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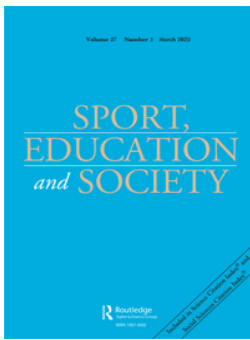
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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Facilitators and barriers of inclusion: a critical incident technique analysis of one non-binary Physical Education teacher's workplace experiences

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ABSTRACT

Background: Publications documenting how teaching is typically undertaken in highly cis-normative school spaces are beginning to increase in popularity. Scholars highlight how school Physical Education (PE) departments operate as highly gendered, and exclusive spaces which are typically ruled by gender-binarised discourses. This ideology is heavily manifested in everyday practices such as male/female-divided changing rooms, PE uniforms, and curriculums. However, the experiences of non-binary PE teachers working in these spaces remains mostly non-existent. *Purpose:* The research questions for this study were to explore the experiences of a non-binary PE teacher and disrupt the inequalities of power in PE spaces where cisgender teachers are deemed the 'norm', and anything outside of this is positioned as the 'other'. This paper highlights the stories of one non-binary PE teacher's everyday experiences. *Context:* The participant, who will be referred to as Seb, was in the 25–35 age group and worked in a state-funded school in a rural area in the northwest of England. *Design and Analysis:* This study employed a qualitative, single-participant case study method to analyse the experiences of the teacher. Data consists of a participant's narrative account via online interviews. The participant was encouraged to tell uninterrupted stories of their career, achieved through accessing their own ideas and thoughts in their own words. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. The researchers analysed the data using deductive and latent coding processes. *Conclusion:* The paper will conclude by highlighting the main findings, limitations of the study, and opportunities for further research. Practice recommendations will be suggested, focussing on practices that infuse cultural humility such as encouraging a personalised, socially-nuanced pedagogical approach towards including and affirming the identities of gender diverse PE teachers in schools.

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Introduction

Cisnormative policies, attitudes, and beliefs are permeated within socio-ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, British legislation including the Gender Recognition Act (2004) (GRA) excludes non-binary individuals and requires an applicant to appear before a state-issued panel who must support the idea that the applicant appears sufficiently 'transgender enough' in their 'acquired gender', as described by Section 9, to be awarded their Gender Recognition Certificate and gain a new birth certificate (Hines, 2013). Furthermore, the Equality Act 2010 fails to

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acknowledge non-binary identity labels and focuses simply on 'gender reassignment' as referring to a person changing from simply one discrete gender category to another (Nirta, 2021). Additionally, a new recent study with 2000 participants undertaken by Mermaids, a leading British trans charity and advocacy organisation, and Censuswide, and has shown that individuals do not recognise non-binary pronouns (e.g. they/them) and one in two people do not believe a person can identify with any labels beyond 'male' or 'female' (Mermaids & Censuswide, 2021). These examples highlight how societal structures and legislation ongoingly fail in their response to the needs of non-binary individuals, and cisgender discourses of masculinity/femininity continually position non-binary individuals as problematic and abnormal.

From this systemic framework, it can be conceptualised that such cisnormative ideals permeate physical education (henceforth, PE) teacher training programmes.

However, whilst many studies highlight how cisnormativity dominates PE school spaces for children and young people (Devis-Devis et al., 2018), there is currently no published research exploring non-binary PE teachers lived experiences within the same spaces. A small number of research studies have been published that explore the day-to-day lived experiences of transgender teachers internationally (Harris & Gray, 2014; McCarthy, 2003; Seffner & Reidel, 2015; Wells, 2018),¹ but there are no contemporary studies that specifically address: (1) non-binary trainee teacher identities, and (2) their experiences within PE school spaces.

