



Navigating the Journey of Self: A Systematic Review of Gender Identity Formation in Transgender and Gender-Diverse Adults from a Global Literature

Iqra Fiaz¹ · Sana Rehman¹ · Siti Raudzah Ghazali² · Sadia Saleem³ · Shoaib Abbas⁴

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Abstract

This study presents a multidimensional framework for understanding gender identity development among transgender and gender-diverse (TGD) adults, integrating personal, social, and cultural-contextual factors into a cohesive model. Building upon Lev's transgender emergence theory and Sevelius's gender affirmation framework, we analyzed qualitative data from 15 studies (N = 461 participants). The articles have been taken from diverse databases such as PsycINFO, PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar, Psych ARTICLES, Science Direct, JSTOR and the screening has been followed through PRISMA Flow Chart. The quality of the selected qualitative research studies was evaluated using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) quality evaluation instrument. Findings reveal that gender identity development depends upon three interdependent dimensions: (1) *personal dynamics* (internal processes of recognition, body-mind dissonance, and identity negotiation), (2) *social dynamics* (community belonging and stigma management), and (3) *cultural-contextual influences* (structural barriers and intersectional positionality). The results underscore the agentic role of individuals in navigating their gender identities while also highlighting how systematic inequalities and intersectional marginalization shape divergent developmental trajectories. This review advances the field by proposing the expansion of linear, stage-based models to reflect the complex nonlinear and contextually embedded nature of TGD identity development.

Keywords Gender diverse adults · Transgender · Systematic review · Identity formation

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

Introduction

Enter a world where gender identity is not confirmed to binary labels like “male” or “female” but instead unfolds along a rich and complex spectrum of expressions and life experiences (Thorne et al., 2019). Gender identity refers to an individual’s deeply felt internal sense of being male, female, both, neither or something else entirely. This differs from biological sex, which is assigned at birth based on physical characteristics and from sexuality or sexual identity, which relates to whom a person is emotionally romantically or sexually attracted to (Schulz, 2012). While some individuals experience gender identity as stable overtime, others find it to be fluid and evolving.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2015), the term gender diverse population is an umbrella term encompassing individuals whose gender identity or expression differ from societal expectations based on the sex assigned at birth. This includes but is not limited to transgender individuals. Gender diverse identities, meanwhile include a broader range of experiences beyond the transgender label (Dowers et al., 2020). This may include non-binary (not exclusively male or female), agender (identify with no gender), genderfluid (experiencing a gender identity that shifts overtime), bigender or multigender (identify with two or more genders either simultaneously or at different times) and gender nonconforming (expressing gender in ways that do not align with the conventional expectations) (Thorne et al., 2019).

In contrast transgender refers more specifically to people who identify with a gender that is different from the one assigned to them at birth (APA, 2015). This includes transgender women (MTF), individual assigned male at birth who identify as female, transgender men (FTM), individuals assigned female at birth but who identify as male and non-binary trans people, individual identify outside of traditional male female categories but still identify as transgender because their identity differs from their assigned sex (Dowers et al., 2020).

The overlap between transgender and gender diverse identities is frequently misunderstood. Transgender individuals fall within the broader category of gender diversity due to the incongruence between their gender identity and assigned sex at birth (Rajkovic et al., 2022). However, gender diverse identities encompass a wider spectrum. Some individuals do not identify as transgender because they do not experience a misalignment with their assigned sex, yet they challenge conventional gender norms and expectations (Macri & Wolfe, 2019). This includes identities such as non-binary gender-queer, gender-fluid or agender, where individuals express themselves outside the traditional male female binary without undergoing a binary transition. Therefore, while all transgender people are gender diverse, not all gender diverse individuals are transgender.

Gender identity can develop and shift across the lifespan, but the significant transition often occurs during adulthood. Unlike childhood or adolescence—where identity is still forming and heavily influenced by family and peers—adulthood offers great autonomy, self-awareness, and access to resources that support deeper exploration of one’s gender identity (Devor, 2004). Many individuals come to fully recognize or embrace their authentic gender identity during this stage, often after years of suppression or internal conflict (Fadjuoff et al., 2016). The adult phase of life, therefore,

becomes a critical period for gender identity transition, marked by intentional choices related to social, legal, or medical affirmation.

The stages of gender development have been authentically described into well-established theories: Lev's theory and Sevelius's Gender Affirmation Framework, both offering valuable insight into how gender identity evolves across different stages of life different stages of life. Lev (2004) emphasizes that identity development involved transgender and gender diverse individual is shaped by intersecting social system personal experiences and responses to stigma or marginalization. Exploring how these individuals navigate their identities especially during adulthood offers deeper insight into the evolving nature of gender identity in contemporary society (Ritchie et al., 2013).

Although identity formation can occur at any stage of life, adulthood who often serves as a particularly significant period for the development or re-evaluation of gender identity. This is due to the complex psychological, emotional, and social transition that typically emerge during this time (Devor, 2004). As individuals take on new roles in relationship, careers, parenting, and social responsibilities, they are exposed to shifting expectations and greater self-awareness (Mitchell et al., 2021). These changes can prompt deeper introspection, allowing previously suppressed or unexplored aspects of gender identity to surface. For those who conformed to external norms or societal pressure in the earlier stages of life adulthood may present the autonomy and cognitive majority needed to question long-held assumptions. This process can sometimes lead to gender identity crises- marked by confusion, emotional distress, or the realization that one's true gender identity differs from the role they have lived. The weight of maintaining cultural, familial or professional expectations can intensify this experience, making the journey towards authenticity both challenging and transformative (Fadjukoff et al., 2016).

As Wangqvist (2013) notes, adult identity formation must be contextualized within both personal introspection and social influences. Lev (2004) described the "emergence" process as a significant phase in gender identity development of transgender and gender diverse individuals particularly during adulthood. This process often unfold through four overlapping stages: self-recognition, exploration, disclosure and affirmation. In the self-recognition individual becomes aware that their internal gender different from the one assigned to them at birth (Mitchell et al., 2021). This realization may come gradually and is often influenced by life experiences, relationship, or exposure to gender diverse narratives.

The exploration stage involves privately or cautiously experimenting with gender expressions roles and identities- such as trying different names, pronouns, clothing styles, or seeking information and support from TGD communities. In the disclosure stage, individual began sharing their gender identity with trusted others, such as friends, family, or therapists. This step can be emotionally complex, involving both fear and hope (Hatano et al., 2022). Finally, the affirmation stage marked a period of greater confidence and authenticity where individual began to live in alignment with their affirm gender through social, medical or psychological means. lev's model emphasizes that emergence in adulthood world is not simply a coming out, but a deeper process of self discovery, integration and empowerment, especially for those

who may not have had the opportunity to explore their identity earlier in life (Hasyim et al., 2024).

