Further genders

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Further Genders

Meg John Barker and Christina Richards

Introduction

In this chapter, we cover those gender forms which fall outside the common binary of women and men. However, as we will see, bisecting the world into women and men – or, indeed, women, men, and others – is not necessarily a useful way of conceptualising things. Consequently, we have entitled this chapter ‘Further Genders’ in order to be comprehensible to readers who are unfamiliar with gender forms other than woman or man (whether trans or cisgender<sup>1</sup>).</p>

Another commonly used umbrella term, which we use throughout the chapter, is non-binary. Broadly speaking, this includes people who:

- have no gender (e.g. gender neutral, non-gendered, genderless, agender, neuter, neutrois);
- incorporate aspects of both man and woman (e.g. mixed gender, sometimes pangender, androgynous);
- are to some extent, but not completely, one gender (e.g. demi man/boy, demi woman/girl);
- are of a specific additional gender (either between man and woman or otherwise additional to those genders, e.g. third gender, other gender, sometimes pangender);
- move between genders (e.g. bigender, gender fluid, sometimes pangender);
- move between multiple genders (e.g. trigender, sometimes pangender);
- disrupt the gender binary of women and men (e.g. genderqueer, genderfuck).

As we will see, many people’s realities, whether they use this terminology or not, are something outside the strict categories of man (e.g. always wears blue, is aggressive, smokes...
a pipe) and woman (e.g. always wears pink, is passive, does knitting). Therefore, this chapter considers both those who explicitly identify outside the gender binary and those whose experience may be regarded as to some extent non-binary.

Another point to consider here is that the terms above may well be unfamiliar to many readers precisely because this remains such an under-researched area (and, indeed, an under-represented area in wider Western culture). As we will see, the vast majority of psychological research and theory has assumed that gender is binary – often to the point of searching for differences between (two) genders. Relatively little work has challenged the categories of women and men, although there has been a fair amount of theory in some areas of other disciplines (such as Sociology, Cultural Studies, Gender Studies, and Trans Studies) questioning the gender binary: most notably queer theory.\footnote{We touch upon this during the chapter while focusing upon the burgeoning body of knowledge within psychology. Of course, when we refer to ‘psychology’ here we are speaking of a minority Western model of psychology which has historically not engaged fully with global identities and experiences. Consequently, while this chapter endeavours to be broader in scope, it necessarily reflects this bias in its reporting of the literature.}

**History**

In the early years of Western psychological thinking, the binary gender system was viewed as self-evident, and deviations from it were generally regarded as psychopathological (Krafft-Ebing, 1886) or as the outcome of a developmental process (Freud, 1905). Generally speaking, women’s experience was neglected and the focus was upon men’s lives and realities. Up to the 1960s, psychoanalysts and psychologists tended to look for overall human explanations for psychological phenomena (generally studying men), and assumed that women would naturally be inferior (Tavris, 1993). However, more recently, both academic psychology and popular psychology have turned towards a ubiquitous view of the genders as different, or ‘opposite’, with the majority seeking explanations for why women differ from a perceived masculine norm (see Hegarty & Buechel, 2006) and a minority suggesting that women’s experience may be superior to men’s (e.g. Gilligan’s, 1982, work on women’s supposedly more care-based moral reasoning).
Neither of these understandings (of men as superior to, or more normal than, women) questions the gender binary or includes the possibility of gender fluidity or flexibility. Furthermore, subsequent mainstream and critical work in this area has questioned the obsession with gender differences, finding that women and men are far more similar psychologically than they are different (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Indeed, a moment’s thought allows one to recognise that there are no psychological areas in which men and women are entirely discrete (Fine, 2010). Additionally, there are often larger differences between people of the same gender in different cultures than there are between people of different genders in the same culture. Despite this, psychologists tend to add (binary) gender as an independent variable (IV) in the vast majority of studies. The bias towards reporting research which finds a difference over that which does not means that such research is over-reported, reinforcing the notion that there are two and only two genders, and that they are different in kind and not degree.

