchers in the 1970s to assess a child's developmental understanding of gender. Children are asked to reflect on whether their gender could change, particularly following changes such as changing to gender-incongruent stereotyped clothing. Research by Kohlberg indicates that children begin to understand gender as a constant characteristic between the ages of 6 and 7.

Another important consideration, when considering self-defined gender, is that a binary, dichotomous system does not reflect the experiences of gender fluid and non-binary individuals. Over time, developments in psychological understanding regarding gender identity have led to a movement away from bipolar measures in which an individual is measured on a scale from masculine to feminine (Bem, 1974; Spence et al., 1975). Recent research into the use of binary gender categorization in survey research has found that scaling better represents gender diversity between and within groups (Alexander et al., 2021). One proposed example of this scaling is the use of continuous separate gender rating scales of masculinity and

femininity, allowing participants to report the degree to which they identify with each of these attributes (Alexander et al., 2021).

2.1.2 Intergroup Bias

Another means of understanding a child's gendered experience is to explore sex segregation or intergroup bias. This is referred to by Kornienko et al. (2016) as a 'between-gender' measure. Social identity theory (Taifel and Turner, 1979) suggests that members of any group see their group as distinct from outgroups and the sense of belonging felt by a group member will automatically lead to in-group bias. For this reason, researchers often use measures of group-related judgements (e.g., ingroup bias or out-group derogation) as a measure of gender identity (Wood and Eagly, 2015). When relating this to the key theories of gender development, it is important to note that a gender schema perspective would suggest that a child would first need to be able to identify these groups before self-categorising themselves within a group (and displaying intergroup bias).

2.1.3 Gender Stereotyped Preferences

With some children not developmentally able to self-identify at an early age, many researchers also use observational methods or parental report of children's stereotyped preferences to try to record a child's gender identity (Lauer et al., 2018; Halim et al., 2013; Hassler et al., 2022). Measures of gender stereotyped preferences and traits are based on cultural stereotypes of men and women (Wood and Eagley, 2015). Traditionally, gender research focused on social role theory analysis in order to reflect the division of labour between sexes in society as well as gender stereotyped self-concepts (Koenig and Eagly, 2014). Modern models of gender identity are based on early research suggesting that separate dimensions of masculinity and femininity are a useful tool in understanding overall gender identity (Broverman et al. 1972). The associated personality traits and preferences associated with each of these dimensions are universally accessible and used frequently by social perceivers. Much of this traditional research into stereotypes focuses on agentic and communal

traits because of their cultural associations with femininity and masculinity (Wood and Eagly 2012)

In practice, gender stereotyped preferences are often measured using researcher observation of toy/activity preferences, as well as the clothing that a child chooses to present themselves to others. Gender expression is interwoven with social gender, focused on stereotyped and culturally specific demonstrations of femininity and masculinity (Lindqvist et al., 2021). For young children, these observable preferences and their congruence with gendered stereotypes can be a particularly salient way of self-judging their gender-typicality (Egan and Perry, 2001). When considering the implications of a gender schema hypothesis, it would be expected that a child would first develop an awareness of their gender, and then begin to learn the associated social expectations and norms expected of a member of their gender group. With research suggesting that children are able to self-identify at age 2, it would be expected (as part of a gender schema perspective) that children would not show these gender congruent preferences prior to this age.

Despite the widespread use of the use of gender stereotyped preferences as a measure of gender identity, there are potential limitations of this type of measure. Firstly, these preferences are typically based on a binary view of gender and do not acknowledge that some individuals experience more fluid or nonbinary gender identities (Diamond, 2020). The assumption is also made that an individual's gender expression is consistent with their gender identity (Geist et al., 2017). Non-conformity to societal stereotypes in terms of gendered preferences is not always predictive of a transgender identity. Instead, adaptive and flexible use of gendered behaviours has been found to be associated with positive psychological adjustment (DiDonato et al., 2012).

2.1.4 Correlation Between Measures

To understand trajectories of these interwoven aspects of gender development, considerable literature has been created, investigating the stages at which a child is able to self-identify and the patterns of their gendered preferences. However, despite their similar

theoretical underpinning, gender identity measures are rarely found to correlate with one another, and distinct patterns and trajectories are often found for each construct (Bruun and Farr, 2021; Gulgoz et al., 2022; Halim et al., 2013; Hassler et al., 2022; Egan and Perry, 2001). Furthermore, despite many of these measures being developed around a binary system, many people do not demonstrate consistency across measures of masculinity and femininity, particularly when self-reporting (Egan and Perry, 2001). Joel et al. (2015) investigated the internal consistency of gendered personality traits, attitudes, and behaviours. They found that it was very rare for an individual to demonstrate traits consistent with 1 gender and, instead, most humans possessed both masculine and feminine psychological characteristics (Joel et al., 2015; Spence, 1993). In their sample of US college students, the authors found less than 1% exhibited only masculine or only feminine behaviours and preferences (Joel et al., 2015). Hyde (2005) proposed the gender similarities hypothesis which states that men and women are very similar on most, but not all, psychological variables. Therefore, it may be dangerous to assume and overall gender identity from a single domain (Egan and Perry, 2001). A greater awareness of how an individual's gender identity develops over time, as evidenced by a combination of measures, may support a more nuanced understanding of gender identity development, as well as providing an insight for researchers about the usefulness of these measures.

2.3 Method

2.3.1 Research Questions

This systematic review was conducted with the aim of exploring the trajectories of gender identity development over time in cisgender and gender diverse individuals. The following research questions were explored:

R1: What do distinct categories of measures of gender identity tell us about trajectories of gender identity development?

R2: How do these trajectories fit together and what does this tell us about the overall development of an individual's gender identity?

2.3.2 Search Strategy

Initial scoping searches were conducted in January 2022 to collect information about the breadth of research literature and identify appropriate search terms. Five electronic databases were chosen as suitable sources of information: PsycINFO, ERIC, Web of Science (Core Collection), ProQuest Dissertations (Theses), and Scopus (see appendix A for specific search terms). Final searches were undertaken in June 2022 and search results were important into Rayyan systematic review software. From the five databases, 9979 results were collected, and 3554 duplicates were removed.

2.3.3 Study Selection and Exclusion/Inclusion Criteria

Title searching was then used to assess suitability of the remaining papers and 6378 were removed at this point. A further 12 studies were excluded using abstract searching, leaving 35 papers selected for full text review. Of these 35 studies, 21 studies were selected for inclusion (see Figure 1 for PRISMA flow chart depicting this process). Exclusion and inclusion criteria were used to assess the appropriateness and relevance of studies (see Table 1). Included studies were required to use a longitudinal or follow up study design with at least two clear time points and use of a qualitative or quantitative measure of gender identity. Studies were excluded where participants had been the recipient of some form of intervention. This ensured that the included studies included measures of participants naturally occurring gender development over time, without the influence of hormonal or psychological intervention. Social transition, (e.g., changes in gender expression, name and/or pronoun) was not considered a formal intervention.

Table 1.

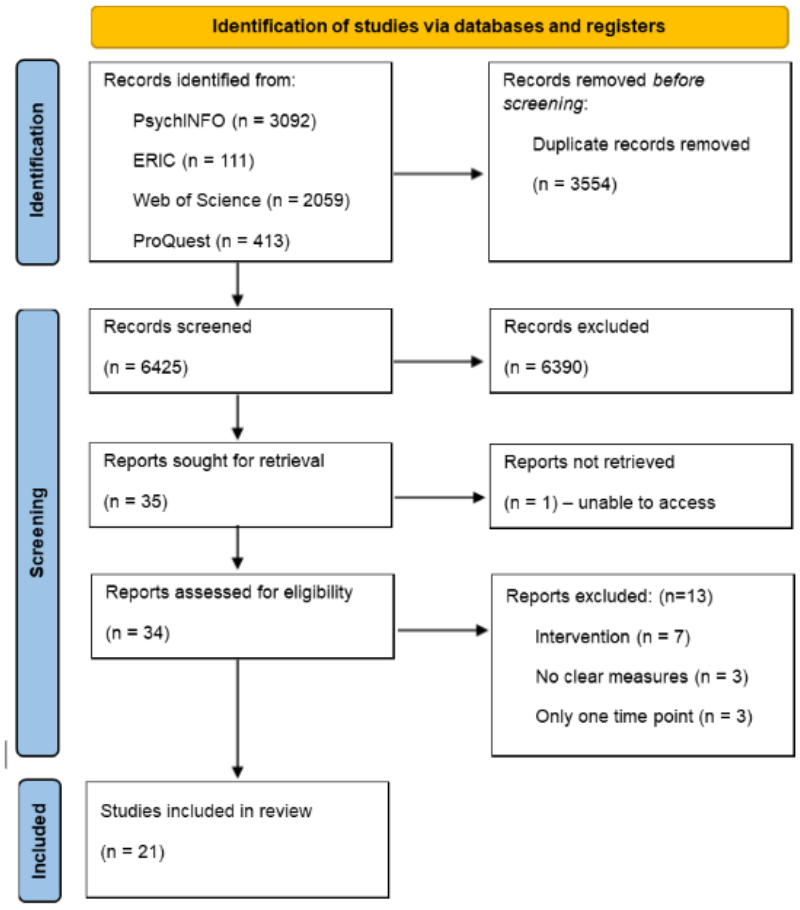
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Study Item	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Type of Research	Peer reviewed published papers and theses	Book chapters, systematic reviews, dissertations
Methodology	Qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-	Retrospective studies, or studies

	methods longitudinal studies	without at least 2 time points
Participants	Participants of all age ranges	
Intervention	Studies where participants were not subject to any formal intervention (e.g., hormonal, or psychological) Social transition was not considered a formal intervention.	Participants were subject to a formal intervention
Outcomes/Focus	A quantitative or qualitative measure of gender identity is used	No measure of participant gender identity
Language	Paper accessible in English	Paper not accessible in English
Date	All dates of publication	

Figure 1.

PRISMA 2009 Flow Diagram (Moher et al.,2009) of the systematic search process



2.3.4 Quality Assessment

Study quality was assessed using the Quality Assurance of Diverse Studies (QuADS) checklist, a revision on the QATSDD (Harrison et al., 2021). With a comprehensive list of assessment factors, the QuADS checklist has been found by researchers to be a useful means of assessing the quality of research across a range of disciplines and study designs, including health and psychology (Harrison et al., 2021). Specific criteria are provided alongside the QuADS to support the rating given to each study for each component. This meant that studies were given a percentage score which reflected the overall quality of the study. However, it is important to note that although overall percentages were created this were not used to determine inclusion or exclusion as there is no evidence to suggest that any of the criteria included in the QuADS checklist are more important than another and therefore it is not possible to decipher a 'cut off point' for inclusion (Harrison et al., 2021). The quality assessment framework was used as the starting point for broader discussion about the components of the included studies in relation to the specific research questions. All studies included in this review scored above 64% (see Appendix B).

2.3.5 Data Analysis

Data was extracted from each study regarding the participants, time points, methods, measures, analytic strategy, and main findings. Researchers then grouped studies according to these features and synthesised information from across the included studies to form a narrative for each grouping. It was decided that the richest narrative was obtained when studies were grouped according to the categories of measures of gender identity due to the distinct developmental patterns demonstrated by each category. Four categories of measures of gender identity were identified across the included studies: 1) self-identification, 2) object and activity preferences, 3) clothing preferences and 4) peer preferences. Within each of these categories, a range of individual measures were represented. However, due to a lack of consistency of measures used across the research literature, it was decided that this review would focus on these broader categories rather than specific measures. A narrative synthesis was collated for

each category of measure of gender identity and the pattern of development over time evidenced by this measure. Following analysis of individual categories of gender identity, these trajectories were compared to one another and integrated to make comments on gender identity development as a whole. This form of synthesis, in which researchers synthesise information to create a new 'whole', is referred to as meta-ethnography (Page and Thomas, 2009).