Similarly, Sevelius (2013) emphasizes that identity development for transgender and gender-diverse adults is a dynamic and ongoing process shaped by continuous negotiation of gender affirmation, resilience, and risk. A central part of this process involves meeting internal psychological needs, such as desire to feel congruent with one's true identity and the need for self-acceptance and the pursuit of emotional well-being and authenticity. These internal needs often drive individual to explore and affirm their gender, seek supportive communities and live in alignment with their identities. However, this journey is deeply influenced by external social factors such as stigma discrimination, cultural norms, lack of legal protections and limited access to affirming healthcare (Potterton et al., 2022).

In environments where gender diversity is not accepted or is actively punished, TGD individual must often develop resilience strategies—such as building strong support networks, engaging in advocacy or cultivating self-compassion—to cope up with marginalization (Jones et al., 2017). At the same time, seeking gender affirmation in hostile or invalidating environment can increase personal risk, including emotional distress, social rejection and even physical harm (Schulz, 2012). These layered internal and external influences add complexity to the identity development journey of TGD adults, shaping how they express, affirm, and sustain their gender identities over time (James et al., 2016; Stynes et al., 2021).

Lev's Transgender Emergence Model (2004) and Sevelius's Gender Affirmation Framework (2013) offer key insight into how transgender and gender diverse (TGD) adults develop their gender identity. Together, they highlight the complex, dynamic nature of gender identity development. However, the applicability of these theories varies across cultural context. In many western societies—Canada, the Netherland, Sweden, New Zealand, and Germany—there has been a growing emphasis on individual autonomy, mental health, and human rights in discourses around gender identity (Butler, 2004; Richards et al., 2016). This reflects broader socio-cultural movements that frame gender variance as a matter of personal agency and identity rights, rather than pathology or deviance. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2015) affirms that gender identity is a core aspect of human diversity and advocates for inclusive affirming psychological care. Legal protections, greater healthcare access, and increasing social awareness in several Western nations have facilitated visibility and support for TGD individual (Drescher, 2015). However, the progress has not been universal or uncontested; assistance persist even within progressive movement, often fueled by biological essentialism and fixed notion of gender (Hines, 2017).

In contrast in many Eastern cultures—such as in South Asia—identity development is shaped by religious beliefs, collectivistic social structures and strong family expectations. In such settings, conformity to traditional gender norms is often rewarded, and deviation may lead to significant social or familial repercussions (Akram et al., 2023). Nevertheless, alternative kinship system such as guru- chela relationship within the Hijra communities offer emotional and social support in the absence of familial acceptance (Krishnasamy & Asafu-Adjaye, 2024).

Additionally individuals in conservative or faith oriented-societies make sense of their gender identity through private spiritual reflection, the use of metaphorical or

coded language or internal negotiation of conflicting beliefs and cultures expectation (Jaapar et al., 2023). While gender identity development is shaped by broad societal forces religious frameworks— particularly within Islamic context— hold significant influence in shaping how gender diversity is understood and treated in Eastern Cultures such as Pakistan (Awan et al., 2024). Traditional interpretations of Quran and Hadith in Pakistan often uphold a strict binary view of gender, reinforcing societal norms that cost nonconforming identities as spiritually and socially deviant.

For instance, the story of Prophet Lut (Surah Al-Araf 7:80–84) and Hadith equating same-sex behavior with Zina (adultery) are frequently cited by conservative scholar to justify the marginalization of transgender and gender-diverse individuals (Md Yusof et al., 2015). These interpretation contribute to the stigmatization and exclusion of TGD people within religious and communal spaces.

However, a growing movement of progressive Islamic scholarship within and beyond Pakistan challenges these views by drawing on more inclusive interpretations of Quran. Versus such as Surah Az-Zumar (39:53), which emphasizes Allah’s boundless mercy—“Say, ‘O My servants who have transgressed against themselves, do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins...’”—are interrupted by some scholars as a theological basis for extended compassion, forgiveness, and dignity to all marginalized individuals, including those with diverse gender identities.

To fully grasp the significance of this negotiation, it is essential to consider the lived realities of transgender and gender diverse individual (TGD) experiences that reveal the deeply personal and often challenging terrain of gender identity development in adulthood (Jaapar et al., 2023; Morgan & Stevens, 2012). The above data indicates that gender diverse and transgender experience a dramatic shifts in their identity. However the steps and factors of these identity transitions are still vague in the existing literature.

Considering the above data, the current study is grounded in three key motivations. First, a recognition of gender diversity expands, evidenced by identification of over 100 gender categories as of 2024 (Diversity, 2024; FOX 26 Houston, 2024) there remains limited research on how identity formation is shaped by intersection of societal norms, cultural expectation, and individual lived experiences, particularly among young adults navigating a rapidly changing social landscape.

Second the growing visibility of LGBTQ + plus right movements and global advocacy efforts reflects an important cultural shift toward equity, representation, and the deconstruction of rigid gender binaries. These movements, often amplified by social media and international protests (FOX 2 Detroit, 2022; KTLA5, 2023), have promoted widespread public discourse. Investigating how such socio-political transformation influences the identity development transgender and gender diverse (TGD) individual is critical for informing inclusive policy, addressing stigma, and promoting evidence-based interventions in mental health education.

Third, there exist a significant gap in cross-cultural research for gender identity. Existing systematic reviews have primarily examined gender identity trajectories in children and young people (Stynes et al., 2021) or adults without age restrictions (Di Luigi et al., 2025). With a focus on binary or non-binary identities in context such as support participation (Jones et al., 2017) and social gender affirmations (Di Luigi et al., 2025). However, none of these reviews comprehensively explore the underlying

steps, mechanisms, and factors driving gender identity transformation in adults, such as life transitions, sociocultural influences or internal self-discovery process. This systematic review aims to address this critical gap by synthesizing evidence on how and why gender identity evolves in adulthood, providing deeper insights into the dynamic nature of gender identity beyond the existing frameworks.

Method

Study Design

A systematic review design was selected for this study to comprehensively examine and synthesis existing empirical researches on the factor influencing gender identity formation among transgender and gender diverse adults (TGS). Although the study aimed to examine the factors influencing gender identity formation, this can be effectively achieved by systematically reviewing qualitative studies that document these factors within diverse socio- cultural and psychological contexts. Systematic reviews are well suited for collating and critically appraising such evidences when guided by focused, structured research question.

This approach ensure methodological rigor, transparency and replicability in identifying patterns, themes and influencing factor across multiple studies. Furthermore given the increasing volume of qualitative research on TGD identified development in recent years, a systematic review offers a valuable means to consolidate fragmented findings, highlight recurring personnel and social dynamics and identify gaps in the literature. By organizing and synthesizing this body of acknowledge, the study aims to provide a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of the factors shaping gender identity formation in adulthood, thus contributing to the informed clinical practice, social policy and future research directions.