If we assume, for the moment, that gender is, in fact, a spectrum, it might be reasonable also to assume that it would, as with so many aspects of human experience, be normally distributed. Relatively few people would be situated within the tails, and the great mass would be clustered around the mean, as in the diagram below (Figure 10.1).

**Figure 10.1** Gender distribution

However, if we consider the impact of such cultural forces as gendered modes of dress, language use, and even such things as gendered stationery, colours, watches, shampoos, and so on, such forces would create a bimodal distribution, as in the diagram below. This is evidenced in an embodied sense when one picks a ‘pink’ or ‘blue’ aisle in a children’s toy shop (Figure 10.2).

**Figure 10.2** Gender distribution with cultural impact

The tendency in both mainstream and popular psychology to constantly reinforce the idea of ‘opposite’ binary genders could be regarded as very much part of this impact. However, as we will now see, even this conceptualisation (of gender on a spectrum) is limited.

The most influential psychological researcher to study gender in a way that included the possibility of non-binary experience was Sandra Bem (e.g. Bem, 1981, 1995; Bem & Lenney, 1976; Bem & Lewis, 1975). Bem challenged the prevailing view that people were
healthier if they conformed to the psychological characteristics most associated with their gender (i.e. masculine men and feminine women). She created a measure of gender, the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), which contained questions relating to 60 traits: 20 stereotypically masculine, 20 stereotypically feminine, and 20 neutral filler items. Including masculinity and femininity separately in this way moved away from the common view that masculinity and femininity were polar opposites, and opened up the possibility that people could, for example, be high or low on both masculinity and femininity simultaneously. Participants were classified as sex-typed (high on the gender traits commonly associated with their birth-assigned sex and low on those of the ‘other sex’); sex-reversed (low on the gender traits commonly associated with their birth-assigned sex and high on those of the ‘other sex’); androgynous (displaying both stereotypically masculine and stereotypically feminine traits); or undifferentiated (low on both).

Once validated, Bem used the BSRI to compare androgynous participants with those who were more sex-typed (e.g. Bem & Lenney, 1976; Bem & Lewis, 1975). For example, Bem and Lenney (1976) found that sex-typed individuals struggled more than androgynous people to engage in behaviours associated with the ‘other sex’ even if it was in their best interests to do so. Bem concluded that those who were androgynous were better able to adapt to their situation and, therefore, that psychological androgyny was the healthiest kind of gender.

However, in Bem’s later work she moved away from the idea of androgyny as inherently liberating because the concept still reinforces the idea that there are psychologically masculine and feminine traits, rather than recognising that such understandings are bound in time and place. Bem (1981) argued that gender was not useful as an organising category beyond the description of genitalia, and that psychology – and wider culture – should move away from the use of gender categories entirely. Her gender schema theory focused on examining how children internalise concepts of ‘appropriate’ gender roles, and how this affects their behaviours. Here Bem focused on the learned nature of gender schemas and how their dynamic construction provided for the possibility of change. Therefore, overall, Bem’s work opened up the possibility both for gender experience to incorporate masculinity and femininity, and for gender fluidity and flexibility.

We return to Bem’s (1995) more recent psychological theories later in the chapter. For now, it is important to point out that her work has not gone without criticism. Particularly, the
theories do not always capture the multidimensionality of gender (Carothers & Reis, 2012) (Figure 10.3).

Important points for students
Fitting and misfitting binary gender
Write down in two columns what it means to be feminine and what it means to be masculine in mainstream culture (covering all aspects, including behaviour, roles, emotions, and appearance – for example, women care about their appearance and men don’t). Consider whether you, or the people you know, fit only into one column.