Table 2

Data Extraction Table

	Study	Participants	Time Points	Methods/Measures	Data Analysis	Main Findings
1	Barron and Capous-Desyllas (2017)	USA Purposeful sample 4 families from a transgender support group 5.5yrs – 8.5yrs	Over the course of a year	• Case study and ethnographic methods (participant observations, journals, interviews) • 12 visits per household, and interviews for all family members	Cross case and comparative analysis Inductive coding Themes and subthemes	• Gender non-conforming generally began at age 2-3 • All case study children enjoyed dressing up in preschool • All children experienced a stage of fluidity, moving towards the constraints of the binary • Children showed stereotypical gendered preferences and socially constructed ideas of gender • Journeys were based on the choices of the children • Parents felt a sense of blame from society • The need to be accepted by society in daily interactions was very important to the children and may be associated with intensity of presentation
2	Behrendt (1989)	33 children at wave 1 aged between 4 and 9.5 yrs Recruited from schools and preschools USA	Follow up after 4 years	• Draw a person test • Semi structured interview about gender	Coded responses Descriptive statistics	• Girls were more consistent in their gender constancy • Boys and girls responded differently • Gender stereotypes hold meaning for children • Girls referred more to internal personality characteristics, but boys referred more to external appearance characteristics • Girls were less gender stereotyped

3	Bruun and Farr (2021)	106 families in the USA Adoptive parents: Lesbian, gay, and heterosexual Children 13-72 months old at time point 1	2 time points, 5 years apart	• Standardised questionnaires and observational coding of gender presentation • Parents and children unstructured play session with gender typical and gender-neutral toys • Interviews and family interaction tasks • Inventory of parent and peer attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) • Participants rated 1-5 in gender expression, gender conformity and gender non-conformity	Bivariate correlation and one-way MANOVA Power analyses	• Children across family types were generally gender-conforming in their presentation • Children's conforming presentation in early childhood was not related to conforming behaviour in middle childhood. • Children's gender presentation and friendship quality were not found to vary based on parent sexual orientation • Parents' presentation was not significantly associated with child presentation. • Gender presentation follows a different developmental trajectory than gender-typed attitudes, behaviours, and traits
4	Campbell et al. (2000)	60 infants, 3-18 months UK	3, 9, and 18 months	• Sex-congruent and sex-incongruent paired stimuli from four domains (baby faces, child faces, toys and activities) • Rouge mirror test • Duration of gaze to each stimulus was measured	Photos taken Coded by frame and converted into units of time to calculate duration of gaze Two-way ANOVA	• No evidence of self-recognition by 18 months • No consistent same-sex peer preference across age ranges • Sex-congruent toy choice by 9 months of age • Sex congruence significant in male but not female children • Both sexes showed a preference for 'masculine' activities • Activity preference remained stable over testing ages

5	DiDonato et al. (2012)	Participants recruited from a larger longitudinal study USA 115 preschool students	Twice weekly over the course of an academic year	• Observational coding of naturally occurring gendered behaviour • Average of 131 observations per child • Gender typicality assessed through activity choices and peer play • Adjustment measures: Child behavioural checklist (teacher report)	Bayesian Probability Score Hierarchical regression	• Well-adjusted children showed flexible gendered behaviour to suit different contexts • Only when behaviour was more random that it was linked to adjustment • Support for both consistency and flexibility hypotheses • Encouraging children to be flexible in their gendered behaviour may increase adaptivity
6	Golombok et al. (2012)	UK, Bristol, Large ALSPAC study Sample based on PSAI scores at age 3.5, N=377 6 groups of children: (1) extremely masculine boys, (2) extremely masculine girls, (3) extremely feminine girls (4) extremely feminine boys, (5) randomly selected boys, (6) randomly selected girls	Follow up at age 13 55% of the age 3 sample.	• Sex-typed behaviours measured at 3.5 yeas using PSAI (Preschool Activities Inventory) – parent report • Multidimensional Gender Identity and Sexual Questioning Scale administered at age 13 – child self-report	MANOVAs of boys and girls separately	• Findings showed continuity in sex-typed behaviour from preschool to adolescence • Girls classified as masculine at age 3, felt less gender typicality, less contentedness, and more self-efficacy for male sex-typed activities at age 13 • Boys classified as feminine at age 3, felt less gender typicality and had lower self-efficacy for male typed activities at age 13 in comparison to randomly selected boys (gender typicality, agentic traits, male typed activities) • Girls classified as extremely masculine at age 3 varied on more subscales at age 13. • Greater variation in sex-typed behaviour in girls. • Evidence more compatible with hormonal and social influence than a cognitive-developmental theory of gender

7	Gulgoz et al. (2022)	Participants from larger longitudinal study 4 groups (1) transgender, (2) gender non-conforming, (3) cisgender siblings of trans or non-conforming children and (4) unrelated cisgender children USA and Canada Study 2 = 196 children, 6-9 years	2 testing sessions (M=1.95 years apart)	• Gender spectrum task using a continuum from 'feeling totally like a boy' to 'feeling totally like a girl' – percentage • Toy, clothing and peer preferences measure (child report) • Similarity task – 10 questions (5-point scale) • Gender identity implicit association test • Categorical gender identity – children asked to describe identity	Study 1: One way ANOVA examining effect of participant group on spectrum scores Study 2: Independent samples t tests	• Transgender children, cis siblings and unrelated cis children did not differ from one another in the extent they identified with their current gender on the continuous measure • Gender non-conforming children showed greater variability across the scale • None of the groups identified exclusively with their own gender – continuous measure needed • Even cis and trans children did not score themselves as 100% their current gender • Participant scores on the spectrum measure were moderately stable over time
8	Halim et al (2013)	Preschool children (N=229) and their mothers 154 families participate in all 3 waves of the studies Mexican, Dominican, or US born African American mothers.	3 waves Ages 3,4, and 5	• Observations of gender-typed appearance coded at each stage (masculine or feminine) • Gender typed dress-up play – reported by mothers on a 4-point scale • Gender-typed play – reported by mothers on 4-point scale for feminine and masculine items • Sex segregation – mothers asked to list up to 9 peers their child spends time with and their sex (siblings excluded)	Multilevel models of behaviour Gender and ethnicity as factors and time as a covariate Structural equation	• Nearly all behaviours moved towards greater rigidity over time (dress-up, gender-typed play, sex segregation increased between ages of 3 and 4). • Sex segregation increased from ages 4 to 5 • Dress up and gender typed play remained stable, but cross gender typed play decreased • Observed gender-typed appearance remained stable from age 3 to 4 • Gender typed appearance decreased in rigidity from age 4 to 5 • Ethnicity generally did not affect scoring • Gender dimensions showed distinct patterns • Moderate stability in individual gendered behaviours from year to year

					model to assess stability across time	
9	Hassler et al (2022)	Large ongoing longitudinal study (n = 433). USA Included first testing session and the most recent testing session. Mean ages 7 and 9	Two time points, an average of 2.6 years apart.	• Gender Identity Measure: "Do you feel like you are a boy, girl, or something else?" and "When you grow up, do you think you will feel like a boy, a girl, or something else?", • Gender Similarity: five questions about how similar they are to boys and five questions about how similar they are to girls, answers on a 5-point scale • Toy Preference Task • Peer Preference Task • Clothing Preference Task • Composite Score	Preacher's procedure Linear mixed model for repeated measures	• Consistency across the 2 and a half year time span across measures for cis and transgender children • Effect size different depending on measure • Toy preferences particularly well-correlated over time • Clothing preferences less consistent over time in all groups • Trajectories were highly similar across the three groups of children • Overall trend toward greater rigidity in gender development among boys than girls
10	Kahn and Halpern (2019)	20745 adolescents in 7th to 12th Grade as part of national study USA	Tested in 1995, 1996, 2001, 2008	• Biological Sex • Sexual Orientation (self-report in wave 4 interview) • Gender Typed Behaviour – (AGB) self-reported at each wave	Multilevel mixed regression models to assess longitudinal variation	• Longitudinal analysis showed that gender-typed behaviour increased from adolescence to early adulthood, but that this trajectory was not linear. • Generally, participants became more gender conforming in waves 1-3 and then less conforming again in later waves • Gender intensification peaked at emerging adulthood (18-25) • In all groups, scores spanned the measure suggesting that gender non-conforming is common in all groups, not just those with minority sexual orientation • Results suggest that gender typed behaviours

						do not predict sexual orientation
11	Kornienko et al. (2016)	Part of a wider longitudinal study on identity development N- 670 aged 12-13 USA	Wave 2 and 3 of larger study Age 12 and 13	• Self-Report Survey with questions about identity, psychological and educational outcomes • Friendship nominations • Gender Identity – self-identification as well as 4 continuous measures (1) gender typicality, (2) felt pressure from peers for gender conformity, (3) intergroup bias (4) gender contentedness • Friendship networks – asked to nominate 10 friends so that researchers could form friendship networks matrices	Stochastic Actor-Based Modelling	• Peer socialisation affected between-gender dimensions of GI: intergroup bias and felt pressure for gender conformity • Same sex preferences demonstrated in both year groups • Over the course of the school year, both year groups showed changes in their levels of intergroup bias and felt pressure to conform to become similar to the levels of their friends • Between-gender group dimensions of GI might be more susceptible to peer influence than the within-gender dimensions of GI.
12	Lauer et al (2018)	52 children (25 girls) USA	Time A: 6 to 13 months Time B: 4 years old	• Object preference task at 6-13 months • Parent Questionnaire about gendered preferences at age 4 • Gendered play score calculated for each child	Steiger's (1980) *z* tests	• Evidence of developmental stability in gendered preferences across early childhood • Object preferences in 1st year of life are precursors for future play preferences.
13	Martin (2009)	Cohorts of 3- and 4-year-old children as they joined Nursery and moved into Reception classes UK	Over 2 years	• Participant observation • Ongoing field notes based on discussions with staff and parents • Child interviews • Play/conversations/preferences	Ethnographic and discourse analysis Grounded Theory	• Children learned norms of gender behaviour from each other • Gender stereotypes were policed and regulated by the children • Heteronormativity was sustained through classroom activities • Children were influenced by 'more established' and older children • Boys learned to disassociate themselves from femininity • Children were keen to demonstrate their

						'correct' gender positioning • Adults provide important role models
14	McHale et al. (2001)	Longitudinal study about gender role socialization in middle childhood 198 families participated in current study USA		• Interviews with parents/1st and 2nd born siblings including attitude to gender role measures for children and parents and parent sex-typed leisure activities measure • 7 evening telephone interviews to ask about child's activities	Mixed model ANOVA	• Pattern of second born sibling gender role orientations consistent with social learning from 1st born sibling • Firstborns followed a pattern that suggested they changed to distinguish themselves from siblings (de-identification) • More evidence for sibling influence than parent influence • Cognitive developmental changes mean that children become more flexible in their ideas about gender • Girls demonstrated more flexible attitudes than boys • Second born children less stereotypical than first born children
15	McHale et al. (2004)	Longitudinal study about gender role socialization in middle childhood 200 families participated in current study USA	Time 1: 10.81 years Time 2: 12.82 years of age	• Interviews with families – each member separately asked about personal qualities and family relationships • Children attitude towards women scale • Sex typed personality qualities measure • Interest in languages and maths • Self-esteem scale • 7 evening telephone interviews to ask about child's activities	Correlational analysis	• Consistent sex differences in the ways in which and the people with whom children spent their time • Sex typing was more apparent in boys' time with peers • Girls less stereotyped when with female peers