Development of Research Question

The strength of this study lies in the clarity and logical structure of its research question, which was developed using the PICO framework. PICO is a structured way to generate a research question. PICO stands for P (Population) I (Issue), C (Comparison, if applicable) and O (outcome). This framework guided the development of a focused and relevant research topic: P represent transgender and gender diverse (TGD) adults, I I refer to gender identity formation, C is not applicable in this context, and O concerns the influencing factors associated with identity formation. The use of PICO framework ensured that the research question remained precise, structure, and appropriate for systematic review methodology.

Research Question

What factors influence gender identity formation among transgender and gender-diverse (TGD) adults?

Research Objectives

The current study has following objectives

- To examine the role of socio-cultural factors or experiences in shaping gender identity development among TGD adults.
- To examine the role of psychological factors or experiences in shaping gender identity development among TGD adults.
- To examine the role of personal factors or experiences in shaping gender identity development among TGD adults.
- To examine the role of healthcare-related factors or experiences in shaping gender identity development among TGD adults.

Search Strategies

The following search terms were utilized for the systematic search of research articles specifically addressing transgender and gender-diverse (TGD) identities; “transgender,” “trans women,” “trans man,” “non binary,” “gender non-conforming,” “gender-queer,” “gender diverse,” “gender minority,” “agender,” “bigender,” “genderfluid,” “trans-masculine,” “trans-feminine,” “two-spirits,” and “gender identity development. These terms were combined with “Adult,” using the Boolean operators OR and AND. For this study, data were gathered from several electronic databases, including:

- PubMed
- Scopus
- PsycINFO
- Google Scholar
- ResearchGate
- ScienceDirect

Inclusion Criteria

The following criteria were used to determine the exclusion and inclusion of publications:

1. Articles related to gender sociology and psychology were included in this study this refers to all articles published in general that focus on these disciplines.
2. Article published between 2010 and 2014 were considered for the review 14 years were chosen due to the significance significant increase in research on gender identity formation During this time driving by greater social awareness advocacy for gender inclusivity and ongoing societal changes studies from various regions around the world were included such as those conducted in South Africa on the US and the UK.
3. Studies from various regions around the world were included, such as those conducted in South Africa, Hong Kong, the US, and the UK.

Exclusion Criteria

The following criteria were used to exclude publications from this review:

Studies limited to specific clinical or medical outcomes without addressing gender identity, psychological or sociological aspects were excluded, even if published within relevant journals. Research conducted exclusively in clinical or institutional setting without broader community or cultural perspective on gender identity formation was excluded. Articles not published in peer-reviewed academic journals—such as conference paper, book chapters, editorials, or unpublished thesis—were excluded to ensure the inclusion of rigorously reviewed, high quality studies. Studies conducted solely in regions not representing diverse cultural, social or legal contexts of gender identity development (if any such regional bias was detected during screening) were excluded community to preserve the global scope of the review.

Quality Assessment

The quality of the selected qualitative research studies was evaluated using the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CAPS) quality evaluation instrument (Critical Appraisal Skill Program, 2018). This instrument includes 10 questions designed to evaluate the findings impact validity and methodology of the studies.

Data Extraction

After documenting the selected articles study characteristic table, the key themes related to management and evaluation were identified. Additionally, data were extracted from every article by using a standardized way of covering the following areas: first author's name publication year, study location study, design, methodology, sample gender description, and sample size. In summary, study aims to provide an overview of gender identity formation and its influencing factors, as drawn from the experiences of TGD adults during their gender identity formation.

Data Analysis

The Thomas and Harden (2008) approach is used for thematic analysis. This approach is valuable for systematically synthesizing qualitative research because it offers a clear, transparent, and structured method for analyzing and integrating findings from multiple studies. It allows researchers to move beyond merely summarizing existing evidence by developing new conceptual insights grounded in participant's perspectives. This approach is particularly suited for reviews exploring factors, experiences, or perception across diverse socio-cultural context.

It involves 3 key stages such as line by line coding, development of descriptive themes and generation of analytical themes. Firstly, each line of the text from the finding section of included studies is coded to capture significant ideas and concepts. Secondly, the generated codes are grouped into related categories to form descriptive theme that summarize common pattern in the data. Thirdly, these descriptive themes are further interrupted to develop analytical themes, offering new understandings or

explanations relevant to the reviews research question this method is widely applied in health psychology and social science review's research question. This method is widely applied in health, psychology and social science reviews, providing a systematic framework for transforming qualitative evidence into meaningful evidence informed conclusion.

PRISMA Chart

Figure 1: The studies were screened using the PRISMA flow chart (Moher et al., 2010).

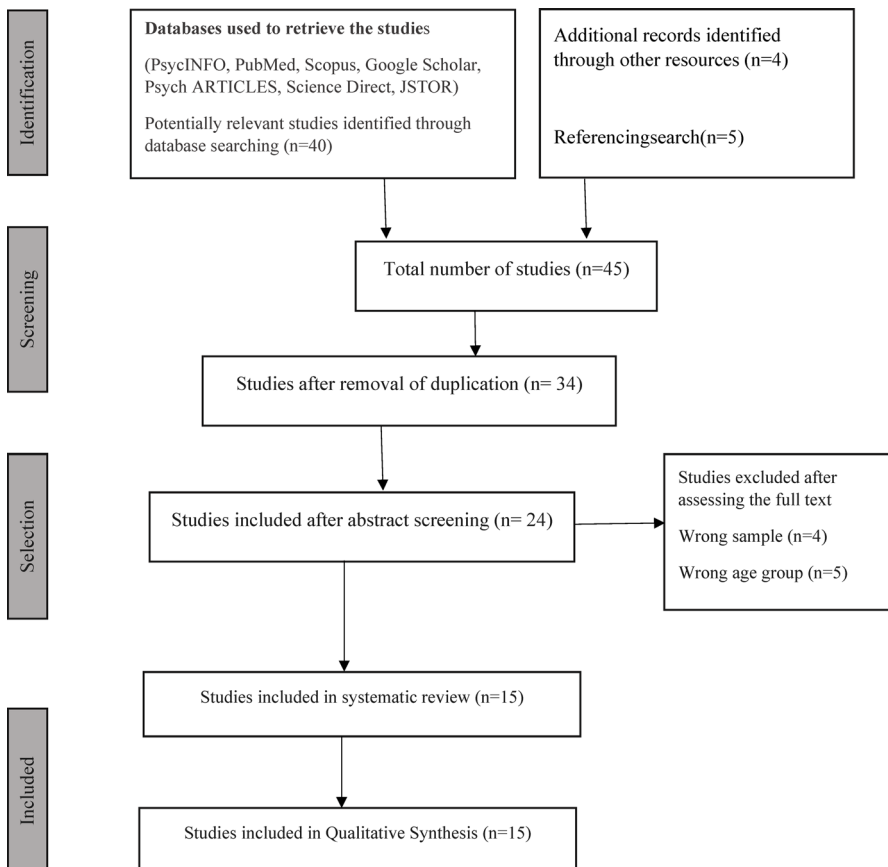


Fig. 1 A diagrammatic representation of the study selection process for the systematic review is depicted using the PRISMA flow chart

Results

After removing duplicates and excluding studies with incorrect samples or age groups, a total of 15 studies were retained. Refer to Fig. 1 for details; these fifteen research articles met all inclusion criteria and were also evaluated for quality (Table 1).