Research has documented LGBTQ+ stigmatisation within the context of PE. In a sample of 409 university students, those preparing to be physical education teachers ($n = 199$) exhibited statistically stronger levels of anti-gay and anti-lesbian prejudice than university peers not studying PE ($n = 210$; O'Brien et al., 2013). While sexual orientation is a different concept than gender identity, it is important to highlight that oppressive LGBTQ+ perspectives are prominent within this context (Greenspan et al., 2019; Kulick et al., 2018). For example, gender diverse PE students have reported that they often feel lonely, isolated, and experience bullying and harassment due to their gender identities (Devis-Devis et al., 2018). To this end, research has revealed that approximately 84% of gender diverse and sexual minority youth reported feeling 'very uncomfortable' or 'somewhat uncomfortable' talking with P.E. teachers or coaches about LGBTQ+ related concerns (Kosciw et al., 2020). Approximately 25% of LGBTQ+ youth have avoided athletic fields or athletic facilities in response to feeling uncomfortable (Kosciw et al., 2020). Research suggests that transgender students engage in athletic participation to a similar degree as their cisgender peers, but feel less safe doing so due to hearing LGBTQ+ oppressive language and using gender-segregated spaces (Kulick et al., 2018). Other research suggests that approximately 59% of transgender youth and 41% of nonbinary students avoid PE (Kosciw et al., 2020).

The research has yet to explore the experiences of gender diverse PE teachers. However, in light of the aforementioned literature, some PE teachers may have experienced oppressive PE contexts as children, within their teacher training, and within the workplace. Further, it could be that gender non-binary PE teachers feel unsafe or unwelcomed to openly express their gender within the school context. It would behove researchers to glean a more comprehensive understanding of facilitators that have supported gender diverse PE teachers into the field.

The research questions for this study were as follows:

- (1) What are some of the workplace lived experiences of one non-binary PE teacher?
- (2) Using the critical incident technique, can any barrier or facilitators of inclusion factors be identified that impact workplace inclusion for non-binary PE teachers?

Methodology

A qualitative approach

A qualitative paradigm was selected for data collection since the research aims focused on the whole human experience and the meanings a participant ascribed to them (Atkins et al., 2008). Quantitative

data would have only provided ‘headline figures’ when the aims were to achieve deep insight into one teacher’s experience (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, one of the main advantages of qualitative researchers researching social problems is the rich descriptions of everyday practices shared by the participants, which can empower readers to creatively juxtapose their daily behaviours with the research findings (Silverman, 2011). In reading qualitative research, there lies a chance for practitioners to undertake their own analysis decisions about their behaviours and actions and experiment with implementing the new behaviours explained in the study (Shaw, 1997). In the case of this particular study, practitioners may develop increased self-awareness about ways in which they are perpetuating cis-normative ideologies within their school settings. Such self-awareness may support them in developing more affirming and inclusive practices.

A single participant case study method was used. Case studies are described as a method that accentuates causal links and pathways in a particular phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Elements of life history research were used since the original data collected spanned the participant’s whole life as the data was collected for a pilot study to test the methodological choices for the lead author’s doctoral thesis, but smaller extracts of the participant’s life history are used here for this particular paper due to word limit constraints. The life history approach method was fitting since some argue that teachers’ separate private/public lives cannot be detached from each other (Bullough, 1998), and has been used for other recent educational scholarship (El Halwany et al., 2021; Milton-Williams & Bryan, 2021). This approach can also help provide a space for individuals who have been historically marginalised to give social problems a human voice and space to express their experiences (Kouritzin, 2000). A phenomenological method was selected since it meant that the essence and meaning of the variables that supported and provide challenges to, transgender PE teachers’ employment could be thoroughly explored, as similar to other scholarship exploring the lived experiences of transgender young people in schools (Moustakas, 1994; Singh et al., 2011). This also helped the authors seek a structural understanding of six critical experiences that occurred in the employment of one non-binary teacher.

Ethical clearance for sensitive research

Being extremely considerate of the ethical research considerations of this project was a priority at all times. This was to ensure the dignity, rights and welfare of the research participant (British Education Research Association (BERA), 2018). To make it as an effective, cognitive and embodied process as possible, a collaborative and dialectical relationship between the researcher collecting the data and the participant was formed (Kim, 2014). The need for sensitivity, taking account of culture and context, and being guided by respect, openness, honesty and integrity, were all considered and these values were adopted in practice throughout the whole research process, as recommended when considering the ethics of researching marginalised people when considering power differentials (Bhopal & Deuchar, 2015). Before recruiting the participant, ethical clearance was applied for with the lead author’s UK-based university ethics board. The British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) guidelines were followed, and specific guidance into ethical considerations to reflect on when working with transgender participants was followed at all times (Adams et al., 2017).