Multidimensional gender
Critics of gender theories that are based on notions of masculinity and femininity have pointed out that how people identify with these depends a lot on what aspect of stereotypical masculinity or femininity we are talking about. Try putting a cross on the following spectrums as to where you would place yourself if you were referring to masculinity and femininity broadly, or if you were using the terms to mean: ‘delicate or tough’, ‘emotional or rational’, or ‘submissive or dominant’.

```
Masculine ——— feminine
Delicate ——— tough
Emotional ——— rational
Submissive ——— dominant
```

Figure 10.3 Spectra of gender (adapted from Barker, 2013)

In addition to multidimensionality, it is important to note that gender is intersectional – meaning that the way in which people’s gender manifests itself intersects with other aspects of their identity and experience, such as class, race, ethnicity, age, generation, and geographical location. What is considered masculine and feminine differs across different contexts (see Barker, 2013). Furthermore, how people behave often depends on the situation they are in, or on the gender of the people they are interacting with, rather than on anything intrinsic about their own gender. For example, single fathers behave in nurturing ways (Risman, 1987); and girls play in more independent ways when with other girls rather than with boys (Maccoby, 1990). This fact, that gender in such contexts is not a fixed and innate characteristic but, rather, is changeable and culturally bound, has been termed ‘doing gender’
(West & Zimmerman, 1987). All of these aspects make it difficult to measure the degree of masculinity or femininity that a person possesses.

So, we have seen that psychology has overwhelmingly focused on gender as a (natural) binary, and on demonstrating differences between women and men. Bem’s research suggests that it is certainly possible for some people to have a more androgynous gender (having both masculine and feminine traits) and for gender to be more flexible and fluid. We now turn to the small body of more recent research which has studied those whose identities and experiences explicitly fall outside the gender binary of women and men.

**Key theory and research**

Biological research into gender reveals that, at all levels of analysis, there is diversity rather than a strict binary (Joel, 2012). This includes such things as genotype and phenotype (body morphology and neuroanatomy), and it is the case within both human and non-human domains (Fausto-Sterling, 2012). Within humans, 1–2% of the population has some form of intersex condition (see Roen, *Intersex*, this volume), and if neurological intersex is included this number would be far higher (cf. Richards & Barker, 2013). However, it is important to remember that many intersex people identify as male or female. One biological study has explicitly studied a group of people who identify outside the gender binary and found evidence for a neural substrate associated with bigender experience (switching between masculine and feminine identity) (Case & Ramachandran, 2012).

Perhaps due to such biological underpinnings, non-binary identity and experience is relatively ubiquitous both geographically and over time (Herdt, 1996). However, such identity and experience obviously varies according to the cultural context in which it occurs. For example, we might consider the Hijra identity in India; the Tom, Dee, and Kathoey identities in Thailand; or the Bissu, Calabai, and Calalai identities in some communities in Indonesia. It is vital not to reduce such identities and practices to contemporary minority Western understandings of binary or non-binary genders, as diverse cultural understandings may well not fit within such a worldview. Psychologists should also be cautious of slipping into academic colonialism through overly critical or celebratory discourses regarding such experiences and identities.
Intersections between biology and culture are perhaps best viewed as biopsychosocial in that, in addition to biological aspects impacting psychological experience, there will inevitably be feedback from the social context in which people find themselves to their cognitions, neural connections, and behaviours. These will, in turn, inevitably affect the sociocultural context. This positioning of people as an inextricable part of their culture is particularly vital in the case of non-binary people within a largely binary culture wherein the disjunct between these two states must be negotiated with evident tensions. This is apparent in the limited amount of research which has been conducted, thus far, into Western non-binary gender experience.

In relation to the extent of non-binary identity, one UK study found that 5% of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth surveyed identified as neither male or female (METRO Youth Chances, 2014). In the United States, Harrison et al. (2012) found that 13% of trans people surveyed were ‘a gender not listed here’ (p. 14). Finally, a Scottish study on trans mental health, McNeil et al. (2012), found that over a quarter of survey participants identified as non-binary or agendered. Generally speaking across such research, non-binary-identified people were younger than trans men or women (this is also echoed by Hansbury, 2005).

A key finding from the research is that many non-binary people do not feel that they have specific spaces within which they fit. This often includes an experience of not fitting into cisgender or trans spaces, analogous to many bisexual people’s experiences of not fitting into heterosexual or lesbian/gay spaces (see Bowes-Catton & Hayfield, Bisexuality, this volume). Some non-binary people have created online or offline spaces for themselves (e.g. Beyond the Binary working group, 2014), while others have found a home within broader trans or LGBT communities (Rankin & Beemyn, 2012).