Study Characteristics

This study synthesis comprised 15 research articles, which included a total of 461 diverse gender-identity youth aged 18 years or older. Of these studies, ten were conducted in the USA, two in the UK, one in South Africa, and two in Malaysia.

Themes and Sub-themes

The analysis of 15 primary qualitative studies using thematic analysis identified three key themes in gender identity formation: Personal Dynamics, Social Dynamics and Intersectional Influences. Each theme includes further sub-themes that describe the phases individuals go through in forming their gender identity. Personal Dynamics consists of Initial Identity Recognition, Body-Mind Dissonance, and Negotiating Identity, and Social Dynamics includes Sense of Belonging and Digital Spaces, and Societal Stigma and Discrimination, while intersectional influences exhibit Cultural and Religious Contexts, and Geographical Barriers. These themes, derived from consistent factors across the studies, provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex process of gender identity formation.

Thematic Synthesis

The thematic synthesis process, as described by Thomas and Harden (2008), was employed in the following three steps to systematically analyze and interpret the existing literature.

Step 1. Initial Coding

The analysis started with an intensive familiarization; this process entailed the researchers reading and re-reading all included papers to ensure a good comprehension of the data. First-stage codes were developed while maintaining close proximity of the first-order concepts to the text itself: by identifying and coding significant portions of the text. This approach allowed for explicit ideas and subtle nuances to be retained between the studies.

Step 2. Developing Descriptive Themes

The second phase moved the initial codes to the higher-level detail of descriptive themes by using pattern recognition and seeking relationships between codes. Related codes were grouped to create themes that represented repeating concepts in the data. This stage was strongly data-led, working to organize and categorize patterns and avoiding premature interpretation or theoretical imposition.

Step 3. Refining Analytical Themes

The last step in the analysis was the interpretation of the descriptive themes to construct analytical level themes in response to the research question. This included

exploring linkages between descriptive themes and more transcendent theoretical ideas which fed into global thematic categories. By a process of iterative reduction, themes were grouped to create clusters that better represented the complexity of participants' narratives, which subsequently culminated in a synthesized account which reflected these analytical concepts and retained connection with the raw data (Table 2).

Personal Dynamic

In gender identity formation, “personal dynamic” refers to the individual experiences, emotions, and internal processes that shape how someone understands and expresses their gender. This theme underscores the complexity and personal nature of gender identity. It is further divided into three sub-themes: Initial Identity Recognition, Body-Mind Dissonance, and Managing Identities.

Initial Identity Recognition

The process of “Initial Identity Recognition” refers to the moment when TGD individuals become aware of the conflict between their gender identity and societal norms. This stage often involves emotional struggles and relational factors, such as trauma or negative experiences. For instance, an undergraduate shared how sexual trauma in a same-sex relationship with a senior led him to believe same-sex relationships were the only way to fulfill their sexual desires (Hassan & Ghazali, 2013). Freud (1971) observed that painful experiences, like negative interactions with men, could push women toward adopting masculine behaviors. Similarly, childhood abuse or male discrimination may influence some women to seek security in same-sex relationships. Aziz et al. (2019) found that 80% of respondents had similar experiences, preferring relationships with “Pengkid” (a term for women with masculine traits), who are perceived as more considerate and romantic than men.

Body-Mind Dissonance

For individuals experiencing body-mind dissonance, the conflict between their physical appearance and self-identified gender creates daily struggles, often leading to emotional challenges like depression (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). Andre, a Black transman in his 60s, shared how undiagnosed gender dysphoria contributed to years of depression until therapy helped him explore his identity: “I was in a relationship and miserable. After she left, my depression worsened because I didn't know who I was. One night, I journaled, and the next day, I gave it to my therapist. I had written, ‘I'm not sure what gender I'm supposed to be.’ That started my journey” (Nordmarken, 2023). Body-mind dissonance often leads to secret behaviors like cross-dressing, offering brief relief but posing significant risks. Amber recalled her father's violent reaction to her cross-dressing: “When my parents went shopping, I'd try on my mom's clothes. When they caught me, my dad beat me so badly I couldn't go to school for three days. After that, I had to hide everything” (Morgan & Stevens, 2012).

Table 1 Characteristics of the primary studies that were added in the qualitative research synthesis

Year	Author	Country	Sample gender description and size	Age	Study design and methodology	Results
2023	Drabish	US (West Virginia)	11 transgender adults	18 years or older	Descriptive qualitative study (Semi-structured interviews)	Three overarching themes with eight sub-themes were identified: 1). Acknowledging turmoil (<i>Sub-themes</i> : Feeling a Disconnect Between Assigned and Identified Self; Navigating Self-Discovery and Pressure to Conform, Facing Internal Challenges of Coming Out and Transitioning) 2). Acknowledging marginalization (<i>Sub-themes</i> : Encountering Disaffirming Microaggressions and Discrimination, Prioritizing Safety and Privacy, Feeling Isolated from Family and Community). 3). Embracing identity (<i>Sub-themes</i> : Living the Authentic Self and Engaging with a Supportive Community, visualizing a Future and Acting as an Advocate for Change)
2014	Levitt and Ippolito	USA	17 Transgender identities (e.g., crossdresser, transman, transwoman, butch lesbian),	18–63 years	Qualitative study (Grounded Theory) (Semi-structured interviews)	There is an eight-level hierarchical framework with 1,275 meaning units. The core category “the struggle to develop color vision in a monochromatic world”—reflected participants’ efforts to live authentically within restrictive gender norms. Beneath this, seven thematic clusters and multiple categories captured key identity struggles, including early stigma, the role of language, and balancing authenticity with societal expectations, based on interviews with 17 transgender individuals
2012	Morgan and Stevens	USA	6 transgendered adults (5 MTF, 1 cross-dresser)	23 to 61 years old	Qualitative study (in-depth interviews) (Narrative analysis)	Participants’ narratives revealed three key themes: 1). Early Sense of Body-Mind Dissonance, marked by childhood gender disconnect and secrecy due to punishment; 2). Negotiating and Managing Identities, involving adult gender conformity and concealed authenticity; and 3). Transition Process, where years of compromise led to physical gender transition
2019	Aziz et al.	Malaysia	10 Malay Muslim (lesbian, Pengkid/Butch)	18 years or older	Qualitative study (Semi-structured interview)	Analysis centered on identifying recurrent factors leading to femme-Pengkid relationships: 1). Love, Caring, Softness from “Pengkid”; 2). Loose Religious Understandings and Education, 3). Bitter Treatments Experienced with Men, 4). Friends/Peers Influence, 5). Biological factors, 6). Environmental factors
2023	Nordmarken	USA	30 binary identities, 45 beyond binary identities	18 years or older	Qualitative study (in-depth, semi-structured interviews)	Derived through thematic analysis of interview data, the overarching conceptual theme is “Coming Into Identity”, and the four sub-themes are: 1). exposure to new gender conceptualizations and models, 2). gender experimentation, 3). difficult experiences, and/or, 4). conversations with others. These experiences reveal identity as socially shaped

