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Queering Gender: Exploring Parental Perceptions of Gender Diversity in High Schools

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to explore the perceptions of parents of high school learners regarding gender to determine their understanding of gender diversity. Globally, emerging research suggests that parents of school-attending learners are developing a positive attitude toward gender diversity. South African high schools have embraced gender diversity since the era of democracy. However, parents' voices have not been fully explored regarding their perceptions of gender issues and inclusion at the high school level. The study utilised Ubuntu, the African philosophy that emphasises interconnectedness and compassion, and queer theory, which challenges binary constructs of gender, as theoretical frameworks. An interpretive design was adopted, and nine parents were snowball sampled from a rural location in the Free State province of South Africa. This qualitative study used thematic analysis to analyse data from focus group interviews, drawings as visual participatory methodologies, and captions for the drawings. The findings of this study indicate that the majority of parents associate gender with sexual orientation or sexual organs, as well as gender roles. However, the findings also show that there is an emerging understanding among parents that gender is a social construct and not something synonymous with sex. This study attempted to fill the gap in the scant literature about parents voicing their perceptions of what gender is. Therefore, mixed methods studies are also encouraged to explore the perceptions of parents involving a larger number of participants.

Keywords: Queering, trans and cisgender, parents, Ubuntu, high schools, cisnormative, gender diversity.

1. Introduction

Globally, there is a growing attempt to support gender-diverse learners in schools (Horton, 2023; Ioverno, 2023; Markland et al., 2023). The term 'gender diversity' (GD) is used in this study to include all individuals who identify with a gender that does not align with the sex assigned at birth (Jones et al., 2016; Ullman, 2019). Fostering GD in schools helps trans learners to express their identity freely. Furthermore, it enables them to focus on their academic performance as well as their psycho-social development, reducing the rate of gender dysphoria (Fuentes-Miguel et al., 2023; McQuillan & Leininger, 2023). Gender dysphoria is a mental disorder caused by a feeling of incongruence between the sex assigned at birth and the gender identity of a trans learner (Barnes, 2020). Gender dysphoria negatively affects transgender learners' performance due to consistent dissatisfaction caused by the non-alignment of gender identity and sex assigned at birth.

Yet, despite global trends to include GD in schools, most trans learners continue to experience gender discrimination (Bottoman, 2021; Reygan, 2016). The term transgender (trans) is used as an umbrella term for all individuals who do not conform to the sex assigned at birth (Erlangsen et al., 2023; Wittlin et al., 2023). In this paper, 'gender diverse' and 'transgender' or 'trans' are used interchangeably to refer to all learners who do not identify with a gender that aligns with their assigned sex. Furthermore, this paper accepts the description of gender by queer theorist Judith Butler, who asserts

that it is a performance constructed by society and not synonymous with an individual's biological sex (Butler, 1990). This means that a person's biological sex does not dictate their gender. However, most parents and schools use biological sex to describe gender.

The study by Francis (2023b), after exploring how schools, as cultural and social spaces, produce and resist cisnormativity, reported a need for urgent school reform to support and promote GD and create an affirming environment for trans learners. Yet, various studies still report that South African trans learners experience gender discrimination, misgendering, and verbal abuse (Bottoman, 2021; Francis, 2024; Reygan, 2019; Ubisi, 2021). These experiences indicate that most South African high schools are cisnormative in nature. Furthermore, a considerable amount of literature published on GD in South African schools primarily focuses on the experiences of learners and teachers (De Beer, 2020; Francis & Reygan, 2021; Nichols & Brown, 2021; Sathyanand, 2021). These studies have scant representation of parents regarding their perceptions of GD in schools. This leaves a gap in understanding the perceptions of parents regarding gender and gender diversity in schools. In South Africa, parents (governing bodies) have the power to approve school policies, such as the code of conduct (RSA, 1998). Although parents possess power regarding the governance of schools, it is unclear what their perceptions are about the inclusion of GD in schools. Therefore, there is a dearth of literature on the focus of this study, making it important to explore the voices of participating parents regarding gender in high schools. This paper asks, *"How do parents perceive gender in high schools to determine their understanding of gender diversity?"* and explores the perceptions of parents of high school learners regarding gender to determine their understanding of gender diversity.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Parents' understanding of gender