Recruiting the participant

Purposive sampling was employed as a method of identifying and selecting detail-rich cases related to the subject of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). The participant had spoken to the lead author once during an online Physical Education conference during the COVID-19 pandemic, but no friendship was established when the participant was approached to take part. Some argue that emotional connection and research reflexivity offer a powerful resource for explorations, and therefore does not present methodological challenges (Hoffmann, 2007). However, Goodson and Sikes (2016) argue it is better to avoid undertaking education research into colleagues, friends, acquaintances, or

relatives lives since participants can be cautious about what they reveal, especially when the study solicits information of a personal nature. Therefore, it was useful that no relationship had been formed before the data collection began. The participant was approached via email, and informed consent was sought and given.

Participant and context

Due to this project being single-participant research, specific information about the participant and the context in which they were located has been kept deliberately vague to ensure the researchers met the privacy, anonymity and confidentiality assurances provided in the informed consent process and make sure that the participant was kept as unidentifiable as possible. After careful consideration, it can be shared that the participant, who will be referred to as Seb, was in the 25–35 age group and worked in a state-funded school in a rural area in the northwest of England.

Data collection

The data collection stage took place during the COVID-19 pandemic which caused unprecedented disruption and uncertainty around academic scholarly work (Wigginton et al., 2020). Online methods needed to be employed due to the ‘instant transition’ that the pandemic initiated from traditional face-to-face research to new innovative methods (Morreale, Thorpe & Westwick, 2021). Previous studies highlighted how online research could still be as effective (Hewson et al., 2015; Schleyer & Forrest, 2000). Microsoft Teams interviews were used for the two interviews and this was a rapid and effective tool. There were no interview questions and instead the interview took the shape of a grounded conversation, as appropriate for life-history research (Goodson & Gill, 2011). The transcription feature was used for swift transcription, with all names and other identifiable parts of information changed to protect anonymity, as is a fundamental part of ethical scholarship and particularly in instances of single-participant research projects (Grinyer, 2002).

Insider/outsider research

Insider and outsider positionings as a theoretical concept began in the social sciences, with the meanings altering throughout time and various disciplines (Milligan, 2016). Authors discussed their positionality toward this topic of inquiry to consider how their world-view intersects with this topic (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Further, authors’ worldviews and experiences can contribute to biases that can influence how they approach the research, however recognising, naming, and reflecting upon these biases can bring forth increased transparency about the research process (Bourke, 2014).

Before analysis, it was therefore important for both researchers to locate, discuss and bracket our biases about the topic, as both were insider/outsider researchers to this topic area. The first author was a cisgender, heterosexual woman who holds a doctoral degree in the field of gender and is a Senior Lecturer in Education in the north of England. She had no close experience with a non-binary person, but had recently completed a doctorate in the lived experiences of a transgender man and therefore had assumptions about the topic and a bias that transgender employees were not always treated fairly in schools. The second author was a cisgender male who identifies as part of the LGBTQ+ community. He holds a doctoral degree in School Psychology and is a Nationally Certified School Psychologist and researcher in the United States. He has engaged in research and clinical work with non-binary and transgender youth, and also held the assumption that transgender employees were not treated fairly in schools. To counteract these biases, the first author conducted the interview and lead the analysis and interpretation process. The second author supported data analysis and interpretation.

The participant was asked to review the interpretations to see whether they felt the conclusions were representative of their beliefs, checks for alternative explanations were undertaken to make the interpretations stronger and no changes or compromises were needed. In addition to this, a critical friend was employed after the final write-up of this paper. This was an academic colleague of the lead author and offered an opinion on whether it seemed like there were gaps in the arguments presented, and whether the findings were sound and reasonable based on the data. No data analysis changes were needed following this check.