16	Potter et al. (2021)	Ongoing, longitudinal, US cohort Study N= 4,95 9-10 years USA	1 year follow up visit	• 4-item gender survey measuring felt-gender, gender noncontentedness, and gender nonconformity • Youth KSADS-5 suicide module (Kaufman et al., 1997) • Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) (Achenbach, 2009) • Puberty Development Scale (PDS; Petersen et al., 1988)	Logistic regression Linear mixed models	• Prevalence of transgender children at 9 years was 0.5% and then 1% at 10 years • Females showed greater gender diversity than males. • 39.5% of 9/10-year-olds respond 'I don't understand' when asked if they are transgender
17	Rae et al., (2019)	Cohort of gender-nonconforming children (n = 85) compared with groups of transitioned transgender children (n = 84) and gender-conforming controls (n = 85). Recruited from community groups USA	2 year follow up	• Child self-report • Five gender-development measures: peer preference (from Olson et al., 2015), toy and clothing preference (from Fast & Olson, 2018), gender similarity (Martin et al., 2017), and gender identity (Fast & Olson, 2018). • Composite score calculated	Logistic regression model	• Stronger cross-sex identification and preferences at initial testing predicted social transitions • Children who later transitioned scored similarly to those who had already transitioned and to the control group of their expressed gender • Social transition does not appear to impact preferences and identification
18	Shirley (2000)	60 infants recruited by health visitors and media	3, 9, and 18 months	• Duration of attention paid to male or female stereotyped stimuli presented in pairs • Rouge mirror test to investigate	T-tests	• No clear pattern of sex typed behaviour at 9 months • Infants could self-identify at 18 months but were not accurate in the gender labelling

		advertising UK		self-identification and time looking at own picture/picture of same age/sex child • Gender labelling assessment at 18 months	ANOVA Cross domain stability measure	assessment task • Same sex preferences for peers and play activities shown in male infants but not in group as a whole (with female infants included) • Significant sex-congruent toy preference by 18 months
19	Steensma et al., (2013)	127 adolescents (79 boys, 48 girls), who were referred for GD in childhood (<12 years of age) The Netherlands	4-year period	• WISC • Gender Identity Interview for Children (GIIC) • Gender Identity Questionnaire (GIQ) – Parent report • Child Behavior Checklist • Peer Relations Scale • Gender Identity Interview for Adolescents and Adults (GIAA) • Utrecht Gender Dysphoria Scale (UGDS) • Body Image Scale (BIS) • Sexual Orientation Questions	Bivariate logistic regressions	• Factors associated with persistence vary among natal boys and girls. • Persisters reported higher intensities of GD, more body dissatisfaction, and higher reports of a same-sex sexual orientation compared to desisters • Link between the intensity of GD in childhood and persistence of GD • Higher probability of persistence among natal girls • Psychological functioning and the quality of peer relations did not predict the persistence of childhood GD
20	Szkrybalo and Ruble (1999)	Preschool, kindergarten, and lst-grade children *(N* = 195) Part of a large longitudinal study USA	3-year period	• Sex-category constancy measure (derived from Slaby and Frey, 1975, Wehren and De Lisi's, 1983 and Frey and Ruble, 1992)	Child responses coded into explanation categories ANOVA	• Constancy performance appears to improve or decline over time depending on the kind of reasoning that children use at different ages to explain sex-category membership • Children's SCC judgments showed a clear increase from ages 6 to 8 • Children are more likely to cite stereotypes as reasons for a person's sex identity to change than as reasons for it to remain constant (e.g., boys can cook too) • Sequence of self-constancy before other constancy

21	Warin (2000)	10 children during the transition to School UK	6 months prior to school attendance to end of second year of schooling	• The pictorial scale of perceived competence and social acceptance Harter and Pike (1984); • Semi structured interview about toy, activity and peer preferences • Slaby and Frey (1975) gender understanding questions • Measure of the child's desire for gender consistency (clothing task)	Mixed methods	• Range of understanding across the 10 children at first testing for self-consistency measure • Association between a lack of gender constancy and a preparedness to engage in non-conforming behaviour • 6 gender-constant children appeared to be much more gender-stereotypical in their preferences

2.4 Results

2.4.1 Study Characteristics

Key characteristics and findings from each of the included studies were extracted and summarised in a data extraction table (see Table 2). All studies followed the gender identity of participants over time and used either a longitudinal or follow up study design. The time between initial data collection and the second time point ranged from 1 year to 13 years. The most recent study was published in 2022 and the oldest study was written in 1989. All included studies were conducted in either the USA (n=15), UK (n=5), The Netherlands (N=1) or Canada (n=2). The majority of studies used quantitative methodology (n=18), with 2 entirely qualitative studies and 1 mixed methods study. A variety of measures of gender identity were reflected across the included studies, including gendered object/activity preferences, self-identification, intergroup bias, and clothing preference measures. Sample sizes ranged from 4 participant families to 20745 individual participants and included participants aged between 3 months and 32 years old. The focus of the studies was spread across early childhood (n=8), middle childhood (n=8), adolescence (n=4), and adulthood (n=1).

2.4.2 Self-Identification

Self-identification measures were used in many of the included studies, with participants across age groups. Four studies focused on self-identification as their primary gender identity measure (Campbell et al., 2000; Gulgoz et al., 2022; Hassler et al., 2022; Shirley, 2000). Campbell et al. (2000) used the rouge mirror test, as outlined by Amsterdam (1972), to assess self-identification in infants at 6, 9, and 18 months. At all stages of this study, the infants did not show signs of self-recognition. This rouge test was also used by Shirley (2000) alongside an additional task where children were shown paired photographs of themselves and a same-sex, same-age peer to assess preferential looking. At 18 months, infants were found by Shirley (2000) to demonstrate self-recognition but their performance on another

gender labelling task indicated that their formal recognition of gender was not yet developed at 18 months.

Many of the included studies, in which a child is asked to self-identify in this way, focused on middle childhood. Hassler et al. (2022) used self-identification measures of gender similarity and gender identity to allow 7- and 9-year-olds to express their gender identity. Across the 2.5-year time span, transgender and cisgender children's self-identified gender remained stable across both measures. Gulgoz et al. (2022) used a gender spectrum continuum as a means of allowing children to express their gender identity. This continuum ranged from 'feel totally like a boy' to 'feel totally like a girl' and participants were asked to draw a cross to mark where they would place themselves on this spectrum. In the longitudinal part of this study, results showed moderate stability in the way that participants self-identified using this spectrum measure over the 1–2-year time period. Gulgoz et al. (2022) found that transgender children, their cisgender siblings, and unrelated cisgender children did not differ significantly in the way that they identified with their current gender. No group identified 100% with their current gender, indicating that binary measures may not accurately reflect the unique experience of individuals.

2.4.3 Object and Activity Preferences

14 of the studies investigated object and activity preferences as at least one of their measures of gender identity, beginning in very early childhood by observing the gaze of babies as young as 3 months old. Campbell et al. (2000), used pairs of gender-congruent and-gender incongruent stereotyped toys and activities to assess infant preferences over time. Overall, gendered preferences remained constant from 3 months to 18 months (Campbell et al., 2000). Lauer et al. (2018) also found this predictive association between object preferences at 6 months of age and 4 years of age. Gender stereotyped object preferences appear to continue to increase in rigidity throughout early childhood. Halim et al. (2013) observed increased rigidity between the ages of 3 and 4 years, followed by constancy between the ages of 4 and 5 years. When investigating middle childhood, Hassler et al. (2022) encountered similar results. Toy preferences were identified as being particularly well correlated for transgender children and

unrelated cisgender children between the ages of 7 and 9.5 years. This consistency also appears to continue into adolescence. Golombok et al. (2012) found continuity in participants' sex typed behaviour assessed at age 3 and at age 13. As individuals approach adulthood, Kahn and Halpern (2019) observed another peak in gender typical preferences for participants aged 18-26. This was followed by a decrease in the final wave of the study. Overall, whilst the trajectory of object and activities preference does not appear to be a linear intensification process, the literature appears to evidence stability in the preferences of individuals.

Although these trends seem to be common amongst studies, individual differences have been observed. Campbell et al. (2000) and Shirley (2000) noticed that, at 3 months old, both sexes showed a preference for masculine toys and activities. Both authors hypothesized that this may be associated with the increase in moving features in these 'male' toys. As a whole group, participants showed sex-congruent preferences by the age of 9 months but, when split into male and female results, these preferences were only significant in the male group. This preference for masculine toys intensified at 9 months and 18 months for male infants. Evidence of more stereotypical preferences being demonstrated by boys was also collected by Behrendt (1989), Hassler (2022) and McHale et al. (2004) in middle childhood.

2.4.4 Clothing Preferences

Clothing preference is used frequently throughout the research literature as a means of observing and measuring a child's gender expression. Specifically, 8 of the included studies used clothing preferences as at least one of their measures of gender identity. However, longitudinal data from the included studies indicates that a child's clothing preferences have a unique trajectory, distinct from other measures of gender identity (Bruun and Farr, 2021; Gulgoz et al., 2022; Halim et al., 2013; Hassler et al., 2022). In both qualitative parental accounts collected by Barron and Capous-Desyllas (2017) and a quantitative study based on researcher observation conducted by Halim et al. (2013), children appeared to demonstrate gendered clothing preferences by the age of 3. Halim et al. (2013) observed this age to be a 'peak' in rigidity in children's clothing choices, followed by increased flexibility in the degree of gender conformity by age 4-5. This early 'peak' followed by increased flexibility was also

observed by Bruun and Farr (2021). Whilst children's gendered presentation was found to be associated with their parents' presentation at wave 1 of the study (Mean age=3 years), this did not persist into the second wave (Mean age = 8.34 years). Bruun and Farr (2021) hypothesized that this increase in flexibility may be related to the age at which a child develops more autonomy over their clothing choice. It is also possible that increased flexibility coincides with developmental changes in the type of reasoning a child is able to use (Szkrybalo and Ruble,1999).

Although there may be developmental and environmental factors that affect clothing preferences, it is important to note that clothing can be a particularly salient gendered cue for children. When assessing children's understanding of gender constancy, Szkrybalo and Ruble (1999) found that young children were more likely to agree that a person could change their gender when presented with a picture of an individual who had changed clothing than an individual engaging in non-conforming activities. Children have also been found to refer to clothing to justify their gender labelling of others (Conn and Kanner, 1947) and appear unable to detect gender when given photos of people who do not fit with stereotypical gender expressions (Wild et al., 2000). Martin (2009) observed preschool and reception aged children over the course of 2 years and noted that children regularly 'policed' any non-conformity in choices of dressing up outfits. Children have also been observed to react strongly when asked to dress in a way that does not fit with their current gender identity. Warin (2000) used stereotyped clothing to assess children's willingness to engage in non-conforming dress up. 43 of a total of 57 children who participated in this study refused to wear items of clothing that did not conform to their assigned gender. Parents interviewed by Barron and Capous-Desyllas' (2017) referred heavily to their child's clothing and hairstyle as 'indicators and signifiers' of their gender identity. All 4 of the families of transgender children who participated stated that the child was distressed when unable to wear clothing that was congruent with their expressed gender' these transgender children's clothing preferences were described as 'exaggerated' and parents linked this intensity with their child's "need to look and feel like a girl".

2.4.5 Sex Segregation/Peer Preferences

Seven of the included studies used a measure of sex segregation or peer preference alongside other measures of gender identity. Starting at 3 months of age, researchers such as Campbell et al. (2000) and Shirley (2000) used paired photographs of peers to assess whether infants showed same-sex preferences. Campbell et al. (2000) found a small significant preference for same-sex photos of peers at 3 months of age, but this was not replicated in later waves of the study, despite the increase in gendered cues demonstrated in photos of older children. The results collected by Shirley (2000) were also variable and did not evidence sex segregation in infancy. However, when investigating the peer preferences of older children, Halim et al. (2013) found a curvilinear increase in sex segregation between the ages of 3 and 5. Within this study, 48% of 3 years old children's friends, 70% of 4 years old's friends, and 74% of 5-year-old children's friends were found to be of the same gender. This sex segregation appears to remain stable over time, with Hassler et al. (2022) finding evidence of a significant positive correlation between children's peer preferences at age 7 and 9.5 years. Kornienko et al. (2016) found that adolescents tended to gradually develop similar levels of intergroup bias to that of their nominated friends.

2.4.6 Comparison of Trajectories in Transgender and Cisgender CYP

When exploring the experiences of transgender children and young people, many researchers have found evidence to suggest that transgender children show very similar patterns of development to control groups of children of their expressed gender. Across a variety of measures, Rae et al., (2019) found that this similarity was present regardless of whether a transgender child had been able to socially transition. Although stronger cross-sex identification was found to be predictive of later social transition (Rae et al., 2019) and persistence of gender dysphoria (Steensma et al., 2013), the scores that children obtained using these measures prior to transitioning did not differ significantly to those who had transitioned already or to a control group of their expressed gender (Rae et al., 2019). Hassler et al. (2022) also observed highly similar trajectories for transgender children, cisgender siblings, and unrelated cisgender children. The stability in gender identity displayed across these

populations is reflected in the statistics around persistence of gender identity in transgender individuals. As part of an ongoing longitudinal study, Potter et al. (2021) used a 4-item gender survey to explore gender identity in 8- to 9-year-old children. Approximately 0.5% of children reported that they were transgender at time point 1, followed by 1% at time point 2. This was echoed in the data collected by Gulgoz et al. (2022), who found that children showed consistency in their use of a continuous measure of gender identity over the course of 1-2 years.