South African literature on gender diversity (GD) at the school level often focuses on governance and parental involvement (Bhana, 2014; Nichols, 2021). Parental understanding of what gender means at the school level has not been explored, except for their reactions towards GD (Mayeza, 2021). Most parents in Southern African countries such as Lesotho, Botswana, Eswatini, and Namibia consider gender to be synonymous with sex and maintain a culture of silence regarding GD issues (Francis et al., 2019; Smuts, 2023). This suggests that silence among parents reinforces the assumption that gender is binary, making it challenging for schools to promote GD. Despite a cisnormative schooling culture, Francis (2023a) recently revealed that trans learners recognise cisnormative expectations in schools and the community as merely performative and have chosen to navigate the complexities of expressing their gender identity. While global literature has begun to address the intersectionality of parenthood and GD in schools, there are limitations, as it primarily focuses on parents' reactions to their children coming out, rather than on parental understanding of gender (Clark et al., 2020; Felner et al., 2020). Consequently, the two significant reactions of either rejection or acceptance imply that gender is perceived as a binary construct, although it is increasingly regarded as a social construct. This review will further illustrate how the reactions of non-affirming and affirming parents shape their understanding of gender.

2.2 Perception of gender as a synonym of sex-assigned at birth

Despite later reconceptualising their understanding of gender, most parents react negatively towards gender diversity (GD) (Carbone et al., 2023; LaSala, 2010). This suggests that most high schools are cisnormative in nature, as most learners have parents who respond negatively to GD. Parents of transgender learners have dominated trans studies, leaving the voices of parents of cis learners behind (Armitage & Felix, 2023; Nichols, 2021). Many of these parents want their children to be cis rather than trans, which explains why negative reactions are often seen as a measure of perception equating gender to sex. A cross-sectional study of 245 LGBT adults (ages 21–25) in the United States, which examined the efforts of parents to change their trans children to be cis, emphasised that these

parents interpret gender as synonymous with sex assigned at birth (Ryan et al., 2020). Parents view their negative reactions as a form of protection against misalignment with sex assigned at birth (Goodyear et al., 2022). However, this form of protection exacerbates feelings of misalignment between gender identity and sex assigned at birth, contributing to mental health issues such as depression and suicidal ideation among trans learners (Ubisi, 2021). The cisnormative culture in schools aggravates this sense of misalignment among trans learners. A South African study notes that only a small number of schools have taken positive steps to support transgender learners in predominantly cisnormative educational settings (Daniels et al., 2019). Although we have argued for a considerable time about how non-affirming parents' perceptions affect the entire school environment, some parents do affirm GD.

2.3 Perceptions of gender as socially constructed

Recently, a Canadian study by Pullen Sansfaçon et al. (2020) revealed that parents are accompanying their trans children to clinics for gender-affirming care. However, similar studies in the South African schooling context that show a shift in parental perceptions of and attitudes toward gender diversity are scarce. This shift indicates that more parents are now reconceptualising their understanding of gender. Additionally, a reconceptualised perception of gender is the first step that parents must take to promote gender diversity awareness in high schools. A US survey by Robinson et al. (2020) involving 402 parents of trans learners affirmed a shift from a negative approach after the initial stage of 'coming out'. This confirms that affirming gender diversity is a measure of perceiving gender as a social construct. Furthermore, a study by Hale et al. (2021) reiterates that parents who support trans children, despite feeling challenged with adjusting to their gender identity development, display qualities of reconceptualised perception. Moreover, de Bres (2022) noted a shift in global literature from the 1990s to the 2010s among publications about parents and gender diversity, moving from a robust pathologising of transgender identities to a more gender-affirming approach. Despite parents affirming their trans children, to our knowledge, limited studies report how parents, both of trans and cis children, perceive gender in South African high schools. Affirming stances align with Ubuntu, an African philosophy that emphasises the interconnectedness of individuals. Furthermore, prominent queer theorist Judith Butler adds that gender is performative and not a stable identity (Butler, 1988). This perception of gender is an initial step in queering cisnormativity in high schools