Analysis

Content analysis was used to code and analyse the data. Transcriptions were uploaded to NVivo12 software (QSR International, 2019) to provide a platform for rigorous, systematic and pre-planned analysis (Bazeley, 2006). There were two approaches to coding this section of the data for this paper and they were to search for the following two pre-defined categories: (1) enabling features, and, (2) barrier features, in their successful transition into school life as a trainee PE teacher. Latent coding was used, which refers to interpreting what the researchers see as what is hidden deep within the text and the search for implied meaning in the participants lived experiences (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). Extracts from the raw data were chosen to support each of the sub-categories.

Findings

This section outlines six of the critical incidents that Seb shared. The incidents are included wholly in Seb's own words, with the sub-headings added by the authors for guidance and clarity. The critical incidents are shared below in their raw data form to allow the participant's stories to be shared freely and uninterrupted without any early analysis. These are presented in Seb's words since the data was collected this way and therefore both authors wanted to include the narratives within this paper in a way that mirrored the methods. Both researchers believe that since queer identities (such as non-binary identities) are viewed as fluid and transient, it is inappropriate to create papers laid out in rigid, traditional methods (see Liinason & Kulpa, 2008) with analysis embedded throughout. Instead, the choice was made to resist normative layout processes and present the six incidents in their raw, uninterrupted way so that it provides as much voice as possible to the non-binary participant and their experiences, and as little voice as possible to the two cisgender researchers. This approach is in line with more contemporary queer methodologies (Halberstam, 1998). All names have been changed to try to preserve anonymity.

Incident #1: What do you want the kids to call you?

The headteacher said, 'What do you want the kids to call you?' And I've always just said 'Seb'. I don't get upset if they call me 'Miss', but I get that little niggle almost that itch in my back when the kids do because it doesn't fit. It just isn't me. I've just taught in school and colleagues routinely get call me 'Miss'. I thought to myself, 'Can I be called that for the next forty years every day? Can I stomach it? Can I take it?' I did speak to a couple of friends and one friend, who can be a bit blunt, just told me I needed to 'put up with it as it's the way it is. Just shut your mouth and get on with it'.

Incident #2: I want to be able to support them as much as possible, and I can't support them if I am not being true to myself

I thought I had a transgender girl in one of my classes. She had really short like 'boy style short. Her PE top was a little feminine. Obviously, everything is gendered in primary schools, even the uniform, and her shirt sleeves had that little slight puff to them. She had a girls' top on and she had leggings on with the pink stripe down the side. And then I think she had like Ugg boots or something on, and not PE shoes. I thought, 'that is not quite right'. You know, the haircut didn't match her outfit. Then I heard some of the other kids calling her 'Matty'. On a worksheet, I gave the class to fill in she had chosen the name 'Maddie'. After the second or third week, when I built up a bit of relationship with the child, I asked her to stay back and I said, 'Alright Maddy. You put 'Maddie' on your class

worksheet and the other kids call you 'Matty'. I just want to know what to call you'. She said, 'Maddy', and I said, 'that's fine'. And then a couple of weeks later, she was with a group of girls and I actually said, 'Come on girls'. Her face just lit up because, as a teacher, I referred to her as a girl. I kept thinking of that incident and being with that child. And then I thought, if I have another child like that then I want to be able to support them as much as possible, and I can't support them if I am not being true to myself.

Incident #3: They asked me what my preferred pronouns were

I wanted to be prepared with an alternative to the title of 'Miss'. I didn't just want to march into the school on day one and say, 'I don't want to be called miss'. I always come with a solution to the problem. So, I wanted to be prepared with another term that I could use. I thought I'm just going to have to bite the bullet. So, I emailed my training provider saying I didn't want to be called 'Miss' on placement and would prefer to be called my first name 'Seb'. She reassured me saying, 'Don't worry it's not a bad thing. They are *educating and celebrating* school'. So, I had a meeting with the placement school's deputy head, the head, and the tutor from my learning provider. When I said I wanted to be called Seb, they said, 'That's fine. We can. We can do that. We will introduce you as Seb and you will have that on your name badge'. So, they were really supportive. They asked me what my preferred pronouns were and I said I do prefer 'they / them' pronouns, but I won't make a big deal if the kids or anybody else calls me 'she / her'. I wondered after if I should have made more of a stand about the importance of pronouns. I always, always back off. I don't want to make waves so it's almost like I'd won that victory with my name in the title so I didn't want to, you know, cause any more problems. Although, in a Zoom call afterwards with the whole cohort, the headteacher did refer to me as 'they'. And I almost missed it because she said, 'Well that's a good point Seb made. They said' And I was like, 'Who's they?' And then thought, 'Oh me, I'm they! Yeah, yeah!'