2.5 Discussion

Overall, the results of this systematic review are consistent with wider research suggesting that distinct developmental patterns can be observed when using different constructs and measures of gender identity (Egan and Perry, 2001). When synthesizing the results of the included studies, the longitudinal data does not appear to lend full support to a biological essentialist, or gender schema model of development. Prior to the time at which children can reliably identify their own gender and the gender of others, they seem to display gendered preferences (Campbell et al., 2000; Lauer et al., 2018). At this age, children do not appear to show any intergroup bias or same-sex preference, yet they begin to develop a preference that adheres to the stereotypes associated with these groups (Campbell et al., 2000; Shirley et al., 2000). These preferences may be typical of the gender they have been assigned at birth, but this is not always the case (Bruun and Farr, 2021; Gulgoz et al., 2022). Across the included studies, the age of 3 appears to be a particularly salient time in which children are becoming increasingly consciously aware of gendered cues and norms (Bruun and Farr, 2021; Halim et al., 2013). At the age of 3, children appear to increase their rigidity in their gender stereotyped clothing preferences and start to show evidence of sex segregation (Halim et al., 2013). However, as they enter middle childhood, it seems that these children's preferences stabilise rather than continuing to intensify (Halim et al., 2013) and sometimes reduce in rigidity (Ruble et al., 2008). Once children reach middle childhood, they appear to show stability across measures in various constructs of gender identity (Hassler et al., 2022; Kornienko et al., 2016).

2.5.1 Something Essential but also Social

The fact that children demonstrate gendered preferences prior to being able to label the gender they are or the gender of others, suggests that there is some essentialist quality to gender. However, with so many children demonstrating gender identities incongruent with biological sex, it does not appear that anatomy can fully explain this essentialist quality. Although children do learn about the societal expectations and stereotypes attached to gender, an individual's gendered experience seems to remain stable over time, even when this does not match cultural and societal expectation. Attempts to inhibit gender identity to fit within the prominent binary systems and structures can have a negative impact on psychological outcomes (Olson, 2015). This would suggest that both the 'doing gender' schools of thought and the 'being gender' schools of thought have a place when understanding the nuance of gender identity development in children and adolescents (Hyde et al., 2019).

To further understand this mysterious essentialist characteristic of gender identity, more recent research has investigated more nuanced biological influences on gender. For example, neuroendocrinology (the study of hormones) has been used to assess the impact of hormonal differences on an individual's gender identity and presentation. Critically, Gillies and McArthur (2010) emphasise that hormones are not dimorphic and both male and female bodies create hormones that are mistakenly thought of as 'male' or 'female'. The hormones within an individual are also not fixed and social factors can influence hormone production rates (van Anders et al., 2011). Whilst some initial support has been found for the hypothesis that increased levels of androgens in natal women can be associated with male stereotyped preferences and behaviours (Frisen, 2009), studies have shown that this does not appear to alter the overall gender identity of participants (Meyer-Bahlburg et al., 2004). Perry et al. (2018) suggest that further research may be needed to explore how these biological factors interact with cognitive, social, and behavioural variables to impact gender identity.

2.5.2 Stability Over Time

Another key finding of this systematic review is that when children reach middle childhood their self-identified gender tends to remain consistent over time (Hassler et al., 2022; Kornienko et al., 2016). Components of an individual's overall gender identity, such as their gendered expression or preferences, may reduce in rigidity. However, overall summary judgements of gender identity tend to remain consistent from middle childhood to adolescence (Golombok et al., 2012; Kahn and Halpern, 2019). Research into cognitive development and the types of reasoning that a child is able to access at different stages in their childhood may help to explain the variation in the trajectories of gendered expression (Szkrybalo and Ruble, 1999). For this reason, further research regarding the gendered cues and criteria that children use to make a summary judgement about their gender identity may also be useful. Understanding the relative salience of various attributes for these children may support researchers to recognise the impact of child developmental factors on these trajectories (Perry et al., 2019). Qualitative accounts of gender identity over time may also help researchers to understand this trajectory of rigidity. For example, in the accounts collected by Barron and Capous-Desyllas (2017), the transgender child who received the most affirmative response from their parents was reported to demonstrate more flexible gendered behaviours. The children who experienced more turbulence in their transition were reported to present more 'intensely', in line with societal stereotypes for their expressed gender. Barron and Capous-Desyllas (2017) hypothesise that this may be linked to the importance that these children place on being accepted and 'verified' by society.

2.5.3 Fixed or Malleable?

The data collected about social influence as part of these longitudinal studies also appears incongruent with both biological essentialism and gender schema theories. Rae et al. (2019) focused on the impact of affirmative care on a child's gender identity and expression. The length of time for which a young transgender child had been allowed to socially transition was not found to impact on their responses to these gender development tasks (Rae et al.,

2019). Even without the affirmation provided through a social transition, gender diverse children were found to score similarly across measures. Studies have specifically explored the impact of transgender children on their siblings. No significant differences were found between the control group of children and siblings of trans children across the measures used by Gulgoz et al. (2022), suggesting that the home environment does not provide gender socialization experiences that change a child's gender development. This would indicate that sex-specific expectations and experiences do not necessarily define a child's expressed gender identity later in life (Gulgoz et al., 2019). Whilst these results suggest that external factors do not appear to malleate an individual's gender identity, evidence suggests that gender identity can still be experienced as 'fluid' by some children and adolescents (Diamond, 2020). Gender fluidity is conceptually different to the idea of malleability, as it refers to fluidity in personal experience of gender rather than changes that occur as a result of external factors.

2.5.4 Limitations

A significant limitation of this review is that all studies included were conducted in westernised countries. This is significant seeing as cross-cultural differences in gender may have an impact on the gender development of children within these cultures. A large number of studies were contextualised in North America which, again, may have impacted the overall narrative of the data. To understand the impact of this limitation, further research focusing on gender identity development in less binary cultures would be helpful. In addition to this, the range of measures of gender identity reflected in the included studies are representative of varied and contrasting conceptualisations of gender as a concept. For example, stereotyped preferences are typically based on binary concept of gender, whereas some of the self-identified genders in studies such as Gulgoz et al. (2022) represent a more expansive concept of gender. This is problematic when comparing data from studies with contrasting conceptual assumptions.

2.5.5 Implications for Practice:

A clear implication for future practice in psychological research is the acknowledgement that gender is a multidimensional, continuous construct, and the use of single dichotomous measures is not sufficient to fully understand an individual's gender identity. Across psychological and health disciplines, evidence suggests that humans cannot be organised into two gendered categories and that these cultural expectations can be harmful to psychological outcomes (Hyde et al., 2019; Olson, et al., 2016). Therefore, policies and structures that refer to gender, should not be based on this outdated dimorphic criterion. To simplify gender in this way would disregard biological and psychological scientific evidence.

In relation to affirmative care, the results of this review indicate that a child's gendered preferences develop before they are able to recognise their own gender and that there is an essentialist quality to gender identity. For this reason, it seems unlikely that a child's gender identity could be malleated fully by social experience. Whether a child's gender identity is congruent with their sex assigned at birth or not, patterns of gender identity development are found to be similar (Olsen et al., 2015; Gulgoz et al., 2019; Rae et al., 2019). Exposure to more flexible gendered expectations also does not appear to affect gender identity development (Gulgoz et al., 2019). Further to this, the intensity of a transgender child's gender stereotyped preferences does not appear to be influenced by the affirmative support they receive (Rae et al., 2019). This would suggest that practitioners working with children should therefore strive to minimise the binary expectations and biases in their settings and reduce felt pressure for conformity to these norms (Perry et al., 2019). Evidence would suggest that this could support better psychological outcomes for these children but also reduce the potential for self-stereotyping, discrimination, and structural biases (Hyde et al., 2019).

Chapter 3: Parent/Carer experiences of Drag Queen Story Hour events: An empirical research project

Abstract

In schools, transgender and gender diverse children and young people have been referred to as one of the most marginalised and oppressed groups (Kosciw and Pizmony-Levy, 2016) and can be subject to bullying and victimisation (Day et al., 2018). The inter-group contact hypothesis, developed by Allport (1954), proposes that increased positive interactions between members of different social groups leads to a reduction in stigma. This principle has been applied to gender diversity with positive results (Walch et al., 2012; Hoffarth and Hodson, 2018; Massey et al., 2021). This research project aimed to explore the experiences of parents and their children when exposed to gender diversity in the form of a 'Drag Queen Story Hour' (DQSH) event. Drag Queen Story Hour UK is an organisation who deliver story time events for children in community spaces (e.g., libraries). 11 parents volunteered to engage in semi structured interviews to explore the following research questions: (R1) *How do parents/carers experience attending a DQSH event with their children? (R2) What types of parent/child conversations are prompted by a DQSH event? (R3) What impact do parents/carers believe that DQSH has on their child's understanding of gender?* Reflexive thematic analysis was used to attempt to understand the lived experiences of parents and their children, who were asked to reflect on their experiences during and after DQSH events.

Parents reported that the events created an engaging learning space for their children, in which they were able to access a positive LGBTQ+ role model, broadening their experience and understanding of gender. They also expressed concern about the current context for the LGBTQ+ community and conceptualised DQSH as 'important work'. These results provide initial support for the use of intergroup contact interventions to develop children's understanding of gender diversity.

Transgender and gender diverse children are referred to by Kosciw and Pizmony-Levy (2016) as one of the most marginalised and oppressed groups in schools. In comparison to non-transgender youth, transgender young people have been found to be more likely to experience victimisation and bullying (Day et al., 2018), verbal abuse, threats of assault, non-affirmation, and rejection (Price et al., 2021).

Gender diverse individuals, particularly in the Western world, often live in societies that expect people to experience congruence between their assigned gender and the gender with which they identify, resulting in a set of implicit social rules that privilege this congruence, known as *cisnormativity* (Horton et al., 2023; Kelly, 2022). Gender minority stress theory proposes that gender diverse individuals can be marginalised by cisnormative societal expectations (Goffnett et al., 2023) and social environments (Goldbach and Gibbs, 2017; Lubitow et al., 2017; Clary et al., 2023). When gender diverse individuals experience social conditions that reject or marginalize their gender identities, they may internalize feelings of shame and struggle with accepting themselves (Goffnett et al., 2023). In the most extreme cases, institutionalised cisnormativity can lead to harm as it systematically undermines a young person's identity resulting in gender diverse children '*unknowing'* themselves (McBride and Neary, 2021).

While schools are well placed to challenge cisnormative rules and expectations (Keenan, 2021) a lack of statutory guidance for school staff has left families and professionals questioning how best to support gender diverse children and young people (Smith-Millman et al., 2019). School confidence is undermined by the legacy of the historic section 28 legislation in the UK that prohibited discussion around lesbian and gay identities (Allen-Bidell and Bond, 2021). Schools must navigate the provision of gender-segregated spaces, challenging gender stereotypes, and managing changes of names and pronouns (Davy and Cordoba, 2020). Perhaps unsurprisingly, evidence collected from trans children and their families suggest that much of the support they are receiving from schools is 'ad-hoc and reactive' (Davy and Cordoba, 2020),

with schools even unaware of the difficulties their gender diverse students experience (Toomey at al., 2012).

3.1 How can we reduce prejudice towards gender diversity?

To actively create safe and supportive environments for gender diverse children and young people, it is important to understand the psychological underpinning of prejudice and discrimination. Transphobia can encompass both individual feelings/attitudes and societal stigma towards individuals who do not conform to cisnormative gender identities or presentations (Ellis et al., 2016). Much of the research surrounding this prejudice does not focus specifically on gender diverse populations, instead encompassing the broader LGBTQ+ population (Ellis et al., 2016). However, the gender diverse population may be more likely to experience prejudice due to the increased visibility that comes with social and/or physical transition (Ellis et al., 2016).

Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) is based on the idea that group members are motivated to protect their self-esteem, which can result in negative appraisals of those who do not conform to the norms of the ingroup. This prejudice can range from direct discrimination towards the outgroup, to more subtle bias towards the ingroup (Bond et al., 2010). Prejudice can be demonstrated through passive behaviours (e.g., ignoring) or active behaviours (e.g., voting for policies that negatively affect a group). Many of these behaviours are determined by the views held by an individual about the outgroup. When making judgements about a member of an outgroup, it is suggested by the stereotype content model that people often evaluate the warmth and competency they attribute to this group (Fiske et al., 2002).