3. Theoretical Framework

The intersection of Ubuntu African philosophy and Queer theory as theoretical frameworks underpinned this study in queering gender. Chigangaidze (2021) describes Ubuntu as an African philosophy expressing humanness. The origin of the term Ubuntu is traced to Nguni Bantu languages of Southern Africa from the term "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu," translating to "I am because we are" (Boboyi, 2024). The first publication that introduced Ubuntu as a philosophy appeared in 1980 (Samkange, 1980). Mkabela (2015) argued that Ubuntu is all about the holistic interconnectedness of people, focusing on the development of a person as a whole (physical, mental, spiritual, and social). The focus on developing a person holistically made this philosophy a relevant frame for this study.

Most Black South African parents believe that gender beyond binary boundaries is not normal and that we should identify with the gender assigned to us at birth (Huysamer & du Toit, 2023). This approach by the parents affects the trans learners holistically. To trouble the idea of classifying GD as an unnatural phenomenon, this study used the African philosophy of Ubuntu as its theory to shift the approach of the parents to a perception that trans learners and cis learners must be developed holistically. Indeed, the premise that "human is human through other humans" (Nwoye, 2015, p. 109) has indirectly instilled the understanding that, despite GD, we all need each other. Although Ubuntu focuses on humanness and interconnectedness, it does not challenge the assumption that we must all identify ourselves with the gender that was assigned at birth.

Queer theory challenges the established system of gender that is fixed to the sex assigned at birth and advocates that gender is socially constructed (Butler, 1990; Seidman, 1993). Queer theory was first introduced as a theory in 1991 in the writing of De Lauretis (De Lauretis, 1991). One of the proponents of Queer theory, Judith Butler, reaffirmed the premise of Queer theory that gender is not synonymous with sex but is a social construct, making it performative (Butler, 1990). Queer theory is relevant because it directly challenges the binary system principle lacking in Ubuntu philosophy, although it does indirectly by promoting humanness and interconnectedness among all humans. Ubuntu and Queer theory, for being able to complement each other, made this intersection relevant for queering cisnormativity in high schools.

Ubuntu intersects with Queer theory because once parents establish the understanding that trans learners need them to be who they are (interconnectedness), then they will be in a position to question or challenge the established idea that gender is binary and not performative. Ubuntu revives humanness and interconnectedness, which makes queering cisnormativity a necessity to create an inclusive schooling environment. The Ubuntu philosophy has also enabled us to establish queering cisnormativity "from an African worldview perspective; a perspective that is missing from Western psychological discourse" (Wilson & Williams, 2013, p. 20) and to assist parents in reconceptualising their understanding of what gender is.

4. Methodology

This study used the interpretive paradigm. Queer theory posits that gender is socially constructed, and this made the interpretive paradigm relevant because it proclaims socially constructed multiple realities instead of a single reality (Bevir & Blakely, 2018). This paradigm allowed us to explore the perceptions of parents regarding their views on the phenomenon studied (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2016). A qualitative approach confined to a phenomenological design is adopted in this study. Phenomenology is used to explore lived experiences and the meaning that individuals attach to those experiences, affirming that there is no single reality (Moran, 2002). All nine participants in this study are from one rural location in the Free State province of South Africa, and they were snowball sampled because most parents don't consider gender issues negotiable (Parker et al., 2019). However, the values of Ubuntu that "I am because we are" assisted in facilitating the chain referral method that generated a sample of parents who participated in this study. This further assures that we viewed the phenomenon studied through the eyes of the participants.