Incident #4 She was worried I would launch into some big thing about gender or something

I've been involved with the coaching of children and stuff for over ten years so I know what kids are like, but the Headteacher said, 'Oh, you know that the children will call you miss by mistake' and I said, 'I know, it's not a problem. I'm not going to kick off. I understand and I will gently correct them'. The headteacher said, 'You know, we try to, you know, talk about things in a in an age-appropriate manner'. And I said, 'No, I understand all that. I've been teaching for the last 10 years. I know that you talk in age-appropriate manner and if a child asks me why I'm not a miss, I will simply say, 'I just don't like it. I don't like being called 'Miss' so everyone calls me Seb'. She said, 'Yes, that would be good'. I think she was worried that I would launch into some big thing about gender or something. I just like to keep things really low key.

Incident #5: No, he's not. He's a girl. No, she's not. She's a boy.

I have had little kids asking me, 'Am I a boy? Am I a girl?' I was once leading them to the Hall. I think they were Year Three (age eight to nine years old) class. I think I was leading them to the hall through all walking. You know, single file or in pairs, behind me very much like little ducklings as they do and I could hear this too little voices behind me and the little boy was saying, 'No, he's not. He's a girl'. And the girl said, 'No, she's not. She's a boy'. So even between themselves they found it confusing and were confused with what they were saying between themselves and then they were arguing backwards and forwards. Not in a really vicious way, but, you know, just genuine. They were saying, 'I think you're wrong, and I think I'm right'. They were having a genuine discussion, and then I turned around and everyone looked a bit shocked, and I'd only turn around because we'd got into the hall. Then a little kid behind him said something. You know when little kids desperately trying to get everybody else in trouble? He said, 'They went there talking about you? And whether you were a boy or a girl'. And bless, this little boy and girl looked absolutely terrified that I was going to yell at them and I just went, 'Oh, does it matter?' And they went 'Oh no, no, it was OK. That doesn't matter, does it?'

It is confusing for the children because they do think on that gender binary. And because I have short hair and because I have a boy's name, because I wear shorts and a polo shirt and play football. Yeah, it's such a massive divider of people that I don't use the gender binary. But I talk about these

things and I told them I was in the army and told them I have an Xbox and things that we think are usually boy things. They do ask if I am a boy or a girl, but it's usually from a place of curiosity more than anything you know, a place of confusion: 'Why? Why have you got a boy's name when you look like a girl? Are you a boy?' ... kind-of-thing.

Incident #6: I do dress non-gender-conforming at school, and I wear shirts and ties and stuff if we ever went out for meals and stuff.

I do dress non-gender-conforming at school, and I wear shirts and ties and stuff if we ever went out for meals and nights out. Obviously, there's probably low-level sexism, which I try to confront and I don't like that at all. Like, for example, there was a staff football tournament. And I wasn't invited. And I'm like I've played football to a higher level than all of you. I have played national level football before. My colleagues obviously thought 'girls don't play football'. I think I've been quite lucky in that respect it, which is a sad thing to say that I feel like I've been lucky 'cause it should just be the norm, shouldn't it? People do give me funny looks a little bit, like when I go to staff parties and stuff. You know at Christmas parties I'll wear a suit or wear shirt and tie. Usually, people just don't really say anything either way. But again, like I keep saying, I think it's because I hide a lot of it and because for the majority of the time the only ever seen me in what I suppose is my PE uniform of shorts and T-shirt.

Incident #7 I tried to justify myself ... I tried to justify the fact that I prefer men's clothes ...