Table 1 (continued)

Year	Author	Country	Sample gender description and size	Age	Study design and methodology	Results
2018	Bradford et al.	USA	25 genderqueer-identified	15–26 years	Qualitative study (thematic analysis) (Semi-structured interviews)	Three major themes emerged: 1). intrapsychic experience (describing the internal and lived experiences of being genderqueer) 2). descriptions of master narratives about gender identity (capturing the dominant social narratives genderqueer individuals must navigate), and 3). co-construction of identities (reflecting how individuals actively respond to and reshape these narratives through personal strategies)
2021	Giano	USA	12 gays	18–24 years	Qualitative study (Interpretive interactionism and grounded theory) Online survey (open-ended qualitative questions)	Four major themes emerged: 1). The Internet acted as a catalyst in the development of gay male identities (highlighting how online access initiated and supported identity exploration), 2). Early milestones about participant's gay identity came largely from online experiences (indicating the formative role of digital spaces in initial self-recognition), 3). The use of pornography is multifaceted in the development of gay identity (revealing its complex and varied impact on identity understanding), and 4). Online experiences influenced affirmations of gay identities (demonstrating how digital interactions reinforced and validated sexual identity)
2024	Herry et al.	USA	15 White American transgender adults	22–41 years	Qualitative study (semi-structured interviews) Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)	Three major themes emerged: 1). Identity recognition and development (describing participants' transition experiences and how they recognized their gender identity), 2). Contextual influences on gender identity journey (exploring how factors like geographical location shaped their experiences), and 3). Social influences on gender identity journey (highlighting the role of social environments such as family and friends in shaping their gender identity)

Table 1 (continued)

Year	Author	Country	Sample gender description and size	Age	Study design and methodology	Results
2012	Schulz	US	28 transmasculine-identified individuals, pilot study with 15 genderqueer-identified individuals	23–59 years	Qualitative study (grounded theory) (Semi-structured interviews)	Five major themes emerged: 1). Experiencing childhood masculinity (describing early feelings and behaviors that did not align with assigned gender), 2). “Coming out” (narratives of disclosure and self-identification), 3). Discovering the option to “be trans” (learning that transmasculine and genderqueer identities exist and are possible), 4). Deciding to transition (making personal decisions about medical or social transition pathways), and 5). Post-transition identity development (ongoing negotiation and expression of identity after initial transition decisions)
2011	McLachlan	South Africa	5 transgender individuals	20–67 years	Qualitative study (In-depth interviews) (Phenomenological study)	Five major themes emerged from participants’ experiences: 1). Navigating tensions between public gender expectations and private identity; 2). Relational struggles marked by feelings of difference and isolation; 3). Bodily discomfort acting as a turning point toward transition; 4). The importance of self-acceptance and support from others in affirming identity; and 5). The complex role of religion and spirituality—initially a source of conflict, later becoming, for some, a space of affirmation and growth
2013	Hassan and Ghazali	Malaysia	5 transsexual homosexual individuals	18 years or older	Qualitative study (Case study) (In-depth, informal interviews)	Two primary themes emerged: 1). traumatic sexual experiences during childhood and 2). traumatic sexual experiences in early adulthood. In both cases, the perpetrators were significant individuals in the participants’ lives. These experiences were reported to have contributed to the development of inverse sexual orientation
2018	Kuper et al.	USA	20 transgender and gender non-conforming	19–22 years	Qualitative study (Constructivist grounded theory) (Semi-structured interviews)	Five key dimensions of gender-related experience emerged: 1). gender identity (including internal sense of gender, desired perception by others, and identity labels); 2). gender presentation (e.g., clothing, makeup, and style); 3). gender expression (e.g., roles, activities, personality); 4). physical self-image (desired sex characteristics); and 5). intrapersonal processes (awareness, exploration, meaning-making, and integration)

Table 1 (continued)

Year	Author	Country	Sample gender description and size	Age	Study design and methodology	Results
2017	Galupo et al.	USA	197 individuals included Gender variant (65.5%) and agender (34.5%)	18–70 years	Qualitative study (thematic analysis) Online survey (open-ended questions)	Six key themes emerged from participants' gender identity descriptions: 1). Gender identity using binary terms—participants used male or female language to highlight misalignment with binary categories; 2). Blended identity—gender was seen as a mix of male and female traits; 3). Fluid identity—gender shifted across time and context; 4). Nonbinary identity—participants rejected the gender binary entirely; 5). Transgender as identity—some embraced “trans” as a meaningful label despite not aligning with binary norms; and 6). Agender identity—participants identified as genderless or disconnected from gender altogether
2019	Eisenberg and Zervoulis	UK	6 transwomen	18 years older	Qualitative study Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Semi-structured interviews)	Five key themes emerged from participants' experiences: 1). Feeling different—a persistent early sense of not fitting in, without the language to explain it; 2). Conforming—suppressing identity by adopting traditional male roles to avoid rejection; 3). Exploration—gradual self-discovery often sparked by internet access and contact with trans communities; 4). Coming out and transitioning—involved renegotiating relationships and seeking social validation; and 5). Authenticity—living openly improved well-being and enabled genuine self-expression, though identities remained fluid
2019	Bates et al.	UK	11 LGBTQ + undergraduates	19–23 years	Qualitative study (Thematic analysis) (In-depth narrative interviews)	Four key themes emerged from LGBTQ + youths' experiences of social media in identity development: 1). Merging safe spaces—online / offline safe spaces supported stable identity formation; 2). External identity alignment—participants sought recognition for who they already knew themselves to be; 3). Multiple context-based identities—youths rejected fixed, singular sexual identities, adapting to different contexts; and 4). Individuality and autonomy—participants emphasized personalized expressions of identity within the broader LGBTQ + community