Such developments have been successful in creating a nascent sense of community among some non-binary people, perhaps especially those who are younger and internet literate. For those who do not have access to such developments, the (labelled) identity may not be available to match the experience of being non-binary. This may lead to the associated psychological sequelae of having an isolated experience. Saltzburg and Davis (2010) found that non-binary young people often reported not knowing how to embrace their gender identities until they found others who identified in such ways. The participants also said that
it was difficult to have a sense of authenticity without any acknowledgement of their identities from the people around them.

In terms of wider understandings of gender, most non-binary research participants did not perceive either gender or sexuality as discrete, or mutually exclusive, categories but, rather, stated that there was complexity and multiplicity in gender embodiment and expression (Davidson, 2007). Some felt an inherent responsibility to challenge the gender binary, even describing themselves as ‘gender pioneers’ and having a sense of being engaged in ‘culture-making’ (Saltzburg & Davis, 2010, p. 105). However, of course, by no means all non-binary people feel such political motivations, and a significant proportion are in cultural and economic positions of marginalisation which limit their capacity to engage in such ways.

Important points for academics

Non-binary experience has important implications for how psychologists measure gender in the demographics sections of their research (notwithstanding the wider question of whether gender should be included at all, or whether it can be regarded as an IV with discrete levels). Current good practice would involve, at the very least, including the possibility of ‘in another way (please state)’ and ‘prefer not to say’ options alongside ‘man’ and ‘woman’ in demography sections pertaining to how people identify their gender (Equality and Human Rights Commission – Glen & Hurrel, 2012).

It is also important to ensure that participants are not misgendered in any way in the reporting of research (Ansara & Hegarty, 2012) and that anonymised names and pronouns reflect their own gender identities.

Finally, reflexivity (for both qualitative and quantitative research) should involve reflection on researchers’ own gender assumptions and the potential impact of this on all aspects of the research process (see Richards et al., 2014, for an in-depth consideration of this topic).

Current debates
While research on non-binary identity and experience is very recent, theoretical considerations have been present in the wider academic literature for some time, notably in the form of queer theory and Trans Studies. Prior to this, some psychological and psychiatric writing dealt with genders that transgressed a fixed binary; however, all of these tended to be subsumed within understandings of ‘transsexualism’, as this was the only available discourse (see Murjan & Bouman, *Trans Gender*; Lenihan, Kainth & Dundas, *Trans Sexualities*, this volume). Within such queer and psychoanalytic literatures there have been occasional depictions of gender as non-binary, but these have often been deployed in problematic ways, for example in order to deny the necessity of transition for trans people (e.g. Hakeem, 2007).

The lacuna of material on the lived experience of non-binary gender, and its lack of visibility within wider culture, means that it can be useful to turn to activist and community literature as well as the small number of extant studies. For example, there have been important collections of accounts from ‘beyond the binary’ in each of the last three decades (Bornstein & Bergman, 2010; Nestle & Wilchins, 2002; Queen & Schimel, 1997), as well as a recent explosion of non-binary websites, blogs, and social media groups. These are helpful resources for psychologists to engage with when exploring how this, albeit limited, subset of people are negotiating non-binary gender in a binary world.

Key current debates in this area concern aspects of language, mental health, medical interventions, legal recognition, and negotiation of public space. These topics are all touched upon in the remainder of this chapter.

The impact of gendered language on experience is well documented within psychology: for example, the usage of ‘man’ for ‘human’ (and similarly gendered words) impacts on comprehension of texts by women (Weatherall, 2005), and cisgenderist language impacts on the sense of exclusion of trans people (Ansara & Hegarty, 2012). Thus, it does not take much of a leap to predict that binary language, and misgendering of non-binary people, will likely have similar effects.

One key way in which non-binary people have developed language in order to enable recognition and representation of their experiences is to adopt non- or different-gender language. Saltzburg and Davis (2010) found that young non-binary people frequently struggled with imposed gendered titles (such as Mr/Ms), as well as with family members who often wanted to use their birth names rather than chosen names. Family members may also
struggle with non-binary alternatives to relationship terms (e.g. sibling instead of sister/brother; offspring instead of son/daughter; parent instead of mother/father).