I have had it where I've asked for male uniform and automatically being given the female/women's shirt and polo shirts from people that I don't really know you very well, like the school administrator. It wasn't like she had met me and she hadn't, you know, hadn't 'seen'. I think I'm quite obviously not female, but maybe it's not. I have short hair. I'd asked for the males clothing and she'd got me the female, and I just jokingly said, 'Do I look like a small woman to you?'

But, again, I suppose I think looking back now that I tried to justify myself and I shouldn't have done. I tried to justify the fact that I prefer men's clothes by saying their women's polo shirt in particular are a lot shorter and they're a lot figure-hugging so I said that when I'm doing stretching with the children and I reach up to do a stretch to the sky, that's going to ride up. I have a tattoo on my belly and I don't let the children to see that I have tattoos. Yeah, so the children would see that they would also I would also be flashing flesh at them and I don't want that so I justified it by saying and looking back now I shouldn't have said 'I don't wear women's clothes. I wear men's clothes. 'Get me the men's shirt'. I've only just realised it that's what I did.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of one non-binary PE teacher and identify barriers and facilitators to inclusion. This was achieved through thematic analysis of the critical incidents, and the analysis led to the development of key themes that describe the barriers and facilitators of inclusion in those experiences which helped the participant feel included in school, and themes emerged from the data. The themes were categorised into these two overarching categories to match the critical incident methodology, which encourages the use of searching for parallels, connections and repetitions in the incidents and help explore the connection between the context in which the event occurred and the participants coping strategies, which help support practical outcomes (Hughes et al., 2007).

Barrier theme one: emotional and interpersonal relations

In four of the incidents, the behaviours of others appeared to evoke negative emotional responses in Seb. They appeared to feel discouraged, upset and criticised several times. References to having to 'stomach' misgendering occurrences and 'getting funny looks' were shared, and they felt the need to 'hide a lot of it' (their non-binary presentation), leading to them not really 'feeling seen'. This treatment of, and behaviour by, Seb mirrors the findings of other studies of oppressive behaviours

towards LGBTQ+ minority identity labels and mirrors the isolation feelings experienced by participants in other studies (Devís-Devís et al., 2018; Greenspan et al., 2019; Kulick et al., 2018). This belief that Seb needed to hide, and appear a traditional sexless and bodiless figure in the school, parallels the findings of Seffner and Reidel's (2015) study examining the gender performances of transgender teachers, where teachers feared the physical 'misrepresentation' of a teacher in the space of the classroom because of their gender presentation. Further hurt was caused when Seb was socially excluded from a staff football match by lack of invitation, despite playing at a previously high level, which appeared to be a perpetuating factor in the level of social acceptance they felt at work. These negative feelings of rejection and the associated feelings of invalidation, parallel other studies on the lived experiences of non-binary individuals in other social contexts (Losty & O'Connor, 2018; Vincent, 2018).

There was an unusual anomaly in the data, which was that there was a moment where Seb appeared to be making statements that included the gender stereotypes/binary that they later seemed to speak in protest of. Initially, Seb described a child (Matty/Maddie) as 'wearing Ugg boots', the child having shirts with a 'slight puff to them', and a 'girls top and leggings' which they thought was 'not quite right' – seemingly, about the child's assigned-male-at-birth sex. Seb later then said, 'Let's go girls', and appeared to assume the child was transgender due to their non-gender conformity, instead of encouraging the multiplicity of gender expressions. It is difficult to try and understand why this was the case, but one suggestion could be due to the deep-rooted nature of masculine and feminine design characteristics in Western cultures, and this example further enhances how engrained these ideas continue to be in England in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, this example highlights how easy it still is for even the most diverse, gender-neutral members of society to subconsciously perpetuate these aesthetic stereotypes further (Saha & Basu, 2021).