Research suggests that prejudice towards gender diversity, specifically anti-trans prejudice, is associated with various factors. Anti-trans prejudice has been found to be associated with how people feel about their own gender identity, particularly in the context of ‘threatened masculinity’ (Harrison and Michelson, 2018). Research suggests that women are generally more supportive of transgender rights (Harrison and Michelson, 2018). This fits with

Nagoshi et al.'s (2008) three-component model of gender nonconformity prejudice, in which social conventionalism, hypermasculinity, and a fear of loss of social power linked with traditional gender roles are associated with prejudice towards gender diversity. Overall, these findings highlight the complex relationship between gender identity, prejudice, and societal attitudes towards gender diversity.

3.2 Experiences of Gender Diversity and LGBTQ+ Role Models

The inter-group contact hypothesis, developed by Allport (1954), proposes that increased positive interactions between members of different social groups leads to a reduction in stigma. Researchers have applied this principle to gender diverse populations. Using a randomised crossover design, Walch et al. (2012) found that interpersonal contact with a gender diverse individual led to greater immediate reductions in transphobia as opposed to hearing about transphobia from a gender typical speaker. This was echoed in research conducted by Hoffarth and Hodson (2018) who found an association between positive contact with a transgender individual and lower levels of anti-transgender bias. Media representations have also been found to promote increased empathy for transgender people and reduce anti-trans bias (Hoffarth and Hodson, 2018; Massey et al., 2021).

This suggests that positive interpersonal contact between children/young people and a gender diverse individual could reduce prejudice and stereotyping. However, structured and controlled inter-group contact opportunities are often limited, leaving it down to gender diverse children to disrupt cisnormativity and provoke reflection in school through their daily expression of their gender identity (McBride and Neary, 2021). Active inclusion, in the form of positive role models, can be limited for gender diverse young people (Ullman, 2018). LGBTQ+ young people have expressed that a lack of representation of diverse gender expressions and sexualities have facilitated a continued lack of understanding about the transgender community (McInroy and Craig, 2015). In particular, participants interviewed by McInroy and Craig (2015) indicated that they felt that there were limited positive representations of transgender people, with the majority of trans visibility reinforcing stereotypes. Negative cultural

stereotypes of transgender individuals (e.g., that trans people are mentally ill) have been found to be associated with greater levels of anti-trans prejudice (Gazzola and Morrison, 2014).

Representation of diversity across community settings can promote feelings of safety for LGBTQ+ youth, through the active demonstration of inclusivity (Clary et al., 2023). In a broader sense, the wider population can benefit from a role model who lives by their own personal standards and does not conform to social pressure (Taylor, 2022). Harrison and Michelson (2018) suggest that it may be possible to motivate individuals to re-evaluate their attitudes towards the gender diverse population if their perceptions of gendered norms and expectations can be altered. For this reason, it is possible that access to a gender diverse role model, with high levels of warmth and competence, may help to reduce negative stereotypes and, in turn, decrease active and passive discrimination towards this group.

3.3 Drag Queen Story Hour

Drag Queen Story Hour (DQSH) is an organisation that aims to '*show the world that being different is not a bad thing*' and '*provide imaginative role models for children to look up to'* (Drag Queen Story Hour Website, n.d.). Beginning in San Francisco in 2015, DQSH offers interactive storytelling events conducted by drag artists in schools, as well as other public facilities (e.g., museums or libraries). Each event lasts approximately one hour and involves a drag artist reading children's books. Previous research into the purpose of the US version of DQSH suggests that events are designed to provide a creative and diverse space in which attendees can experience delight, freedom, and pride (Montague and Latham, 2019). It is important to note here that a drag performer is not the same as a transgender individual (Keenan, 2021). Drag is a performance, intended for an audience and historically has been a term used to refer to any '*sartorially stylized performance'* (Keenan, 2021; Newton, 1979). However, although drag and transgenderism are very different concepts, they share an element of gender-nonconformity (Keenan, 2021). As Rupp and Taylor (2015) argue, drag "trouble [s] gender and sexuality by making people question the naturalness of what it means to be a man or a woman and what it means to be heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual" (p. 5). However, while some see drag as a means of educating audiences about self-expression, there are critics

who raise concerns about the exaggerated portrayals of gender and sexuality in drag performances.

In both the US and the UK, DQSH events have been heavily protested, leading to changes to law and policy surrounding drag performances (Stone, 2019). Librarians interviewed regarding this controversy conceptualised the debate as an intellectual freedom and censorship issue (Oltmann et al., 2022). As is emphasised by Stone (2019), the target of these protests *"is usually not the titles, contents, nor authors of any specific books, but rather who is reading them".* Shenton (2023) analysed statements made by people on the social media platform, twitter in response to DQSH and found frequent use of the word 'grooming' and 'inappropriate'. Many tweets were used to express the view that children were too young to learn about gender identity or sexual orientation. Shenton (2023) also noted that phrases in reference to the drag performers included "deviance," "downfall," "evil," and "weirdos". In a similar study, Davis and Kettrey (2022) analysed Reddit comments in response to DQSH. In their analysis of these comments, they described a general feeling of 'cultural threat' for those who fear the loss of the power associated with historically influenced American values.

3.4 Aims and Research Questions

Whilst a potential reduction in discrimination associated with exposure to gender diversity has been hypothesised, there is limited research about the impact of DQSH events on children and their families. Therefore, this research study aims to explore the experiences of children and their parents when experiencing gender diversity in the form of a 'Drag Queen Story Hour' (DQSH) event. The following research questions were chosen:

R1: How do parents/carers experience attending a DQSH event with their children?

R2: What types of parent/child conversations are prompted by a DQSH event?

R3: What impact do parents/carers believe that DQSH has on their child's understanding of gender?

3.5 Methods

To explore the impact of DQSH on children and their families, a qualitative, exploratory design was chosen in recognition of the individual and subjective experiences of the participants. The project was underpinned by a critical realist approach, with the researcher attempting to explore structures and mechanisms that may be shaping the experiences of participants. It was understood that all participants may have experienced the event differently and the event may have prompted a range of follow-up conversations in their homes. For this reason, individual semi-structured interviews were chosen as a means of capturing these personal narratives. The researcher aimed to conduct as many interviews as were needed to give a rounded understanding of the phenomena. Therefore, the number of DQSH events attended by the researcher was based on an ongoing iterative process of reflection based on saturation. Underpinning this methodology were the principles of 'queer theory', with researchers questioning the assumption that there is a 'normative' gender expression and challenging gender stereotypes (Blaise and Taylor, 2012).

3.5.1 Protests and Controversy

In the UK, all DQSH events attended by the researcher in the summer of 2022 were protested by a right-wing nationalist organisation named 'Patriotic Alternative' (James, 2023). This began at the first event of the summer, with a group of protesters holding signs saying 'welcome groomers' and resulted in an interruption to this first DQSH event including verbal abuse of the attendees and drag artist (Outhwaite, 2022). All subsequent events featured a heavy police presence and increased security measures to ensure the safety of the drag artist and the attendees. As the tour continued, counter-protest groups began to attend in support of the events (James, 2023). Rising tensions led to physical altercations between the opposing groups and an arrest being made for racial abuse towards a police officer (James, 2023).

3.5.2 Recruitment

Participants recruited for this study were parents/carers of children who chose to attend a community DQSH event at a local library. Demographic information was not collected about

participants as this was not relevant to the research aims or purpose, however participants were asked about the age of their child (see table 2). With the permission of participating venues and the DQSH organisation, the researcher attended 9 DQSH events that had been arranged without researcher influence. Attendees were made aware of the opportunity to participate in the research through distribution of a researcher-made poster by the DQSH team. Any interested attendees were directed to the researcher and provided with copies of the participant information sheet. If they chose to proceed, participants were then asked to provide the researcher with their email address in order to receive an online survey including the consent form and times available for interviews. Twenty parents provided email addresses and thirteen of these parents completed the online participant information sheet and consent form survey. Eleven participants took part in semi structured interviews.

3.5.3 Ethics

Ethical approval was gained from the University of Southampton Ethical Board. At the beginning of the semi-structured interview process, the importance of informed consent was reiterated, and participants were made aware of their right to withdraw at any stage prior to data analysis. Audio recordings of the interviews were created, transcribed using Microsoft Teams software and edited for accuracy by the researcher, using the audio recording for reference. All identifiable data was removed or changed by the researcher and, following transcription, all recordings were deleted. After the interviews had taken place, participants were sent a debrief form via email as well as a £20 voucher as compensation for their time. Participants were given pseudonyms during analysis and data was only analysed and presented for the purposes of the study as outlined in the participant information sheet.

3.5.4 Data Analysis

Data collected through the semi structured interviews was analysed using a process of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021). Reflexive thematic analysis entails the researcher actively engaging with the data (Braun and Clarke, 2019).This approach was chosen due to its coherence with the principles of critical realism and the qualitative paradigm. The

analytic process followed the stages of reflexive thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021); (1) dataset familiarisation, (2) data coding, (3) initial theme generation, (4) theme development, (5) theme refining, and (6) writing up. Thematic analysis was used in an attempt to "provide a coherent and compelling interpretation of the data, grounded in, or anchored by, the participants' accounts, that speaks to the situated realities" (Braun and Clarke, 2021, pp. 171). Initial coding was completed within each interview transcript and then repeated and refined. From these initial codes, subthemes were developed and eventually grouped into broad themes (see Appendix G) to reflect the narrative of the dataset as a whole. Throughout this analytic process, the researchers met to engage in reflexive discussion.

Table 3

Participant Information

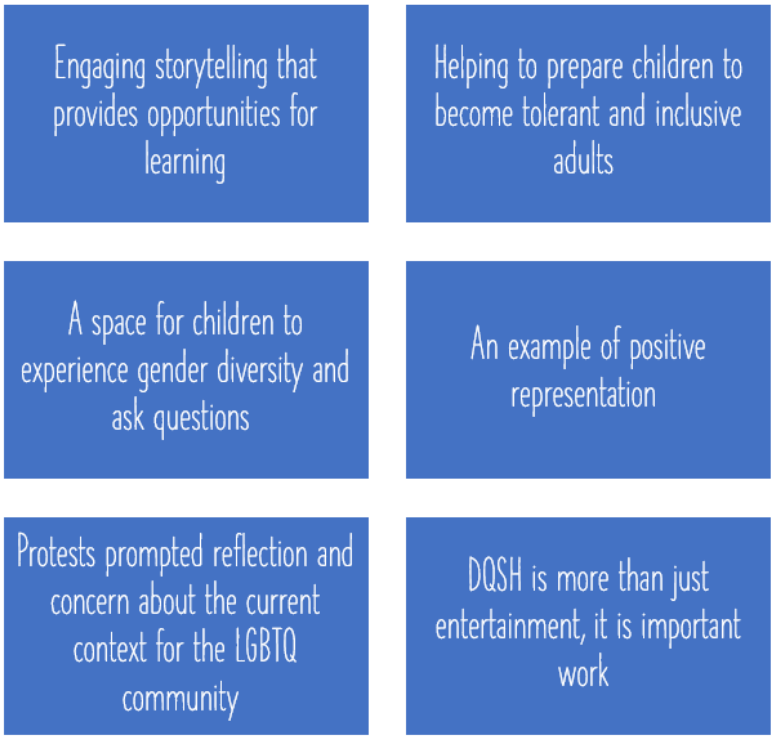
Participant Number	**Age of Child**
1	9.5 months
2	3 years
3	14 years old
4	6 months old
5	18 months old
6	1 year old
7	Child 1: 2.5 years old Child 2: 8 months old
8	6 years old
9	3.5 years old
10	Child 1: 4 years old Child 2: 6 years old
11	6.5 years old

3.6 Results

Six themes were developed through the thematic analysis process (as detailed in Figure 2 below). Within each of these themes are a number of subthemes, full details of which are provided in the thematic analysis guide (see Appendix G). Each broad theme will be discussed below, using illustrative participant quotes.

Figure 2

Thematic Map



3.6.1 Theme 1: Engaging storytelling that provides opportunities for learning.

When reflecting on the reasons why they chose to bring their child to a DQSH event, participants frequently referred to their desire for an engaging event for their child. Some participants expressed a belief that elements of drag performance overlap with the characteristics of effective and engaging storytelling. Participant 6 described DQSH as "*Very dramatic. Very colourful, very bright, very vibrant"*. Participant 1 explained:

> When you're looking at what you want out of someone telling a kid's story, is something that's very theatrical or someone that really brings the story to life. I Don't know. It's probably a little bit over at the top. And I think you get all of that when you've got a drag queen (Participant 1)

Many of the parents and carers interviewed described their child's engagement and sustained attention throughout the DQSH. In particular, participants noted that the story content was well pitched, age appropriate, and fun.