In considering new and preferred terms we restrict ourselves to considering English language forms, but it is vital to note that there are different approaches in other languages, particularly those within which all nouns are gendered, such as French. Within English, perhaps the most common set of non-binary gender pronouns is the use of the existing terms they/their/them/themself. This is grammatically correct in the singular, and there are examples of its singular usage dating back to the likes of Chaucer and Shakespeare. However, some still do not like its association with plurality, although others enjoy this for its troubling of the notion that people are singular selves (Barker, 2013). Other popular pronoun sets which have been explicitly developed include: xe/xyr/xem/xyrself (which has been adopted by schools in Vancouver, BBC, 2014), Sie/hir/hir/hirself, and Per/per/pers/perself (from Piercy, 1976).

We listed, in the Introduction, many of the identity terms which are emerging for diverse non-binary experiences; however, it is worth noting that the US survey studies of Harrison et al. (2012) and Kuper et al. (2012) both found ‘genderqueer’ to be the most common term. Participants frequently related to more than one gender term (either over time or concurrently). Some terms were specific to certain cultural traditions, for example two-spirit (US First Nations) and Mahuwahine (Hawaiian), and some people devised their own unique genders, for example ‘birl, OtherWise, gender blur’ (p. 20) (Harrison et al., 2012). Rankin and Beemyn (2012) further found that some people described themselves with percentages, for example ‘one-third male, one-third female, one-third transgender’ (p. 2), or without labels: ‘I am me.’

Such proliferation of terms reached popular attention in 2014 due to the decision of the social networking site Facebook to provide 58 possible gender terms, and the possibility of choosing the pronoun ‘they’ (see Barker, 2014). Some psychologists and other scientists have taken a stance on how many different versions or forms of gender there may be once non-binary genders are included. Fausto-Sterling (2012) suggested five, but later revised this. Fontanella et al.’s (2013) global survey divided participants into nine gender categories: heterosexual cisgender females, non-heterosexual cisgender females, females who identify themselves as men, fluid females, intersex persons, heterosexual cisgender males, non-heterosexual cisgender males, males who identify themselves as men, fluid males. Bem
(1995) similarly combined gender and sexuality to make an initial suggestion of 18 genders to encompass all the potential combinations of two sexes (male/female), three genders (masculine, feminine, androgynous) and three desires (heterosexual/homosexual/bisexual), although obviously this neglects to include diversity of biological sex or desires that do not relate to gender of attraction (see Richards, Further Sexualities, this volume). Saltzburg and Davis (2010) certainly found that some of their non-binary participants also employed terms which integrated identity of gender and sexuality, such as ‘lesbian in a male body’, and others also included elements of spirituality, such as ‘faerie’.

This raises the question of whether gender-related theory and activism should focus on dismantling the gender dichotomy; on expanding it; or on operating within it. Interestingly, Bem changed her position on this towards the end of her career. She had previously argued that gender should become an unimportant category, only considered when absolutely relevant. However, in 1995, she suggested that the way forward was to turn the volume up on gender instead of down:

I propose that we let a thousand categories of sex/gender/desire begin to bloom in any and all fluid and permeable configurations and, through that very proliferation, that we thereby undo the privileged status of the two-and-only-two that are currently treated as normal and natural. (Bem, 1995, p. 330)

However, Bem (1995) was also aware that such proliferation could lead to further ‘straightjackets’, as people struggled to fit into new narrowly defined identities. This is a danger with all marginalised communities, as new sets of norms are frequently developed which end up excluding as well as including (Barker, 2013). For example, in terms of appearance, the vast majority of images of androgyny are young, white, and slim (Boldly go, 2012), and authors such as Serano (2013) have pointed to a preference of masculine-of-centre over feminine-of-centre people in many LGBT, trans, and non-binary spaces, reflecting wider cultural gender biases. It is not surprising, perhaps, that Harrison et al. (2012) found that 73% of non-binary participants identified on the transmasculine spectrum, and only 27% on the transfeminine. From our clinical experience there is also a risk of a ‘tyranny of cool’ in this area, whereby non-binary people who are older, less educated, or without easy internet access feel excluded from potentially supportive online and offline environments due to quickly changing terminologies and mores and a ‘call out culture’ in relation to those who fail to keep up (Serano, 2013).
Implications for applied psychology and the wider world