Table 2 Themes, sub-themes, and studies

Themes	Sub-themes	Studies
Personal dynamics	Initial Identity Recognition	Hassan and Ghazali (2013), Aziz et al. (2019), Herry et al. (2024)
	Body-Mind Dissonance	Morgan and Stevens (2012), Levitt and Ippolito (2014), Nordmarken (2023)
	Negotiating Identity	Bradford et al. (2018), Eisenberg and Zervoulis (2019), McLachlan (2011)
Social dynamics	Sense of Belonging & Digital Spaces	Schulz (2012), Giano (2021), Bates et al. (2019)
	Societal Stigma and Discrimination	Drabish (2023), Kuper et al. (2018), Nordmarken (2023)
Intersectional influences	Cultural/Religious Contexts	Aziz et al. (2019), McLachlan (2011)
	Geographical Barriers	Herry et al. (2024), Drabish (2023)

Negotiating Identity

For TGD individuals, identity formation is a lifelong process of reconciling their internal sense of gender with external manifestations; such reconciliation often only becomes salient through major life events and points of critical self-reflection. The process is intricate, characterized by a constant balancing act between authenticity and social expectations, always requiring shifting and accommodation. Some have a crisis point at which they can no longer endure living with one's assigned gender, as one participant explained: "I reached a point where I had another nervous breakdown, and it became clear that if I didn't make a change, I probably wouldn't be around much longer"(Morgan & Stevens, 2012). Others negotiate their identity in a slow build when life events leave one with time for reflection, such as Zelda, a white trans woman in her 60 s, who mused: "In one year, I went blind in one eye and my mother passed away... at 58, I had to determine what would make me happy." The process usually entails hiding or judiciously handling one's identity, especially in times of dissonance between body-mind—as did transgender woman Amber relate: "I kept everything hidden after that beating... Even when I was married, my ex-wife had no idea" (Morgan & Stevens, 2012). Others use creative ways of coping with societal pressures, including utilizing theater as a way of experimentation with identity: "I was involved in theatre because it allowed me to be someone that I wasn't. and found my place by making people happy" (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). Regardless of whether caused by significant life events such as divorce, retirement, or loss, or wrought upon need to concurrently prioritize risk with expression of self, this negotiation of identity is indicative of complicated push/pull between personal veracity and social realities (Nordmarken, 2023; Eisenberg & Zervoulis, 2019; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014; Morgan & Stevens, 2012).

Social Dynamics

The term “social dynamic” refers to the interactions, relationships, and societal factors that influence how individuals perceive and express their gender identity. Recognizing the role of social dynamics highlights the challenges of navigating social contexts and the impact of external factors on identity formation. The second theme, “Social Dynamic,” includes three sub-themes: Sense of Belonging, Gender and Society Conflict, and Transition.

Sense of Belonging and Digital Spaces

The first sub-theme, “Sense of Belonging,” explores how individuals find acceptance in social groups that validate their gender identity. A strong community can foster self-concept and emotional support for one's gender identity. Many participants discovered the possibility of being TGD through encounters with other TGD groups and media representations. The 1998 film *Boys Don't Cry*, depicting trans man Brandon Teena's journey, is noted as pivotal in shaping transmasculine identities by introducing the female-to-male transgender experience to the public. Nolan shared: “Watching *Boys Don't Cry* helped me identify with a man and gave me the language to express my identity. I realized I wasn't stupid or crazy.” This film not only validated transmasculine experiences but also provided language for expression. It coincided with the rise of online forums, where participants found crucial spaces for identity development. Drake explained: “I began engaging with the butch/femme community online, where I connected with trans men's stories. I realized I identified more with them than with women.” These experiences highlight the importance of cultural representations and online communities in fostering a sense of belonging within TGD groups (Schulz, 2012).

Societal Stigma and Discrimination

Opposition to a person's self-awareness of TGD representatives generates institutionalized stigma and discrimination. Such exclusion occurs inside institutions like justice systems or health care and schools. In many cases, individuals may be forced to alter their gender expressions to live in safety whilst preserving a specific sense of self internally (Nordmarken, 2023). Black transmasculine man Jack illustrated this plight in detailing working-place microaggressions: “They replaced my faculty photo with an older one, and the next day it was up again with a 'before and after' comparison. This was my first major experience with transphobia, and I decided being trans was something I'd have to live with for life.” There are three intersecting patterns of stigma identified in research as being applied across TGD groups: internalized stigma (internalizing negative societal views), expected stigma (predicting discrimination), as well as enacted stigma (actual exposures to prejudice) (Drabish, 2023). Whereas internalized transphobia can create feelings of inferior worth, individuals such as this participant who stated, “I always felt something was off, but I didn't want to change myself. I wanted everyone else to change” (Kuper et al., 2018; T7), interpret this stigma in ways of strength as well as pride. These encounters illustrate ways in which

TGD individuals undergo as well as counter systems of exclusion in order to assert themselves.

Intersectional Impacts

This theme of Intersectional Influences points out how religious, geographical, as well as cultural influences, contribute towards gender identity formation in TGD individuals. It emphasizes that identity development does not exist in vacuum but is deeply set in larger contexts of sociocultural environments.

Cultural and Religious Contexts

Cultural and religious expectations play an important role in the way in which TGD individuals conceptualize and articulate their gender. In some cultures, strict gender binaries are emphasized in religious contexts, presenting additional obstacles for individuals whose expressions fall outside of such expectations. Aziz et al. (2019), for instance, quoted Malaysian Malay Muslim participants to be negotiating intricate tensions between Islamic teaching and gender identity, while some explained scripture in a less stringent sense in order to reconcile with both religion and sense of self. In similar ways, McLachlan (2011) explained how South African participants balanced multiple demands of traditional gender roles with those of personal identity, with spirituality in some cases serving as at once tension as well as affirmation. These reports illustrate how both cultural as well as religious contexts will either inhibitor and when reevaluated support TGD individuals along identity routes.

Geographical Barriers

Geography, too, plays a pivotal role in the experience of gender identity, especially in areas where the TGD population has few legal rights or visibility. Research done by Herry et al. (2024) indicated that rural White American transgender adults experienced increased isolation and limited resources compared to their counterparts in cities, putting them at a disadvantage in terms of the acceptance of their identities and transition strategies. Drabish (2023) validated in West Virginia, where participants described feeling subjected to conservative social environments aggravating stigma as well as reducing accessibility of gender-affirming care. These geographical disparities demonstrate how place-based disparities intersect with gender identity, leaving some individuals with no choice but to relocate or develop measures of resilience in order to thrive in non-affirming environments.

Discussion

This review summarized the qualitative evidence regarding gender identity development in transgender and gender-diverse (TGD) people in adulthood and submitted a multidimensional, integrative model, which suggested an enlightened influence of

three mutually interdependent processes: social dynamics, personal dynamics, and intersectional influences.