> I can appreciate like the thoughts behind trying to encourage that love of learning. And I really yeah I. I thought they were just absolutely like. They were captured. Their imagination was captured. Their excitement was captured (Participant 7).

After the event, many of the participants reported that their child's memories were focused on the content of the story and that they had been able to recall particularly funny or catchy parts of the story. Participant 8 also emphasised the opportunities that the event provided for academic learning:

> I thought Aida was an amazing teacher, I would say. So, there was a part where Aida got the children to think of their own idea for what would happen next in the story? Their own ending? And I thought that Aida really brought out the creativity and the children so well. Like an absolute professional teacher, like the best teacher you get (Participant 8)

3.6.2 Theme 2: DQSH can help prepare children to become tolerant and inclusive adults.

Many parents/carers also mentioned the potential for social and emotional development in their child as a reason for their attendance. In particular, participants frequently expressed a desire to prepare their child for future experiences of gender diversity and felt that DQSH may help their child to become more inclusive and tolerant of others.

> I think all of this stuff is empowering our next generation. I mean, when I think about my, I've got little cousins who are sort of 13/15 and they've got friends

> who are trans at school. The language is changing, so I'm sort of hoping that this sort of experience will equip our child. (Participant 11)

Reflecting on the impact of the DQSH on their child, many participants specifically expressed a belief that experiences of diversity help to normalise diversity for their child.

> I hope that as he grows older, he is able to realize that this is another type of person another way. How they identify or or choose their path in life, and that it is acceptable, and they can do, you know, normal things that other people would do (Participant 5)

Some parents recounted ways in which they had specifically aimed to challenge gender stereotypes for their child and the responsibility they felt to encourage tolerance in their child. Participant 7 explained their belief that "*ignorance breeds people like the ones outside the library".* In line with this, participant 1 articulated a view that negativity and intolerance can be "*passed down"* in families.

3.6.3 Theme 3: DQSH can provide a space for children to experience gender diversity and ask questions.

For many of the children who attended the events, parents/carers explained that meeting a drag queen was a new experience. When asked about the impact of this experience on their child, many of the participants with children below the age of 6 explained that their child took the drag performer at face value and did not question their gender identity. Specifically, participant 2 referred to the impact of adult modelling on the child's acceptance of the drag artist's gendered presentation:

> I really don't think that that the gender in reference to Aida would have been a question for her. She you know, I referred to Aida as 'she' and I think she would have. I don't think X would have thought even thought about it. She would have accepted that that's how mummy is saying it so that's how it is (Participant 2).

In addition to this, participant 7 expressed a belief that young children do not place the

same value on gender that adults do.

> I don't think gender is something that they find important or interesting. Yeah, it tends to be something that adults hold on to as opposed to children (Participant 7).

Instead, participants felt that being exposed to gender diversity in the form of a drag artist would broaden their child's understanding of how gender works, enlightening their child to the fact '*it's not as black and white as it sometimes seems' (Participant 2).* Many participants also hoped that the event would provide an opportunity for children to ask questions about gender in a safe and structured space.

> It's nice to have opportunities with someone who is willing to not be embarrassed and to have that, you know, really frank discussion and conversation and answer questions that maybe, as a parent, I'm unable to answer (Participant 10)

However, some participants suggested that they would have liked for there to have been more room for children to ask questions if they wanted to.

3.6.4 Theme 4: DQSH is an example of positive representation.

Another common theme was the importance of positive representation of both the LGBTQ+ and neurodiverse populations. A number of the participants cited their own child's neurodiversity as a motivating factor that drove their attendance.

> It's really important, representation, more than just the makeup and the wig. It's having people here who are neurodivergent and proudly so (Participant 11)

Another clear message was that participants felt the way in which the drag artist was represented also held importance. Firstly, participant 3 highlighted the way in which gender diversity is presented in pantomime as something to be laughed at. In contrast DQSH presented a positive example of gender diversity.

> It was funny because he was funny and humorous. We weren't laughing at him because he was in a dress. (Participant 3).

Further to this, participant 3 specifically referenced the setting in which the representation was happening, emphasising *"it was just important to go to a normal place and seeing something that is different".* The context of the events was also mentioned by participant 11, who felt that it was important that representation of gender diversity was accessible in all public settings, not just those associated with the LGBTQ+ community.

> It was quite nice because you've got this like massive kind of juxtaposition of like quite corporate sort of 'normal' if you like, 'the straights' to coin a phrase, and then you've got this like beautiful, exciting rainbow glittery Aida coming out to tell stories (Participant 11).

Whilst these specific statements about the representation of gender and neurodiversity were mentioned most frequently by participants who had children belonging to one of these populations, a wider group of participants referred to the general self-confidence that was modelled by the drag artist.

> It takes a lot of courage to be your own person and I think that confidence and courage is definitely what's kind of missing from schools that you can really get from someone that that stands out from the crowd (Participant 1)

3.6.5 Theme 5: The protests prompted reflection and concern about the current context for the LGBTQ+ community.

Whilst the protests were not initially intended to be a focus of the research, they became a particularly salient part of the experience for participants. Many participants expressed shock at the intensity of these protests and recounted their surprise at the level of security that was necessary in order for the event to go ahead safely. A number of participants emphasised that the protests negatively affected both the attendees and the event organisation. Participants reported feeling *"overwhelmed', 'angry', 'sick' and "in fight or flight".* Many

participants reported leaving the event feeling concern for their child, the other attendees, and for the safety of the drag artist.

As parents/carers, participants described strong emotional reactions to the protests, alongside a belief that the protestors should be challenged.

> I didn't think this before I went, but it's important work that people need to do because if you don't do it, then those horrible people will win (participant becomes emotional) and they shouldn't because they're wrong (Participant 2)

Rather than discussions around gender, many participants explained that the conversations they had with their children after the event were focused on helping them to understand the protests. They began to conceptualise DQSH as a means of challenging intolerance and expressed admiration for the drag artist's resilience.

> I think it's absolutely it is nothing short of heroic to go all around the country with a braying individual after you (Participant 4)

3.6.6 Theme 6: DQSH is more than just entertainment, it is important work.

Having experienced the protests, participants began to explain that they would consciously choose to attend events in future as a demonstration of their personal views. They noted that the event became '*more than entertainment*'**.** Participants reported ongoing reflection after the event, focused on the state of affairs in the UK for the LGBTQ+ population and the way in which drag is becoming politicised. Many felt that the experience of the intensity of the protests had challenged their concept of how safe the UK is for the LGBTQ+ community.

> I think it's easy to live in a bubble of, you know, it's accepted, and you can be who you want. And I think that was the first time for a long time where I felt like where that challenged my opinion of that because I I genuinely thought that things were not like that anymore. But it opened my eyes to and reminded me of how horrendous it can be (Participant 2)

Some of the participants then actively attended subsequent events, in an attempt to "*reconcile*" and "*try and understand a little bit better the context of the whole thing" (Participant 4).* Moving forward, many participants expressed a belief that DQSH was important work and could provide a means of educating society about diversity. It was frequently suggested that an adaptation should be made for teenagers, to ensure that these positive experiences of diversity are available at this important time in a young person's development.

> It would be interesting to get either to do it at infant junior and then secondary school level and see whether that draws out a wider conversation (Participant 9)

3.7 Discussion

The narratives from parents/carers of children who have attended DQSH events suggest that DQSH was a positive experience for parents and their children. For children, the events were reported to create an engaging learning space, in which they were able to access a positive LGBTQ+ role model, broadening their experience and understanding of gender. Many of the parents/carers made an active choice to provide their child with this opportunity, hoping that it would prepare them for future experiences of diversity and support them to become tolerant and inclusive adults. The controversy surrounding these events prompted significant emotional and reflective responses from participants about the wider context for the LGBTQ+ community and the messages that are sent to their children through their engagement and allyship. Parents/carers felt that their 'eyes had been opened' to the continued adversities faced by gender diverse individuals and began to conceptualise DQSH as a necessary and educational experience, rather than just a fun event.

Research suggests that the drag artists involved in the DQSH intervention may provide a positive role model and affirmative space for gender diverse children and young people (Radis et al., 2021). DQSH offers structured and positive interpersonal contact between children/young people and a gender diverse individual, which could potentially reduce

prejudice and stereotyping (Allport, 1954). DQSH events, in which the role of a teacher is taken by a drag artist is a clear way of breaking stereotypes and biases (Keenan and Lil Miss Hot Mess, 2021). Relating this back to the stereotype content model, it is possible that placing a gender diverse individual in a teaching role may increase the child's judgement of competence for this group.

Reflecting on LGBTQ+ role models in children's literature, Moller (2020) underscored the importance of LGBTQ+ literature not solely invoking sympathy, but also celebrating and empowering LGBTQ+ individuals. Interestingly, Crawley's (2017) analysis of LGBTQ+ literature revealed a recurring pattern of initial experiences of sadness and isolation, followed by personal growth. More joyful and nuanced depictions of gender diversity, in both literature and in drag performances, may support a more positive construction of gender diversity for children and young people. This may help to further break down stereotypes and build positive role models, helping children to envision tolerant and hospitable communities where LGBTQ+ people are accepted (Keenan and Lil Miss Hot Mess, 2021).

In addition to positive interpersonal contact that may be provided by DQSH, there is also a potential for social and cultural learning. Research suggests that drag can provide an avenue for children to ask questions about social norms regarding gender in a safe context. Keenan and Lil Miss Hot Mess (2021) explained that children often ask genuine questions about whether the drag performer is a boy or a girl at DQSH events. Whilst many of the parents/carers hypothesised that their child was too young to generate these types of questions, participants noted that they would welcome this opportunity for their child when they reached an age at which they could engage in this dialogue. Teachers often report a lack of confidence with discussing LGBTQ+ issues, particularly in the context of faith schools in the UK (Carlile, 2020). Therefore, this opportunity to ask questions may benefit not only children but the adults supporting them too. Accessible information about LGBTQ+ issues has also been found to increase perceived feelings of safety for gender non-conforming students (Toomey et al., 2012). Malins (2017) emphasised that LGBTQ+ topics, by their very nature, may once have

been considered inappropriate for children but it is important that we reflect on shifts in what society deems to be inappropriate, due to changing ideologies and demographics.

In relation to the wider context, the majority of participants expressed shock and surprise at the intensity of the negative response to the DQSH events. Many spoke of engaging in further research into the views of the protestors and the impact of their social media presence. As is emphasised by Ellis (2022), social media has provided a means of amplifying the views of these protestors in both the UK and US. Recent research, exploring twitter (Shenton, 2023) and Reddit (Davis and Kettrey, 2022) responses to DQSH evidenced the way in which children were conceptualised by protestors as "vulnerable," "malleable," "groomable," and "impressionable". Many of the participants interviewed experienced protestors vocalising the belief that a DQSH event could affect child development and 'promote gender questioning'. For many of the parents/carers interviewed, this hostility had previously been hidden. Increased awareness of the discrimination faced by the LGBTQ+ community invoked a sense of empathy and concern in participants, factors that have been found to be associated with prosocial behaviour towards a group (Lindsey et al., 2015; Tompkins et al., 2015). With attendees likely to have entered this experience with lower levels of ingroup bias, evidenced by their choice to attend, it is unsurprising that the intensity of these protests and the perspective taking they encouraged led to increased empathy and allyship.

Finally, in line with the views of participants, it is argued by Keenan and, drag queen/Professor at the University of Arizona, Lil Miss Hot Mess (2021) that drag as an art form holds pedagogical value for children and can be used effectively for teaching and learning. DQSH is not prescriptive and instead uses a dialogic structure that is designed to capture the imagination of its audience. Many elements of drag performance share similar characteristics with good practice for early years education (Keenan and Lil Miss Hot Mess, 2021; Townend, 2019). DQSH is a multisensory experience with bright colours, use of music and imaginative playful storytelling (Townend, 2019). Library staff interviewed by Barriage et al. (2020) felt that DQSH could help to enhance child language development and promote an enjoyment of literature. Keenan and Lil Miss Hot Mess (2021) refer to this as 'drag pedagogy',

summarised as '*play as praxis, aesthetic transformation, strategic defiance, destigmatization of shame, and embodied kinship*'.