Regarding the mental health of non-binary people, it seems that, while children and adults who are non-binary in traits may be more psychologically healthy due to having higher self-esteem (Allgood-Merton & Stockard, 1991) and a more flexible approach (Harter et al., 1998), those who identify as non-binary and/or express themselves in ways that explicitly trouble binary gender face similarly high levels of mental health difficulties to those of trans people more broadly (McNeil et al., 2012).

Harrison et al. (2012) found that, like their trans participants, non-binary participants often reported being refused medical care and as having attempted suicide at some point (43%); 32% reported physical assault due to bias, and 15% sexual assault due to bias, which were higher rates even than those reported by trans men and trans women. It seems likely that, in addition to anti-trans bias, many non-binary people experience the kind of erasure or invisibility which is faced by those whose sexualities do not conform to a binary. This is known to take a toll on mental health. It seems likely that, depending on expression and context, some non-binary people are more likely to experience anti-trans bias and others invisibility. In addition, people may well experience others’ reactions differently (for example, depending on whether they are hoping to be noticed or to go unnoticed). Further research is necessary to explore the diversity of experience in this area and the mechanisms through which treatment by others impacts mental health.

Intersecting with this, quantitative psychological research on binary gender stereotypes compellingly points to a priming effect on people’s experience (see Barker & Duschinsky, 2012). For example, people inflate their perceptions of their ability on gender-stereotyped subjects (maths for boys, arts for girls) after reading about gender stereotypes or even after just ticking a gender box (see Fine, 2010). Exposure to such gender stereotypes disadvantaging one’s own gender diminishes confidence and interest (Correll, 2004) as well as actual performance (McGlone & Aronson, 2006). Although the research has yet to be conducted, it seems likely that constant cultural priming of binary gender (in the form of signs on toilet doors, unnecessarily gendered products, being called sir/madam, etc.) has a similarly adverse effect on non-binary people’s cognitions, self-esteem, and ability. However,
as in other areas of LGBTQ mental health, it would be valuable to balance research in this area with that on the resiliencies of non-binary people/communities and the positive aspects of non-binary experiences.

When working with non-binary people in an applied context, the main thing to bear in mind is the diversity of experience. For example, psychologists must be mindful that non-binary gender can be both a destination and a waypoint, as, of course, binary gender may be. This is analogous to the way in which some bisexual people can later identify as gay/straight and some gay/straight people can later identify as bisexual (Diamond, 2009).

Similarly, physical interventions may or may not be desired or required by non-binary people. These may include hormones, surgeries, and changes to aspects of appearance, clothing, gait, and/or voice. Rankin and Beemyn (2012) found that some non-binary people who were assigned female at birth took hormones and/or had chest (top) surgery. Others did not engage in permanent body alteration but modified some visible markers of gender in other ways, such as breast binding, bodybuilding, having a traditionally male hairstyle, not shaving their body hair, and/or packing. Those assigned male at birth similarly had differing relationships to hormones/surgeries, and did things such as growing their hair long, having hair removed, using make-up, and/or wearing ‘feminine’ jewellery. Some people liked to destabilise conventional markers of gender by dressing androgynously, by combining ‘men’s’ and ‘women’s’ clothing, and/or by dressing in clothing associated with a different gender. Some made similar shifts in mannerisms such as gait, making eye contact, and sitting with legs together or apart.

As with many genders and sexualities, non-binary gender might be experienced as fixed or fluid, and as ‘natural’, chosen, or socially constructed. Non-binary people may regard themselves as being cisgender or transgender (see Harvey & McGeeney, *Cisgender*, and Murjan & Bouman, *Trans Genders*, this volume). Indeed, some may find neither term to be a good fit, as cis/trans presents a further binary. Given that cis and trans are taken from molecular biology, it is possible that the additional molecular terms fac and mer may be embraced in the future to describe non-binary gender statuses (as they do molecules; Norman, 2014). Perhaps facgender people would include those whose experiences fit between, or as a third addition to, binary genders (e.g. demi boy/girl, gender neutral, or bigender) whereas mergender people would be those with more fluid and/or multiple genders (e.g. genderfluid and pangender).
With all these issues, ask etiquette is appropriate (Richards & Barker, 2013): simply ask what terminology people prefer and how they experience their gender. Also remember that people who appear to be binary may be non-binary, and people who appear to be non-binary may be binary – so checking rather than assuming is essential.