Despite this growing awareness and more than 100 different types of genders currently identified (Diversity, 2024; FOX 26 Houston, 2024), very little research has been done on the formation of identity based on the combination of cultural expectations and societal norms combined with the lived experience. Besides, the available studies nearing gender scholarship have mainly been centered on children and young people (Stynes et al., 2021) or adult samples that have no specific age (Di Luigi et al., 2025), and frequently on the participation in support of the binary or non-binary identities (Jones et al., 2017). This paper fills these gaps by synthesizing qualitative evidence on gender identity development among transgender and gender-diverse (TGD) adults providing three intertwined themes, Personal Dynamics, Social Dynamics, and Intersectional Influences.

Such evidence supports the idea that the development of gender identity is not a linear process but a lifelong, recursive process, whose formation is influenced by the inner experiences a person is exposed to, his or her relationships, and the effect of other structural forces (American Psychological Association, 2015). This broadened lens to theory contributes to the development of theory, spans extant gaps in the literature, and has significant implications in clinical practice, social support systems, as well as policy-making applications.

Based on the works of Lev (2004) about the model of transgender emergence and Sevelius (2013) on gender affirmation, the current synthesis provides a more cohesive framework of identity development linking the strands of personal, interpersonal, and contextual levels. All those dimensions are critical in developing unique and non-sequential routes of identity construction that transgender and gender diverse (TGD) individuals do.

Personal dynamics sit at the center of this process, the intrapsychic experiences by which people come to understand, define, and negotiate their gender identity. Although this corresponds to the early phases of awareness and identity clarification (Lev, 2004), the results of this review show a more fluid and culturally contextualized trajectory of identity development. The personal dynamic evolves in three interconnected sub-themes that include Initial Identity Recognition, Body-Mind Dissonance, and Identity Negotiation.

Most respondents recounted a preliminary realization of gender that occurred due to a lack of congruence among inner sense and externally dictated gender roles. Although these realizations, both sudden and gradual, could be catalyzed by experiencing some sort of trauma (Hassan & Ghazali, 2013) or supportive messages in media or surrounding communities (Aziz et al., 2019), they do not seem to follow a universal timeline.

This elicited struggle is commonly revealed in the form of body-mind dissonance which is the psychological tussle between physical embodiment and inner gender identification. Whereas acute gender dysphoria was reported by some, others described milder manifestations of discomfort (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). These accounts emphasize the fact that a dysphoric experience is not common to everyone and frequently determined by the sociocultural background of an individual (Nordmarken, 2023; Morgan & Stevens, 2012). Drawing upon Lev's (2004) exploration of

gender identity development, the cultural context has been emphasized as a mediator of the development of gender identity since it also determines whether this representation would gather or express gender-related distress.

In negotiating their identity, as people dealt with inner conflict, a great number of people found creative ways to deal with their identity when they faced societal demands. The partial or symbolic manifestation of identity was enabled by types of practices like cross-dressing, role-playing, and participation in artistic spaces (Eisenberg & Zervoulis, 2019; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014; Morgan & Stevens, 2012), affirming the claim of Sevelius (2013) model of gender affirmation that identity development is actively negotiated.

Although internal processes were foundational, social dynamics served as a mediating force in the development gender identity. Continuing on Sevelius's (2013) model of gender affirmation and social transition stages developed by Lev (2004), the research findings depict the increasing role of digital sphere and intersectional factors in the identity development and exploration process. The social dynamic evolves in two interconnected sub-themes that include Sense of Belonging and Digital Spaces, and Societal Stigma and Discrimination.

Most of the participants explained how joining the affirmative community, both in real life and online, created a sense of belonging. Participants also identified media representation, including 1998 film *Boys Don't Cry*, as a way media offered language and visibility, whereas digital resources were mentioned as playing key roles in exploration, validation, and connectivity (Schulz, 2012). Such positively valued contexts served as mirrors to identity creation, although access was unequal and typically mediated by the intersecting social forms of marginalization.

Stigmatization and Discrimination act as a forceful impediment in the process of identifying transgender and gender diverse (TGD) identity in individuals. The reality of transphobia in the workplace, school, and medical facilities compels numerous individuals to suppress or alter their gender presentation (Nordmarken, 2023). Drabish's (2023) study indicates internalized, expected, and enacted stigma, and course through emotional harm and structural exclusion affected participants. Nevertheless, some reframed their experiences as something that gives them resilience and pride (Kuper et al., 2018). These results emphasize the twofold process of survival and resistance to marginalization towards attainment of genuine selfhood. This step relates to the stage of identity tolerance in Lev (2004) but notes the difference in the experience of stigma depending on social position and the cultural context.

Notably, the interplay between personal and social dynamics forms recursive developmental loops, where social experiences refract personal identity narratives that alter the future social-based interactions (Kuper et al., 2018). This counters the linear stage theories as it shows how human beings can still experience previous stages when they meet with new social situations or life transitions (Nordmarken, 2023).

This analysis also throws light on structural and intersectional influences that go beyond traditional identity frameworks. The Intersectional Influences evolve into two interconnected sub-themes that include cultural/religious contexts and geographical barriers. The study shows how possibilities for identity are very much shaped by cultural, religious, and geographical contexts, building on Lev's (2004) transgender

emergence model, and Sevelius's (2013) gender affirmation framework by bringing together more contextual and intersectional considerations in the understanding of gender identity development. In addition to social influences, more structural and cultural situations were meaningful forces on the development of gender identity.

Cultural and religious contexts appeared to be very impactful on how transgender and gender diverse (TGD) people imagined or expressed their identities. In cultures where religious dogma reinforces binary norms around gender, individuals were often confronted with competing demands of faith and their sense of self. Research indicates that some people with transgender and gender diverse (TGD) identities read religious descriptions in ways that bring identity and beliefs into alignment (Aziz et al., 2019), while others experience a combination of conflict and affirmation in understandings of identity through spiritual practices. Similar themes show that faith might also be a source of affirmation as well as a constraint in the identity formation process (McLachlan, 2011).

Geographic location also has a decisive role in identity experiences, particularly in rural or conservative settings where legal protections and affirming resources are limited (Herry et al., 2024). Studies highlight how rural transgender and gender diverse (TGD) adults often face heightened isolation, stigma, and limited access to gender-affirming care. Such obstacles usually encourage people to migrate or cultivate personal resilience to navigate hostile environments (Drabish, 2023). Such findings emphasize that identity formation is not only psychological or social but also spatially and structurally contingent.

All taken together, these findings provide us with a strong, multifaceted theoretical framework that challenges the linear stage development models and rethinks how we think about the development of gender identity. More critically, this framework challenges linear trajectories and promotes recursive context-specific processes that are realized in an ongoing negotiation and adaptation process. The analysis demonstrates that transgender and gender diverse (TGD) individuals often revisit their earlier developmental stages when they are exposed to new social environments or life transitions, underscoring the dynamic and lifelong nature of identity development (Lev, 2004; Sevelius, 2013). This framework integrates interpersonal aspects like social affirmation, self-awareness, and identity negotiation; intrapsychic elements like self-recognition, internal dissonance, and identity negotiation; and intersectional influences like geographical barriers and cultural or religious contexts (Aziz et al., 2019; Drabish, 2023; Herry et al., 2024). Moreover, it represents intersectional variation among diverse transgender and gender-diverse (TGD) individual experiences, and shows how structural factors (e.g., gender norms, religious expectations, and place-based oppression) lead to both similarities and differences in lived experiences of transgender and gender-diverse (TGD) people (McLachlan, 2011; Nordmarken, 2023). These insights illustrate to us the practical relevance of the structural barrier's framework, extending its applicability beyond theory into clinical and community-based practice.