It is suggested that to reduce negative emotions being invoked in non-binary teachers in education workplaces, staff and children are encouraged to behave thoughtfully and perceptively to teachers who do not present in cisnormative ways, and training and intervention programmes have been created which could help prepare children and teaching colleagues for this (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2021; Gender Identity Research and Education Society, 2021). It is advised that schools should not wait until they find a gender diverse individual who 'shoulders all responsibility as singular sites of all learning and change' (Meyer et al., 2016, p. 9), and where adaptations are only made upon request by the individual. Instead, as per other studies regarding good practice, inclusive changes to schools should be made pre-emptively and pro-actively beforehand and in anticipation of the arrival of gender diverse individuals in education environments (Horton, 2020). A practical change that could be suggested from this finding is that whole-school training is undertaken on the mental health impact on victims of behaviours like micro-aggressions from 'funny looks' and acts of misgendering, and this should be undertaken in advance of any non-gender-conforming individuals joining the school.

Barrier theme two: organisational barriers

Some organisational barriers appeared to exist which appeared to act as distressing stressors for Seb. They shared the challenge of it being assumed they would be called the title of 'miss'. Other studies have argued that it should not be the responsibility of non-gender-conforming children to educate an unprepared school (McMillan and Morton, 2019) and explain themselves to their peers since this can take its toll (Horton, 2020). Whilst those studies centre on gender-diverse children's experiences, these data appeared to mirror similar findings in that it was left to Seb, as a gender-diverse trainee teacher, to pro-actively request their chosen name and title, and all ownership was on them to do this independently. A special arrangement had to be specifically requested by Seb simply to be called a name/pronoun that did not misgender them.

Additionally, the distribution of resources seemed to be a barrier to inclusion for Seb. A colleague gave them 'female' PE staff clothing and said they felt like they had to 'justify' themselves and their

clothing choices. There appeared to be an assumption from Seb's colleague here that they would fit into the dominant binary gender category of 'woman's clothing'. It could be interpreted from this that PE staff sports kit/clothing, which traditionally appears to be designed in a way that conforms to the dominant view of gender as a two-fold binary, can be problematic for staff who feel their gender and bodies are more fluid and wish to resist the rigid labelling of their identities and physiques. These findings parallel studies in other societal areas like healthcare (Frohard-Dourlent et al., 2017). This clothing-related incident raises awareness of the questions and challenges in protecting the wellbeing of gender-diverse PE staff when organising and distributing often traditionally cisnormative sports clothing, or other related workplace resources.

Other organisational barriers included a fear of the headteacher, specifically the fear Seb had of thinking that the headteacher was worried they would 'launch into a big thing about gender or something', if Seb had a child ask them why they were not 'a miss'. Seb appeared to validate the headteacher's concerns that it would not be appropriate to go into any detail about their non-binary identity if a child asked them about it, as the headteacher had said separately that they like to talk about things in an 'age-appropriate' manner. This response could be interpreted as passive-aggressive since it appeared to elicit the idea that a person's = gender identity and expression were somehow controversial. This is particularly important when childhood is still being constructed as a time when children should be protected from 'adult concerns' (Warin & Price, 2020). Furthermore, it also mirrors other research findings where LGBTQ+ youth feel unsupported by teachers, since Seb felt unsupported in this instance by a teacher, despite the difference being a collegial relationship with a teacher instead (Kosciw et al., 2020).

Organisational structures could be put in place where school or initial teacher training staff ask all new staff what they wish to be called at the beginning of each placement or university year so that the responsibility to claim what they are legally entitled to is not again placed upon them to pursue their rights in school.

A practical suggestion from this emerged theme is that gender presentation and expression must be openly and freely discussed for all gender non-conforming children and staff to experience positive wellbeing in school. Furthermore, there should be a movement away from cisgender-dominated curriculums (Miller, 2018). Similarly to DePalma and Atkinson's (2009) research findings regarding transgender individuals in schools, in this data conversations where non-binary individuals still appear to remain almost invisible, with the topic being continuously avoided and special permission being required to talk about it.