Furthermore, three sets of data were collected through focus group interviews, drawings by parents, and captions to the drawings. One of the reasons for this was to broaden our insight into the perceptions of parents regarding gender. Guest et al. (2023) suggest that focus group interviews are conducted to benefit from the group dynamic, which can stimulate discussion on a broad range of ideas. Ubuntu values fostered discussion among parents, and their understanding that all trans learners should be included in schools demonstrated the principle of Queer theory that gender is constructed by society. Following the focus groups, the participants engaged in a drawing session where they were asked to draw images based on the prompt: "What image comes to your mind when asked what is gender?" Lorenz and Kolb (2009) posit that visual methods accept visual imagery such as drawings, photographs, videos, charts, and maps as data in the social sciences. Literat (2013, p. 85) reported that the principal objective of drawings as visual methods "is to facilitate the expression of perspectives and narratives that were previously overlooked, rejected, or silenced." The parents' drawings, once analysed, seemed to confirm the themes that emerged from the focus group interviews. Before data collection, the University approved this study. Participants were briefed that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw from participating at any time. Participants completed consent forms and agreed that their pseudonyms, and not their real names, would be used. A brief presentation of the terminologies used in this study was made to parents. A demographic of parents is shown in the table below.

Table 1: *Demographic of parents*

Pseudonym names	Gender	Occupation	No. of children in High School	Gender and grade of their children. (according to parents)
MaLerato	Cisgender Female	Teacher	1	Trans girl, grade 11
Ntate	Cisgender Male	Soccer coach	1	Cis girl, grade 8
Mme	Cisgender Female	Teacher	2	Cis girl, grade 11 and cis girl, grade 8
Mosuwe	Cisgender Female	Teacher	2	Cis boy, grade 12 and cis girl, grade 10
Moruti	Cisgender Male	Preacher	1	Cis boy, grade 11.
Mosireletsi	Cisgender Male	Police	2	Cis boy, grade 11 and cis girl grade 11
Ramosebetsi	Cisgender Male	Self-employed	1	Cis boy, grade 8
Moetellipele	Cisgender Female	Deputy Principal	1	Cis girl, grade 12
Moeletsi	Cisgender Male	Counsellor	1	Trans girl, grade 12

4.1 Data analysis and trustworthiness

Moreover, the collected data were analysed thematically, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps. We familiarised ourselves with the transcripts and drawings of the participants, as well as the captions of the drawings, establishing codes at the initial stage of analysis. Discrepancies in the data were resolved by collapsing and consolidating categories into themes, which were classified as they emerged from the data. The "I am because we are" principle of Ubuntu assisted in coding parents' responses regarding their understanding of interconnectedness with trans learners and whether they considered the aspect of humanness in relation to being trans. We ensured the trustworthiness of the findings by discussing themes with participants to confirm that their views were captured correctly. We also presented these findings at a conference among scholars who were conversant with this field for input and constructive criticism.

5. Findings and Discussion

The results of this study are based on the responses of participants, who represent their understanding of gender at the high school level. The Ubuntu philosophy, with its spirit of interconnectedness, enabled us to identify a common thread across the participants' views, demonstrating their reconceptualised understanding of gender, which is an initial step towards queering cisnormativity. The findings of this study relate to the literature reviewed, showing a similar trend within the global community of parents supporting gender diversity.

5.1 Sexual organs as a measure of gender

Nearly all participants displayed an understanding of gender as a synonym for sex. Both parents of cis and trans learners associated gender with the sexual organs.

> **Moetellipele**: *"when a child born, we check the sex of a of ef a of a child, then we say this is a male, and gender is a male, when again born as a girl we check the sexual again of a gender then we said, she is a girl, gender is a girl, so gender we define them as a male\female, according to my cultural way…"*

> **Mosireletsi:** *"when I was growing, I knew only mother and father, even today, I understand like that in my mind. The gender things are confusing".*

Mosireletsi elaborated on his response that a person's sex determines their gender. Reale et al. (2023) attest that gender and sex are often confused, as they are considered synonymous. This suggests a misunderstanding that contrasts with the premise of Queer Theory, which posits that gender is a performative act rather than being directly associated with an individual's sex organs. The association of sex organs with gender was also evident in most of the participants' drawings. The prompt given to participants, as mentioned in the methodology section of this paper, revealed some of the following drawings.