**Important points for applied professionals**

The following recommendations (adapted from Richards & Barker, 2013) are a useful guide when working with non-binary people:

- Reflexively engage with your own assumptions about gender and encourage all staff within a service to do the same.
- Be open to reading and learning more about gender diversity and raising questions with clients (but don’t expect them to provide you with free education).
- Become comfortable talking about gender issues and adopting clients’ terminologies.
- Normalise genders beyond the binary for clients who are new to this.
- Don’t focus on gender when it is not relevant to the client’s presenting issue.
- Don’t assume a gender binary or pathologise people who don’t experience themselves within it.
- Create a space which is comfortable for people from a diverse range of gender identities (e.g. with relevant materials, posters, etc.).

**Future directions**

In terms of future directions, clearly more psychological research is required into all aspects of non-binary experience, and into applied practice with non-binary people across different settings.

In relation to quantitative research, it would be valuable to have more research on people who identify as non-binary, as well as on those who experience their gender in non-
binary ways without necessarily identifying in that way (see Barker & Richards, *Further Genders*, this volume). Kuper et al. (2012) highlight the importance of considering sampling when undertaking such research, as their online survey found a very different range of people, and experiences, than past research which has focused exclusively on those attending gender clinics. Joel et al.’s (2013) research in the general population found that 35% of people felt to some extent as the ‘other’ gender, as both men and women and/or as neither, which highlights the importance of studying non-binary experience in general rather than just among specific communities.

In relation to qualitative research, further studies could usefully explore the diversity of non-binary experiences, and the multiplicity of meanings that non-binary identities have for the people concerned (rather than searching for one ‘explanation’ for non-binary gender; Richards & Barker, 2013). Doan’s (2010) geographical research considered how experiences varied across different spaces. Other people commented upon, or even touched, gender non-normative people in public spaces and asked inappropriate questions about genitals/surgeries, and there were specific issues around the use of public toilets and telephones.

It is important that research in this area neither eroticises non-binary people nor assumes that all experiences will be the same (Richards et al., 2014). It should also accountably consider the utility of the research for the people involved and the groups they are drawn from. For example, Rankin and Beemyn’s (2012) study explicitly fed into higher education policy, having determined that university accommodation, bathrooms, sport teams, paperwork, and social traditions could easily exclude non-binary people. Research could also usefully feed into such issues as passport gender recognition (Elan-Cane, 2013) and guidelines for media representations (Trans Media Watch, 2014), with psychologists supporting activist endeavours and educating policy makers and practitioners about the impact of misrepresentations and discrimination (see Carrera et al., 2012).

**Summary**

- Non-binary gender is a fast-evolving area which remains under-researched within psychology.
• Many literatures from other disciplines, and from outside the academy, have useful information on non-binary gender which can be of benefit to psychologists.

• Research with non-binary people should be undertaken ethically and with a view towards how it can pragmatically aid this population.

• Identity terms continue to evolve and it behoves psychologists to engage with them.

• Gender, sex, and sexuality are complexly intertwined. A cross-cultural, intersectional understanding of non-binary gender is vital, but should not be undertaken from a colonialist viewpoint.

Further reading


Notes

<en-group type="endnotes">
<en><label>1</label> Cisgender people are those people who are content to remain in the gender they were assigned at birth (see Harvey & McGeeney, *Cisgender*, this volume).<br></en>
<en><label>2</label> Queer theory is an area of study which, drawing on postmodernist thought, seeks to deconstruct accepted categories and to examine fluidity, complexity and multiplicity in a variety of domains, including gender and sexuality (Jagose, 1997).<br></en>
References