3.7.1 Limitations

There are a number of limitations of this study. Firstly, where DQSH is a relatively new phenomena, this research was only an initial exploration of the general impact of the events. The data collected was participant led and based on subjective experiences. This meant that the data was affected by the age of the children of each of the participants. With many of the participants being parents of children who were very young, it was not possible to fully address research question 2 about the parent/child conversations prompted by the event (see table 2). With participants only recruited from those who chose to attend the events, the data collected is likely to be reflective of the views of those who are already supportive and tolerant of the LGBTQ+ community. This may explain the homogenous nature of the data. A broader range of opinions about the impact of these events may have been expressed if data was collected from parents who do not consider themselves to be allies of the LGBTQ community. In addition to this, the context of these events and the heavy protests surrounding the tour, may have had a significant impact on participant experience.

3.7.2 Future Research

Future research may wish to explore the impact specifically of DQSH events in which LGBTQ+ characters are featured in the stories that are chosen. Research suggests that LGBTQ+ literature can 'productively trouble the heteronormative spaces of schools' and allow children to ask questions and prompt meaningful dialogue (DePalma, 2016; van Horn, 2016; Crisp and Knezek et al., 2010). A student interviewed by Crisp and Knezek et al., (2010) was quoted as saying that they did not see themselves in the literature they had access to in their school. Kneeskern and Reeder (2020) found that prolonged exposure to gender non-conforming protagonist in a multi-chapter children's book reduced children's endorsement of gender stereotypes on a gender stereotyped attitudes measure. Whilst the stories read as part of the 2022 summer DQSH tour did not have any overtly LGBTQ+ characters, a number of

children's books with LGBTQ+ characters have been written by the drag artist involved. For this reason, future research about the impact of this specific component of future events may be helpful. It also may be useful to explore the conversations prompted following DQSH events with older children.

3.7.3 Implications for Practice

When considering the implications for practice of these results, it is relevant to note that all participants reported that contact with a gender diverse individual was a positive experience for their child. None of the participants felt that their child had experienced any confusion about their own gender or had a distorted understanding of gender as a whole following the DQSH event. In contrast, participants believed that the experience would support their child to react with tolerance in any future experiences of diversity. These findings are supported by research which suggests that this interpersonal contact with a gender diverse individual can have a greater impact on children's attitudes and behaviours than just speaking about LGBTQ+ issues (Walch et al., 2012), as well as helping to increase feelings of safety and belonging in LGBTQ+ children and develop empathy and tolerance amongst cisgender peers.

For this reason, opportunities for children to experience interpersonal contact with gender diverse individuals may be a helpful way of creating safe and inclusive spaces in schools or community facilities. Professionals, such as Educational Psychologists, may recommend this type of contact when supporting schools to develop more tolerant and inclusive cultures. However, it is important to remember that the contact facilitated by the DQSH events was heavily structured with high levels of security and risk assessment. With the current context of turbulence and adversity for the LGBTQ+ community, it will be important to ensure the safety of any similar intergroup contact interventions. It is also important that gender diverse individuals are represented in a positive way, rather than reinforcing negative stereotypes. For this reason, Educational Psychologists may also focus on ensuring school staff are appropriately trained and show an awareness of a range of gender diverse presentations, moving beyond stereotyped representations.

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Appendix A Search Strategy and Associated Results

Database	Search Strategy	Number of Results
PsycInfo	**S1:** (Transgender* OR "gender identity" OR "gender identity disorder" OR "gender dysphoria" OR "gender divers*" OR "gender non-conform*" OR transsexual OR transexual OR "gender typed preferences") **S2:** (Longitudinal OR "long term" OR "lagged*" OR "follow up" OR "follow-up" OR cohort OR "over time") **S3:** S1 AND S2	3092
ERIC	**S1:** (Transgender* OR "gender identity" OR "gender identity disorder" OR "gender dysphoria" OR "gender divers*" OR "gender non-conform*" OR transsexual OR transexual OR "gender typed preferences") **S2:** (Longitudinal OR "long term" OR "lagged*" OR "follow up" OR "follow-up" OR cohort OR "over time") **S3:** S1 AND S2	111
Web of Science (Core Collection)	Searching within abstracts and filtered to be articles **S1:** (Transgender* OR "gender identity" OR "gender identity disorder" OR "gender dysphoria" OR "gender divers*"	2059

	OR “gender non-conform*” OR transsexual OR transexual OR “gender typed preferences”) **S2:** (Longitudinal OR “long term” OR “lagged*” OR “follow up” OR “follow-up” OR cohort OR “over time”) **S3:** S1 AND S2	
ProQuest Dissertations and Theses	Anywhere except full text (NOFT), doctoral theses only **S1:** (Transgender* OR “gender identity” OR “gender identity disorder” OR “gender dysphoria” OR “gender divers*” OR “gender non-conform*” OR transsexual OR transexual OR “gender typed preferences”) **S2:** (Longitudinal OR “long term” OR “lagged*” OR “follow up” OR “follow-up” OR cohort OR “over time”) **S3:** S1 AND S2	413
Scopus	**Search within abstract/title/keywords, filtered to be articles** **S1:** (Transgender* OR {gender identity} OR {gender identity disorder} OR {gender dysphoria} OR {gender divers*} OR {gender non-conform*} OR transsexual OR transexual OR {gender typed preferences} **S2:** (Longitudinal OR {long term} OR “lagged*” OR {follow up} OR {follow-up} OR cohort OR {over time}) S3: S1 AND S2	4304

Appendix B Quality Assessment using QuADS Checklist

Study	Theoretical or Conceptual Underpinning	Statement of Research Aims?	Clear Description of Population?	Appropriate Study Design for Aims?	Appropriate Sampling	Rationale for Data Collection?	Appropriate Data Collection Tool?	Description of Procedure?	Recruitment Data Provided?	Justification for Analytic Method?	Appropriate Analysis Methods?	Stakeholder Consideration	Strengths and Limitations Considered?	Total Percentage
Behrendt (1989)	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3		2		1	3	0%
Barron & Capous-Desyllas, (2017)	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2		2		0	1	2%
Bruun and Farr (2021)	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	3		2		0	3	9%
Campbell et al. (2000)	3	3	1	3	1	3	3	3		3		0	1	1%
DiDonato et al. (2012)	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3		3		0	3	7%

Golombok et al. (2012)	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	0	1	6%
Gulgoz et al. (2022)	3	1	2	3	3	2	3	3	2	0	3	4%
Halim et al (2013)	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	0	3	7%
Hassler et al (2022)	2	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	1	0	3	4%
Kahn and Halpern (2019)	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	2%
Kornienko et al. (2016)	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	2%
Lauer et al (2018)	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	1	0	3	2%
Martin (2009)	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	0%
McHale et al. (2001)	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	0	3	0%

McHale et al. (2004)	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	0	3	7%
Potter et al. (2021)	2	1	3	3	3	1	2	2	1	0	2	4%
Rae et al., (2019)	2	1	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	0	3	9%
Shirley (2000)	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	5%
Singh et al. (2021)	3	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	0	1	7%
Steensma et al., (2013)	2	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	1	0	1	7%
Szkrybalo and Ruble (1999)	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	0%
Warin (2000)	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	0	1	7%

Appendix C Recruitment Poster

UNIVERSITY OF Southampton

RESEARCH PROJECT

How do parents/carers and their children experience Drag Queen Story Hour events?

My name is Ellie Holman and I am a trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Southampton. I am conducting a research project, aiming to explore the experiences of children and their parents/carers who have attended a Drag Queen Story Hour UK event.

I am looking for parents/carers who:

- Have attended a Drag Queen Story Hour UK event with their child
- Are willing to share their views and experiences of the event

If you decided to participate you would need to:

- Complete an 1:1 follow up interview with me after the event for up to 1 hour
- This would take place either in person, on the phone, or using online video call software

Parents/carers who participate in the project will be given a £20 amazon voucher for their time.

For more information please contact me (Ellie) via email at: ejh2n20@soton.ac.uk or look out for me at your Drag Queen Story Hour Event

Appendix D Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Study Title: How do parents/carers and their children experience Drag Queen Story Hour Events?
Researcher: Ellie Holman
ERGO number: 72004

You are being invited to take part in the above research study. To help you decide whether you would like to take part or not, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the information below carefully and ask questions if anything is not clear or you would like more information before you decide to take part in this research. You may like to discuss it with others, but it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.

What is the research about?
This research project will aim to explore the experience of parents/carers and their children after attending a Drag Queen Story Hour event. If you choose to participate, in the weeks following the event you will be invited to engage in a 1:1 interview with the researcher. In this interview we will discuss how you and your child felt before, during, and after the event. The study has been approved by the University of Southampton Ethics Committee.

Why have I been asked to participate?
You have been asked to participate as you have recently attended a Drag Queen Story Hour UK event with your child. We are aiming to recruit between 12 and 15 parents for this research.

What will happen to me if I take part?
Any parents who decide to participate will take part in a 1:1 interview with the researcher. Your child will not need to attend this interview. The interviews will be conducted either using Microsoft Teams, in person or over the phone and will be audio recorded and transcribed. This is so that I have an accurate record of what you say and will be used for the research described above.

Are there any benefits in my taking part?
Parents/carers who decide to participate in the research will be given a £20 Amazon voucher for their time.

Are there any risks involved?
We do not anticipate any major risks arising from the study, but there may be the potential for discomfort if sharing or hearing negative experiences that have occurred during or after the event. If you feel that you have been affected by any of the issues raised or topics discussed throughout this research, you can contact your GP or the Samaritans helpline on 116 123 for support. Details of Mermaids UK, a charity that may be able to provide specific support relevant to the theme of gender diversity can be found below:

Mermaids UK
info@mermaidsuk.org.uk
https://mermaidsuk.org.uk/contact-us/ (follow this link for web chat support)
Helpline: 0808 801 0400
Or text MERMAIDS to 85258 for free 24/7 crisis support

What data will be collected?
No personal data will be collected as part of this study. We will collect a recording of the interview, however if any identifiable data is discussed, this will be anonymised when it is typed up and the recording will be deleted.

Will my participation be confidential?

Your participation and the information we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential.

The recording of your interview will be uploaded automatically to the University of Southampton's account on Microsoft stream and nobody else will be able to see this recording. When it is transcribed your name and any identifiable data will be removed or changed. Once the transcription is complete, the recording will be deleted.

Only members of the research team and responsible members of the University of Southampton may be given access to data about you for monitoring purposes and/or to carry out an audit of the study to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations. Individuals from regulatory authorities (people who check that we are carrying out the study correctly) may require access to your data. All of these people have a duty to keep your information, as a research participant, strictly confidential.

Do I have to take part?
No, it is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide you want to take part, you will need to complete an online consent form to show you have agreed to take part.

What happens if I change my mind?
You have the right to change your mind and withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without your participant rights being affected.

What will happen to the results of the research?

- Your personal details will remain strictly confidential. Research findings made available in any reports or publications will not include information that can directly identify you without your specific consent.
- Results of this study will be written up as part of a doctoral thesis with the potential of being published.
- The transcript of the interview you take part in will be analysed and written up as part of the doctoral thesis and will be seen by the research team.

Where can I get more information?

If you would like further information, you can contact the researcher at ejh2n20@soton.ac.uk

What happens if there is a problem?
If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you can contact research supervisors, Sarah Wright s.f.wright@soton.ac.uk and Cora Sargeant c.c.sargeant@soton.ac.uk, who will do their best to answer your questions.
If you remain unhappy or have a complaint about any aspect of this study, please contact the University of Southampton Research Integrity and Governance Manager (023 8059 5058, rgoinfo@soton.ac.uk).

Data Protection Privacy Notice
The University of Southampton conducts research to the highest standards of research integrity. As a publicly-funded organisation, the University has to ensure that it is in the public interest when we use personally identifiable information about people who have agreed to take part in research. This means that when you agree to take part in a research study, we will use information about you in the ways needed, and for the purposes specified, to conduct and complete the research project. Under data protection law, 'Personal data' means any information that relates to and is capable of identifying a living individual. The University's data protection policy governing the use of personal data by the University can be found on its website (https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page).