Figure 1: Moruti

Figure 2: Ramosebetsi
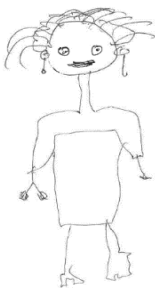
Figure 3: Moeletsi

Figure 4: Mosireletsi

Figures one to four above confirm and echo the understanding derived from the focus group regarding sexual organs. Figure three does not clearly show a drawing of sexual organs compared to the others. However, the drawing depicts a person assumed to be a man with a phallus, whereas the assumption is that the other figure, with long hair, is a female wearing a skirt. Dittman et al. (2023) attest that most research assumes that learners and their parents are heterosexual and cisgender, affirming that sex is used as a measure of a person's gender.

Furthermore, this understanding implies how parents want gender to be defined in high schools. Zhang et al. (2023) conducted a study to address the gap in research regarding the parenting of trans parents. They reported that learners who lived with trans parents had a lower expected likelihood of expressing themselves as cisgender. Furthermore, this finding suggests that trans learners living with cis parents may find it difficult to express themselves as trans, even though they identify as such. Additionally, participants' understanding of gender can cause trans learners to have conflicting thoughts about their gender identity and the gender assigned to them at birth. This conflict raises the question of whether participants adhere to the Ubuntu principle concerning being transgender. This conflict can, in turn, develop into gender dysphoria. Contrary to the views of the majority of participants in this study, we identified a reconceptualised understanding of gender emerging in their responses, even among participants who maintained the idea of gender as binary. This suggests an emerging understanding of humanness and interconnectedness promoted by Ubuntu.

> **Ramosebetsi:** "*so for me I think it goes beyond what your body says, but now it includes the issue of how you feel, and I think the part about who you are attracted to, it very important*"
>
> **Mme**: "*I said the mentality will build up what she or he want and again the attitude will also direct a child where is her gender or his gender*"
>
> **Mme**: "*what a child feels inside that make him or her grow up it's what he feel, the…the inner part.*"
>
> **MaLerato:** "*I cannot show my inner part at this age, that one, it's just the choice of yourself, it's not the real you*"

The narrative of MaLerato was a response to another participant's argument that GD is adopted at a later stage of life. This argument was based on the assumption that experiencing hurt in relationships leads a person to dislike the opposite sex. However, to our knowledge, no literature has been identified to justify that GD is a result of pain from relationships. Despite this resistive approach towards GD, a common trend emerged suggesting a dawning reconceptualised understanding among participants. This understanding brings hope that trans learners in all high schools will be able to express their gender identity. Moreover, research shows that even at a young age, trans learners know that their gender does not align with their sex assigned at birth (Zaliznyak et al., 2021). A three-year-old male assigned at birth repeatedly told his parents in the USA that they must stop using the pronoun "he" and instead use "she" when referring to him (Brill & Pepper, 2022). Additionally, conflicting responses among participants confirmed a perceived reconceptualised understanding of gender.

Caption: FOR ME GENDER IS ABOUT BEING MALE OR FEMALE THE WAY YOU REGISTERED AND THE WAY YOU DRESS

Figure 5: Caption of Mosireletsi

Mosireletsi maintained that gender is binary. However, triangulating his views from focus groups, drawings, and the full captions suggests that he perceives gender to be performative. Furthermore, this implies that a female-assigned-at-birth individual dressing like a male can be considered male and vice versa. Inconsistency among participants suggests that they want to promote gender diversity, but associating gender with sexual organs presents a barrier. Rahilly (2018, p. 1409) dissociated gender from sex by indicating that "there are no established biological factors believed to explain gender and sexual variation, especially as these factors would pertain to genetic influences or pre-natal hormones (including hereditary relationships among LGBT-identified family members)." Despite most participants openly declaring gender to be the sex of a person, a common understanding emerged from the data showing a shift towards viewing it as a performative act. Although the participants did not explicitly state that gender is performative, their responses revealed an underlying belief that it is.