Clinically, this multidimensional model offers a helpful guide for practitioners working with transgender and gender-diverse (TGD) clients. It's not just about designing new assessments; it also promotes a holistic approach that considers the interaction of personal awareness, social affirmation, and environmental barriers

altogether. It advocates the idea to design interventions that fit a person's lived experiences, whether that's dealing with religious tensions common in both Muslim and Christian communities (Aziz et al., 2019; McLachlan, 2011), or geographic isolation where support is limited (Drabish, 2023; Herry et al., 2024). Ultimately, it's a call to action: dismantling the systemic barriers in healthcare, education, and identifying areas where structural change may enhance service accessibility (American Psychological Association, 2015; Sevelius, 2013).

Conclusion, Limitations, Recommendations, and Implications

Conclusion

This research proposes a multidimensional model of analyzing gender identity development in transgender and gender-diverse (TGD) adults and combines personal, social, and structural dimensions of gender identity development. Offers an integration of Lev's (2004) model of transgender emergence and Sevelius's (2013) gender affirmation framework and argues that identity development is not a linear process but a recursive process (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014; Nordmarken, 2023). Internal self-recognition is a core element, mostly brought on by the conflict between self-perception and assigned gender role. These realizations may develop suddenly or over time, and are often triggered by trauma experiences and negative heterosexual relationship experiences (Aziz et al., 2019; Hassan & Ghazali, 2013), and shaped further by social affirmation and stigma as well as sense of belonging (Drabish, 2023; Schulz, 2012). Structural and cultural forces like religious norms, geographic barriers or systematic exclusion are significant in limiting and facilitating the expression of identity (Herry et al., 2024; McLachlan, 2011). The model explains that identity negotiation is dynamic and lifelong, influenced by tactics such as symbolic expression and selective disclosure. The framework addresses theoretical and empirical gaps offers a more comprehensive foundation on culturally sensitive clinical practice, social support systems and the development of affirming public policy.

Limitations

Despite the logical conclusions drawn in the synthesis, a number of limitations are worth mentioning. The difficulty with the review is the use of, mostly, Western and English-language literature, which can limit the usefulness of the framework in non-Western settings where religious, internal and societal prescriptions exist that contribute to the shaping of gender identity. Second, the qualitative nature of the majority of the articles considered provides fruitful results yet limits the possibility of quantitative comparisons of different heterogeneous groups of people and environments. Third, gender-related terminologies as well as the social processes are dynamic in the sense that certain findings may need to be periodically tested. Fourth, there were representational gaps of some marginalized groups (transgender and gender-diverse people in prison or with intellectual or developmental disabilities). Finally, the focus of the study on adulthood can impede the use of the findings in younger populations,

since adolescent or child development of gender identity can be along different psychological and social trajectories.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should aim to address the gaps identified in this review. First, longitudinal empirical research is needed to follow the paths of gender identity formation throughout the entire life, paying close attention to key stages of transitioning through life. Second, the expansion of the scope of inquiry to non-Western contexts will allow a researcher to evaluate and improve the relevance of the existing framework in such settings where religious and cultural traditions are heterogeneous. Third, the tools that have the capacity to measure the relative impact of individual, social, and structural factors on shaping identity should be developed. Fourth, one should pay critical attention to how the current sociopolitical processes, such as anti-trans bills and changing policy models, impact developmental pathways in TGD. Fifth, the experiences of the TGD people, especially people who live with disabilities, older adults, and those people residing in rural areas or underserved communities, are under-represented should be explored.

Implications for Practice

This study's integrative framework offers a cohesive model. Which guide in understanding gender identity development across personal, social, and cultural dimensions. For clinicians, it suggests a developmental, trauma-informed, and contextually responsive practice when engaging with individuals who experience identity confusion in gender identity formation process. It helps to design community programs to respond to the varied needs of individuals in underserved areas by offering accessible resources and support across life stages. Provide suggestions for policy reforms that may benefit from addressing practical barriers related to healthcare access and workplace marginalization. It helps to understand and design potent educational and training programs that will aim to enhance awareness of the diverse pathways through which gender identity is experienced and understood.

Appendix



CASP Checklist: 10 questions to help you make sense of a **Qualitative** research

How to use this appraisal tool: Three broad issues need to be considered when appraising a qualitative study:

- ▶ Are the results of the study valid? (Section A)
- ▶ What are the results? (Section B)
- ▶ Will the results help locally? (Section C)

The 10 questions on the following pages are designed to help you think about these issues systematically. The first two questions are screening questions and can be answered quickly. If the answer to both is “yes”, it is worth proceeding with the remaining questions. There is some degree of overlap between the questions, you are asked to record a “yes”, “no” or “can’t tell” to most of the questions. A number of italicised prompts are given after each question. These are designed to remind you why the question is important. Record your reasons for your answers in the spaces provided.

About: These checklists were designed to be used as educational pedagogic tools, as part of a workshop setting, therefore we do not suggest a scoring system. The core CASP checklists (randomised controlled trial & systematic review) were based on JAMA ‘Users’ guides to the medical literature 1994 (adapted from Guyatt GH, Sackett DL, and Cook DJ), and piloted with health care practitioners.

For each new checklist, a group of experts were assembled to develop and pilot the checklist and the workshop format with which it would be used. Over the years overall adjustments have been made to the format, but a recent survey of checklist users reiterated that the basic format continues to be useful and appropriate.

Referencing: we recommend using the Harvard style citation, i.e.: *Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (2018). CASP (insert name of checklist i.e. Qualitative) Checklist. [online] Available at: URL. Accessed: Date Accessed.*

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Authors and Affiliations

Iqra Fiaz¹ · Sana Rehman¹ · Siti Raudzah Ghazali² · Sadia Saleem³ · Shoaib Abbas⁴

✉ Sana Rehman
sanarehmanpk@gmail.com

¹ Humanities and Social Sciences Department, GIFT University, Sialkot Bypass, Lohian Wala, Gujranwala 52250, Punjab, Pakistan

² Faculty of Medicine and Health Science, University Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan, Malaysia

³ Jaffrey Cheah School of Medicine and Health Science, Monash University, Jalan Lagoan Selatan, Subang Jaya, Malaysia

⁴ Institute of Applied Psychology, Punjab University, Lahore, Pakistan