This Participant Information Sheet tells you what data will be collected for this project and whether this includes any personal data. Please ask the research team if you have any questions or are unclear what data is being collected about you.

Our privacy notice for research participants provides more information on how the University of Southampton collects and uses your personal data when you take part in one of our research projects and can be found at http://www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/sharepoint/intranet/ls/Public/Research%20and%20Integrity%20Privacy%20Notice/Privacy%20Notice%20for%20Research%20Participants.pdf

Any personal data we collect in this study will be used only for the purposes of carrying out our research and will be handled according to the University's policies in line with data protection law. The anonymised data may also be uploaded to the university repository to make data available for future projects. If any personal

data is used from which you can be identified directly, it will not be disclosed to anyone else without your consent unless the University of Southampton is required by law to disclose it.

Data protection law requires us to have a valid legal reason ('lawful basis') to process and use your Personal data. The lawful basis for processing personal information in this research study is for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. Personal data collected for research will not be used for any other purpose.

For the purposes of data protection law, the University of Southampton is the 'Data Controller' for this study, which means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The University of Southampton will keep identifiable information about you for 10 years after the study has finished after which time any link between you and your information will be removed.

If you have any questions about how your personal data is used, or wish to exercise any of your rights, please consult the University's data protection webpage (https://www.southampton.ac.uk/legalservices/what-we-do/data-protection-and-foi.page) where you can make a request using our online form. If you need further assistance, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer (data.protection@soton.ac.uk).

Thank you.

Thank you for taking the time to read the information sheet and considering taking part in the research.

Appendix E Topic Guide for Semi Structured Interviews

Topic Guide: Exploring parent and child experiences of 'Drag Queen Story Hour'

Name and age of child

Do you go to library often?

How did you hear about DQSH?

What made you want to go to DQSH specifically?

- Tell me about your experience of the DQSH event?
  - How did you find the event?
  - What was it like?
  - How did your child find it?

- Did your child speak to you about DQSH after the event?
  - What kinds of things did you talk about?

- Can you think of any conversations have you had with your child about gender before the event?
  - Have they asked about how gender works or what gender they are/your gender etc.?

- Since drag queen story hour, has your little one had any questions linked to the event?
  - What kinds of things did you talk about?

- Do you imagine that your child will be left with any questions after DQSH?
  - Do you think their experience of DQSH will impact on their understanding of how gender works?

- Having seen an event of this nature what is your opinion of drag queens reading stories to children?
  - Was your view at all different before seeing the event? If so, how?

Appendix F Thematic Analysis Guide

Theme	Subtheme	Definition	Example Quote
Engaging storytelling that provides opportunities for learning	Child memories focused on story content	Parent/carer refers to conversations after the event that were focused on story content.	*He spoke about the book content. But not about the drag Queen story hour, if that makes sense?*
	Children were engaged and entertained	Parent/carer describes their child as being engaged during the event.	*They were captured. Their imagination was captured. Their excitement was captured.*
	DQSH is age appropriate	Parent/carer describes the event as age appropriate	*It's interesting that people have chosen to campaign so viciously when he's actually not a particularly sexualised character.*
	Elements of drag overlap with effective storytelling	Parent/carer refers to features of drag and describes how they are congruent with engaging storytelling	*When you're looking at what you want out of someone telling a kid's story, is something that's very theatrical or someone that really brings the story to life. I Don't know. It's probably a little bit over at the top. And I think you get all of that when you've got a drag queen.*
	Opportunities for academic learning	Parent/carer describes parts of the event that they believe provided opportunities for academic learning	*I thought Aida was an amazing teacher, I would say. So, there was a part where Aida got the children to think of their own idea for what would happen next in the story? Their own ending? And I thought that Aida really brought out the creativity and the children so well. Like an absolute professional teacher, like the best teacher you get.*
	Desire for an engaging event for their child	Parent/carer expressed a belief that DQSH would be an engaging event for their child	*We decided as a gang that we would go and that it would be more interesting and more kind of current than maybe some of the more traditional story hours,*
DQSH can help prepare children to become tolerant and inclusive adults	Desire to prepare child for future experiences of diversity	Parent/carer refers to their child's future experiences of diversity in reference to the DQSH event	*I want him to just, for that to just be something of his day-to-day so he doesn't call people out on certain things. That's just everything he's known, and he's grown up with so much variety that's then just everything is just normal to him. And then you can really focus in life on the stuff that's really meaningful rather than what divides us.*
	Experiences of diversity help to normalise diversity for children	Parent/carer describes the impact of experiencing gender diversity in relation to normalising differences	I *think it will make him less sort of drawn to it as something that's very different. I want him to just see it as normal and I want him to see different ways of life, different cultures, different ways of living.*

	Negative responses to diversity can be learned	Parent/carer expresses a belief that children can learn negative views about diversity from others	*If you give the opportunity for a parent to voice their negative opinion that then gets in like yesterday. That's how it gets passed down,*
	Parent desire to challenge gender stereotypes	Parent/carer describes a desire to challenge gender stereotypes for their child	*We do talk about it quite regularly. Me and my partner try really hard to refer to people as 'they' rather than 'he' or 'she', because it's something that both of us sort of do at work anyway and and in our general lives*
	Parent desire to support their children to become more inclusive and tolerant	Parent/carer describes a desire for their child to grow up as an inclusive/tolerant adult and believes DQSH will support this	*So actually, I think all of this stuff is empowering our next generation. I mean, when I think about my, I've got little cousins who are sort of 13/15 and they've got friends who are trans at school. The language is changing, so I'm sort of hoping that this sort of experience will equip our child.*
DQSH provides a space for children to experience gender diversity and ask questions	Child took Aida at face value	Parent/carer notes that their child did not question Aida's gender presentation	*I don't think it would have occurred to X because I don't think gender is something that they find important or interesting. Yeah, it tends to be something that adults hold on to as opposed to children.*
	DQSH can broaden child understanding and experience of gender	Parent/carer suggests that DQSH can broaden child's understanding of gender diversity	*How gender works? I suppose it broadens it, doesn't it? Yeah, it broadens the fact that it's not as black and white as it sometimes seems.*
	Providing a safe space for children to ask questions about gender	Parent/carer suggests that the event allowed their child to ask questions about gender or that they would have liked more opportunities to do so.	*It's nice to have opportunities with someone who is willing to not be embarrassed and to have that, you know, really frank discussion and conversation and answer questions that maybe, as a parent, I'm unable to answer.*
	Meeting a drag queen was a new experience for child	Parent/carer explains that their child had not met a drag queen before the event	*Drag Queens, they've got the hair, the makeup, the loud voice. It's all very theatrical. And I just think maybe it was his age. He was just a bit taken aback by it. By the first kind of 5-10 minutes because it is different, and it is unusual and it's loud*
DQSH is an example of positive representation	Importance of representation of neurodiverse individuals	Parent/carer refers to neurodiversity and the impact of the positive representation of neurodiversity	*It's really important representations, more than just the makeup and the wig. It's having people here in your neurodivergent and proudly doing so. It's really important, was significant for our daughter as well to have that.*
	Importance of representation of LGBTQ+ individuals	Parent/carer refers to gender and/or sexuality and the impact of the positive representation of the LGBTQ community	*It's because X is autistic and is aware now of uh, sexuality being different to other peoples and so I want to want to put her in the position where she sees people that*

			are different as well
	Positive and joyful experiences of gender diversity	Parent/carer refers to the experience of gender diversity as being particularly positive and/or joyful	*We've seen panto and and you know when the the the man comes out dressed as the lady and that's always humorous. And so that's always made her laugh. And but this wasn't this wasn't. It was funny. So he was funny but not because he was in a dress. If you see what I mean. That wasn't The funny thing. It was funny because he was funny and humorous. We weren't laughing at him because he was in a dress.*
	Modelling the confidence to be who you want to be	Parent/carer describes Aida as a positive role model for children to be who they would like to be	*It takes a lot of courage to be your own person and I think that confidence and courage is definitely what's kind of missing from schools that you can really get from someone that that stands out from the crowd.*
	Representation in community settings	Parent/carer refers to the community setting as being an important context for the representation of diversity	*It was it was just important to go to a normal place and seeing something that is different* *So, in terms of like the like, the glamour of a drag show, it was quite nice because you've got this like massive kind of juxtaposition of like quite corporate sort of 'normal' if you like, 'the straights' to coin a phrase, and then you've got this like boolean, beautiful, exciting rainbow glittery Aida coming out to tell stories.*
The protests prompted reflection and concern about the current context for the LGBTQ community	A turbulent time for gender diverse individuals where drag is politicised	Parent/carer refers to the current context for LGBTQ/gender diverse individuals	*Honestly, it's. It is quite cutting in that sense, isn't it? Feels like this is obviously the moment that something is happening. It's so polarizing.* *So, I was talking to my sister about this because she was saying, you know, it's the same as a pantomime and to some extent, I was thinking, yeah, it is. But historically and politically, it. It isn't. Because it's it's the way that, you know, queer people express their queerness*
	Concerns for Aida's safety and admiration for their resilience	Parent/carer refers to Aida's safety and/or resiliency	*I think it's absolutely it is nothing short of heroic to go all around the country with a braying individual after you so yeah.* *It must have been a very stressful experience for Aida, and I spent the whole of the rest of the evening thinking. I wonder if he's safe.*
	Belief that protestors should be challenged	Parent/carer expresses the belief that the protestors should be challenged	*I didn't think this before I went, but it's important work that people need to do because if you don't do it, then those horrible people will win.*

			(participant becomes emotional) and they shouldn't because they're wrong.
	Emotional parental response to protests	Parent/carer describes an emotional response to the protests or the impact of the protests on the event	*Yeah, it's like it upset it like now it upsets me quite a lot thinking about it. But at the time, I think I was just in flight fight or flight. Almost like sort of just thinking, right, I need to keep it together because I'm with X and I need to make sure that I'm OK. But rescuer mode, like everybody, is everybody else OK?*
	Event prompted parental reflection	Parent/carer describes reflection that was prompted by their experience of DQSH	*Part of the reason I went two days later was to kind of revisit it and to kind of reconcile and try and work out kind of what was actually going on. And I spent a lot of time, my husband and I on the Internet that night after the event to try and understand a little bit better the context of the whole thing.*
	The protests had a negative impact on attendees and event organisation	Parent/carer refers to the negative impact of the protests on attendees/Aida/event organisation	*I felt quite overwhelmed and aware of everybody else's response. There was a mum that I knew vaguely from just living in reading, who was really upset and was crying, and I was really aware of her feeling really upset* *Obviously, they changed it for security, which was a shame because actually it went from being in the kind of womb-like child part of the library, rather than something that was a bit more sort of corporate, because that's where they do workshops and things.*
	Protests prompted parent child conversations	Parent/carer refers to conversations with their child that were prompted by the experience of the protests	*Then a protester arrived. So, then there was some shouting going on and. But I felt it was still a positive thing that I could explain to my son about what was going on and that people have the right to protest, but I I felt that they were being bullies really, so we were talking about that as well and how the police were there to protect us and the role of police officers too*
DQSH is more than just entertainment, it is important work	Attendance as a demonstration of personal views	Parent/carer refers to their attendance as being a demonstration of their personal beliefs	*I was really, really glad to be there. And what I did say, when I saw the crowds outside was, 'I'm going to Whitley tomorrow, I'm going to Southgate the next day'*
	Desire for an adaptation to be made for teenagers	Parent/carer suggests that it would be interesting to explore an adaptation for adolescent populations	*it would be interesting to get either to do it at infant junior and then secondary school level and see whether that draws out a wider conversation*
	DQSH is important work, society needs	Parent/carer expresses a belief that DQSH has a wider purpose beyond	*Since doing it, like I said, I've just read it, read a lot more and realized how important it actually is,*

	education about diversity	engaging children	*because I was kind of going along as a more of like you know, entertainment or this would be kind of funny and interesting. And let's go along. It'll be entertaining, kind of, you know, like panto is. But then kind of when I was there and then reading afterwards, I was like, this is a a bit more than entertainment.*
	Shock at the intensity of protests and need for security measures	Parent/carer expresses surprise at the intensity of the protests and/or security measures	*Because I I think it's easy to live in a bubble of, you know, it's accepted, and you can be who you want. And I think that was the first time for a long time where I felt like where that challenged my opinion of that because I I genuinely thought that things were not like that anymore. But but it opened my eyes to and reminded me of how horrendous it can be.*