> **MaLerato***:* "*I think that gender it is the genes. It is the behaviours that are inside the child, that is what I think*"
>
> **Ramosebetsi:** "*OK, I think gender will have to do with, maybe it has to do with how you behave for example to do with issue that you are, a man because of your genitals that you have, now gender goes beyond those issues, and it talks about who you are attracted to*"
>
> **Moeletsi***:* " *….the behaviours from the child, those are the main facts, …*"

Although participants used the phrase "behaviour," their narratives align with the findings of prominent Queer theorist Judith Butler, who argued that the gender of a girl is not inborn; rather, she becomes a woman. Therefore, gender is not a stable identity but is performative (Butler,

1990). Furthermore, some participants elaborated that gender is not stable and that within each person, two opposing forces of masculinity and femininity need to be balanced. However, participants could not articulate how we can identify which tendencies require more balancing. Throughout the focus group interview, drawings accompanied by captions displayed inconsistencies with participants' perceptions of gender in high schools. This inconsistency suggests an unacknowledged disassociation of gender from sex organs. The participants' understanding of gender indicated that gender roles are used as identifiers of gender identity. As a result, participants further considered gender roles as a description of gender, which will be discussed in the following section.

5.2 Gender roles as a measure of gender

Although this paper did not explore gender roles, they emerged from the data. Furthermore, some participants opposed the idea that certain roles are exclusively meant for a particular gender. To clarify, Regitz-Zagrosek and Gebhard (2023) stated that gender has four dimensions: gender roles, gender identity, gender relations, and institutional gender. Gender roles are considered to be the different expectations that individuals in society have of others based on their sex (Archer, 1984; Blackstone, 2003; Marshall et al., 2024). In this paper, participants used gender roles to describe gender. Some participants felt that learners can perform any role they are capable of. The drawing below depicts two girls: the first engages in activities traditionally associated with girls, while the second performs tasks typically assigned to boys according to gender roles.
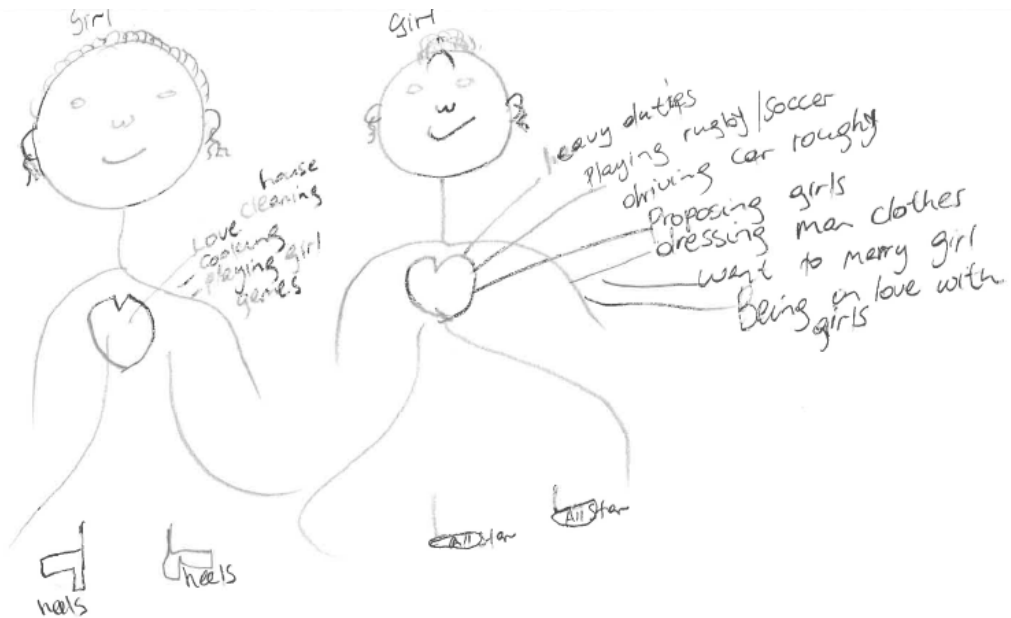

Figure 5: Mme

Although few participants openly challenged gender roles, most did so indirectly by acknowledging that girls can take on roles traditionally considered to be for boys. Despite the growing understanding that gender roles should not be confined to a specific sex, few participants reiterated the cultural and religious authenticity of using gender roles to define gender.

