



# A Resilience-Based Approach to Exploring Non-Binary Identities

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## BACKGROUND

Within the LGBTQIA+ community, an emerging population exists of people who do not identify as exclusively male or female. The non-binary community has been sparsely present in the literature during the last decade with even less resilience-focused research. This poster represents a small portion of the findings of a larger pilot study.

**RQ: Related to gender identity, how are non-binary individuals resilient? Identify what was challenging and helpful to gender identity development as well as identified benefits of a non-binary gender.**

## PARTICIPANTS

- Convenience & Snowball Sampling
- Social Media, flyers, & community leaders

Participant Demographics and Descriptions

| # | Gender                               | Race  | Age | Age of gender exploration |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------|-----|---------------------------|
| 1 | "Nebulous"                           | White | 31  | 29 (2015)                 |
| 2 | Genderqueer                          | White | 33  | 28 (2012)                 |
| 3 | Trans masculine exploring Non-binary | White | 53  | 51 (2015)                 |
| 4 | Non-binary Femme                     | Black | 28  | 24 (2013)                 |
| 5 | Gender Fluid, Non-Binary             | White | 61  | 58 (2014)                 |

Note. All participants were assigned female at birth (AFAB)

## METHODOLOGY

Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014)

- Pre-coding and analytic jotting (Saldana, 2016)
- Initial (line-by-line) coding
- Focused coding
- Constant Comparison Analysis

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND APPRECIATION

- The participants of the study for their willingness to share their rich experiences
- Dr. Vincent Starnino

## RESULTS

### Theme 1: Resilience from gender identity

#### Empowerment from gender diversity

- "I can wear pink pumps and change the oil! And I can actually do it at the same time!" (4.220-.221)

#### Liberation from gender norms

- "I felt more freedom to dress more androgynous sometimes...a strength in that as being just part of myself and feeling attractive that way and just exploring it and being ok in that" (4.438-.440)

#### Liberation from criticisms

- "I definitely feel more confident, more empowered—that there's not something about myself that I have to hide or explain that finally I've got a handle of this and I'm ok with it, so if you're not, that's you" (5.44-.47)

#### Overcoming ambiguity

- "I decided to be a girl my sophomore year - or try that - and boy, that was a nightmare and so then after that, I realized I couldn't do that, so then I was like, well I'm just gonna be myself the best I can" (3.92-.94)

#### Persevering

- "I don't remember a time when I didn't think that I was different from the earliest age, again, growing up in areligious background, I had to wear dresses to church all the time and I fought that for as long as I can remember and eventually, I won" (1.46-.48)

### Theme 2: Benefits of non-binary identity

#### Creating Authentic connections with others

- "it's given me better connections with people – more authentic connections because I'm being honest about who I am" (2.496-.498)

#### Adding to self

- "It's not this or that, it's yes *and*" (5.272-.273)

#### Becoming a role model

- "I break it down from the race to the gender to the sexuality – all with everything that I do and every conversation that I have and every space I'm in – all the time and I really make an effort to be mindful because it's important to me" (4.487-.490)

### Theme 3: Internal and external challenges underpinned by relationship with self or others

- "It's an interesting battle because on the one hand it makes me feel better knowing that I can identify outside the binary, but at the same time, it kinda makes me more anxious and depressed knowing that – I'm not sure where I wanna end up and what I want to happen" (1.244-.246)
- "Some of my reluctance to fully embrace my masculine side might be because of my feminist leanings and all of the abusive, oppressive things that I have seen men do. Why would I want to identify with men?" (5.193-.196)
- "I really didn't just wanna hold another identity. I didn't want something else to set me apart...I know that sounds so crappy, but when you went through what I went through when I was younger, it was like, I can't, I can't be one more thing!" (2.253-.255)
- "It would take a significant relationship to really open up...but knowing that there are people out there that aren't just complete jerks and have their preconceived ideas about what who I am and whatever is important" (1.164-.166)

### Theme 4: Relationships as Resilience Builders

- "I put myself in spaces where I felt safe...around people who I felt safe with so that I could have those conversations and have those explorations"(4.533-.535)
- "It actually took a whole bunch of binary gender people for me to really start accepting myself...subtle support, you know, and just being around an intellectual community that's so open about it...it was like, "this is really ok. And you're ok and you deserve to just be who you are and not apologize for that" (2.260-.266)
- "I don't know how you would educate people, but I suppose it's like the gay movement...it just kept getting more and more people heard more and more about it and then it got accepted more and more, so now we have to get out there and educate places about it" (3.460-.463)

## DISCUSSION

- The simultaneous invisibility of identity and hostility against dismantling binary norms paired with lack of role models place non-binary persons at risk for feeling isolated, unsupportive, and confused about their gender
- The study found that non-binary individuals were more comfortable internally than externally with their gender, indicating potential sociopolitical environmental interventions to decrease barriers to a healthy gender identity development
- Social workers can benefit by applying this knowledge to create affirming interactions and environments

## FUTURE RESEARCH

- Continued exploration of non-binary identities using a strength-based approach that focuses on resilience and identifying coping techniques
- Future research expanding on these findings can further illuminate the unique challenges and strengths of the non-binary community
- The sample provided insightful perspectives on race as a factor and age as a factor that should be pursued with a larger sample of each population
- These findings can contribute to best practices for social workers serving the non-binary community

## References

- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Saldana, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.