Facilitator theme one: validation

Throughout the incidents shared by Seb, some instances appeared to be validating their identity. Whilst it is important to note that these instances were simply colleagues adhering to their legal responsibilities and therefore should arguably not even be celebrated, Seb described them in triumphant and affirming terms. Examples of this include the headteacher calling them the correct pronouns in a meeting for the first time, Seb self-advocating and being 'true to themselves' through setting a positive example of gender variance to the transgender child in their class, and the children agreeing with Seb that it did not matter if they were 'a boy or a girl'. These examples show how other teachers can affirm non-binary identities in the classroom, like Kearns et al.'s (2017) study which highlighted how teachers can affirm transgender youths in their classrooms. There were examples here that showed how colleagues and students can act positively and in an educated manner and the positive impact this can have on the non-binary teacher. Ullman's (2017) research highlighted how noticed recognition from teachers mattered as much to transgender youth in schools as protection from them did, and Seb's examples here parallel this pattern in his experiences as a non-binary teacher receiving acceptance from teaching colleagues.

A practical suggestion from this theme is that an increased understanding of accepting, affirming behaviour from others in school and the positive impact this can have on a non-

binary teacher's level of happiness is considered. This should be a particularly useful point for school leaders when determining initiatives to support and affirm the diverse gender identities of school community members.

Facilitator theme two: moments of open communication

In a number of the incidents, there were moments where individuals engaged in conversations about gender identity, which could be interpreted as demonstrating that there was, at times, an environment where there was space for communication and positive relationship-building through discussion. This is a theme that appears to conflict with one of the barrier themes earlier where there appeared to be a fear from the headteacher of discussing this issue. Yet this data set could be interpreted as showing moments of both. Two of these examples included Seb asking a transgender child what she wished to be called, and also the children feeling they could discuss whether Seb was 'a boy or a girl'. These conversations helped lessen the chances of individuals being marginalised as a result of increasing others understanding that not every child or teacher conformed to hegemonic masculinity and femininity gender ideas. In both incidents, Seb was able to affirm to others that gender variation exists within communities and networked spaces, like schools. Seb was able to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about sex and gender, and demonstrate/affirm how others cross over traditional gender boundaries constructed by the culture they find themselves in, and views that can traditionally 'contain' a person's gender (Jaroszewski et al., 2018).

This facilitating theme demonstrates that careful and sensitive conversations, and responding in a way that is not over-authoritative to young children who are asking questions, can help others expand their knowledge, or have their own identities affirmed. By having conversations about this topic, other people's biases can be raised to light, and this can help facilitate a more inclusive environment in schools for gender-diverse teachers and young people. By being open to questions that query the dominant social framework of man/woman, and exploring and discussing the nuanced areas in-between, often marginalised identity groups like non-binary people, can be better included and their needs less invisible in school spaces.

Limitations

The study had some limitations, firstly, it was conducted with just one individual in only one geographical area of the UK. Future research is needed to identify themes on a much larger scale and in other areas of the UK and internationally to see if any themes identified here can be generalised to other populations. Secondly, the data included and analysed here was from one white individual. More research is needed to underscore these experiences from diverse groups using an intersectional lens that takes into account identities including, but certainly not limited to, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability status, and age (Singh et al., 2011).

Despite these limitations, this study is one of the first studies exploring facilitating and barrier factors in the workplace lived experiences of one non-binary PE teacher. Furthermore, it is one of the first studies empirically analysing the experiences of a non-binary teacher as a participant separately and exclusively to the transgender population. The study highlighted some problems and enabling factors one non-binary PE teacher experienced in the workplace that require future research. This study contributes therefore to the knowledge base that is needed to create more inclusive schools and for school leaders to become better equipped in creating affirming education environments where there are high expectations of inclusion for all teachers and now moving beyond the basic respect of behaviours, like using the correct pronouns and creating cultures of open communication about non-binary lives and existences, to tackling more systemic prejudices and inequalities that can harm non-binary people.

Note

1. As authors we have purposefully chosen to not compare the rights of non-binary English people with non-binary individuals internationally. This is to attempt to resist an 'us and them' culture that can sometimes materialise in academic research on this topic, especially when comparing the UK to countries in the global south. We believe by doing this here, it would fail to acknowledge the complexities involved in attempting to have different nations assume the same cultural beliefs about sexual orientation or gender identity and that each government's priority should be about looking after individuals or communities as a whole.

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