> *Moetellipele: "…. we are going to give our gendered male a more tougher work than the woman, so we said they supposed to go to the field as a male to go and dig and do whatever task that cannot be done by a woman, and then also we cannot allow our*

male to come into the house and do our er housing duties, like cooking, cleaning all types of jobs that are being done in the houses, we are being said this one is being done by a female…"

Mosireletsi: *"so, when it comes to issues of gender, yes there are things that a mother can do, the responsibility of father, responsibility of mother, but recently things are not the same as in the past"*

Moeletsi: *"the voice of my trans daughter, her actions, they are those of girls, I am fine, I love her".*

The narratives above demonstrate an emerging reconceptualised understanding, shifting from the insistence that gender roles are a measure of gender to a more affirmative approach to GD. To elaborate, Moeletsi insisted that gender roles are a measure of gender. However, Mosireletsi acknowledges that things are not as they were in the past. Moeletsi, who is a father of trans learners, expressed intense love for his trans child. Research shows a similar trend. One participant in a study conducted by Matsuno et al. (2022, p. 10) in the USA, for example, said, "I love my child. I want them to stay alive. Studies are clear: these young people are at a much higher risk of suicide, especially if they lack a supportive environment." Knowledge serves as a guide for participants when approaching their children, ultimately improving the well-being of trans learners (Belmont et al., 2024).

Despite claims that GD is not a natural phenomenon, all participants agreed that they could protect and support gender-diverse learners, even though they had contrasting understandings of what gender and gender diversity entail. The understanding of gender through gender roles, echoed by participants, aligns with Queer theory, which posits that gender is performative and not synonymous with sex, although some insisted that gender roles apply to specific genders. Gender roles were classified as a means of distinguishing between binary gender classifications among males and females (Lips, 2020). The classification of roles according to gender generates fear among participants if their children do not conform to the gender roles assigned to a particular sex based on culture or religion. This fear was evident in the narrative of Moeletsi, who once asked his trans daughter, assigned male at birth, whether they were going to have a male bride.

Furthermore, various studies have shown that some participants opt for fertility preservation strategies, such as oocyte vitrification and sperm banking through masturbation, before their children's bodies transform (Nadgauda & Butts, 2024; Stolk et al., 2023). Body transformation can occur via gender-affirming hormone therapy, using testosterone or estrogen, to reduce dysphoria and align a child's physical characteristics with their gender identity (Stanley & Ratnapalan, 2023). Although this paper is not focused on body transformation, it illustrates that participants do associate gender roles with sex, and acting against this association generates fear. Despite describing gender as performing specific roles, an emerging trend among participants indicates that they are beginning to acknowledge that not all gender roles are restricted to a particular gender based on sexual organs, but rather depend on the individual's capability to perform such roles.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Queering cisnormative schooling cultures contributes immensely to the creation of an inclusive environment for trans learners. This study aimed to explore the perceptions of participants regarding gender to determine their understanding of gender diversity. To assess whether this aim was achieved, the following question was addressed: How do participants perceive gender in high schools to determine their understanding of gender diversity? The study concludes that participants' perceptions of gender are shaped by their religious and cultural backgrounds.

Although participants associate gender with sex assigned at birth as well as gender roles, they are willing to help high schools protect trans learners from gender discrimination, misgendering, and bullying. Despite the limitations of the sample (size, race, and location), the findings of this study indicate an emerging trend: participants are willing to play a role in supporting gender diversity, which must be confirmed by applying the same methods in different contexts. In summary, participants' perceptions exhibited signs of reconceptualisation, which is the first step required for queering cisnormative schooling culture in South African high schools.

Furthermore, future researchers should explore rural areas to gather the views of participants who had no opportunity to attend university, as most participants in this study were university attendees. Additionally, the Department of Basic Education should organise workshops through School Governing Bodies (parent component) to empower parents regarding gender and gender diversity. Again, despite the in-depth understanding gained from visual drawings and the focus group, researchers should recruit larger samples to further explore parental understanding. In conclusion, mixed methods studies are also encouraged to investigate the understanding of parents with a larger number of participants.

7. Declarations

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Data Availability: The data are not publicly available due to confidentiality agreements with participants and ethical restrictions imposed by the Institutional Review Board. However, de-identified data can be made available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to approval by the ethics committee.

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