

Exclusion and Inclusion in Transgender Lives

Rima Das

School Teacher

Axom Vidyamandir

Guwahati, Assam, India

Dr. Tarali Pathak

Assistant Professor

Department of Education, Cotton University

Guwahati, Assam, India

taralipthk41@gmail.com

Dr. Arunima Borah

Assistant Professor

Indira Miri School of Education

Krishna Kanta Hnadiqui State Open University

Guwahati, Assam, India

Abstract

Though there are widespread public awareness and legal recognition, discrimination, exclusion and marginalization remain common for the transgender people. This study has attempted to explore the experiences of the transgender people and the barriers they faced in the field of education, employment, healthcare, family relations and social participation. To explore the experiences, perceptions and aspirations of transgender people qualitative research approach was adopted using the in-depth interview. The analysis helped identify stigma, family rejection, educational exclusion, discrimination at work and limited access to healthcare as persistent

barriers to their social inclusion and well-being. The participants expressed that the acceptance from the society is lagging behind. The findings of the study also highlight the importance of the family support, conducive environment community networks and inclusive institutional practices in fostering confidence, resilience and quality of life for transgender individuals. The study emphasized that there is need for the integrated policy interventions, inclusive and gender sensitive educational practices, equal employment opportunities. The study documents the voices and experiences of transgender people and contributes to the growing discourse on gender diversity, with practical recommendations for a more inclusive and equitable society.

Keywords: Transgender; Lived experiences; Social inclusion; Discrimination; Gender identity; Education; Employment; Healthcare; Social acceptance; Qualitative study

Introduction

The relationship between gender identity and the state has a fundamental revolution underway. The increasing visibility of the rights of the transgender globally has forced the rethinking of the legal presumptions associated with science, sex and the gender (Katyal, 2017). But still many countries deliberately deny and ignore the existence of the transgender people , criminalise them and set different preconditions on their ability to self actualisation. (Dicklitch-Nelson & Rahman, 2022). In many places transgender people are treated as second class citizen and they are marginalised from participating in social, political and economic life fully (Dicklitch-Nelson & Rahman, 2022). These disparities are rooted in social stigma which are defined as a belief system of particular society through which non-normative identities are not credited and regarded as invalid (Lim et al., 2014). The rejection because of their identity begins within the family and often shunned and cast out from their homes, which leads to loss of educational opportunities and lack of mental and psychological support. However according to Susan Stryker, this casting out from the society and family causes trauma and can also be the site of a transformative ‘transgender rage’ This rage is not only emotional but also a political

which which has been used to challenge the views that the society holds towards a transsexual body as an "unnatural" technological construction (Baiocchi, 2021; Stryker, 1994). By reclaiming the "dark power" of a monstrous identity, transgender individuals can dispel the ability of social stigma to cause internal harm and roar against the conditions in which they must struggle to exist (Stryker, 1994).

Historically the law and the medical science have explained only the 'morphological model' of sex which explains that gender identity must align with the binary polarities of male and female assigned at birth (Katyal, 2017). This medical pathologization has been critiqued by theorists like Susan Stryker, who draws a parallel between the transsexual body and Frankenstein's monster.

Different research studies indicates that nearly all the LGBTQ students have to face negative remarks regarding their gender expression which leads to increased absenteeism, lowers grades and decreasing sense of the school belonging. (Mountz et al., 2020). The victimisation in schools generally leads to an aggressive behaviour and physical fights which can be understood through Stryker's framework as manifestations of rage used for self-defense and agency (Mountz et al., 2020).

The support for the transgender community often found in the virtual communities which is regarded as a safe space for "safe spaces" for negotiating identity (Prinsloo, 2011). The physical visibility which can lead to transphobic violence, the Internet provides a platform where the individuals enact sexed and gendered performances which away from the physical threats.

Review of Related Literature

The Medical Model versus Gender Pluralism

According to law and medical science gender identity must always align with the binary polarities assigned at birth. (Katyal, 2017). Under this morphological model, gender

nonconformity was often pathologized as "Gender Identity Disorder," a diagnosis that maintained the idea of two discrete gender categories that occasionally required "correction" (Dicklitch-Nelson & Rahman, 2022; Katyal, 2017). Susan Striker criticised this medical pathologization and draws a parallel between the transsexual body and **Frankenstein's monster** (Stryker, 1994). She argues that because the trans body is a product of medical science-"flesh torn apart and sewn together again"-it is often viewed by society as a "technological construction" existing outside the natural order (Stryker, 1994)

Contemporary scholars has forwarded a model of gender pluralism which recognises which recognises gender as a performance and a sort of "intangible property" that is malleable, nonrivalrous, and nonexclusive (Katyal, 2017).

Rejection and Acceptance in the Family Context

Rejection from the family the prime cause of social exclusion faced by the transgender individuals. Research studies shows that when transgender individuals are rejected by their families they often face the risk of homelessness and the poverty. If they are not rejected physically often rejected meanly which leads to lack of support for their academic and health related needs. The lack of the family acceptance is often reflected in the foster care system where the transgender youths face "formidable and complex" barriers, standing at the intersection of placement instability and caregiver incompetence regarding gender identity issues (Mountz et al., 2020). Conversely, family and community support function as critical buffers against the "poison" of self-loathing and internalised transphobia

Systemic Barriers in Education and Healthcare

Transgender youths faces hostile schools climates which induces societal rejection. Almost all the LGBTQ students report that they hear negative remarks regarding their gender expression which leads to increased absenteeism and lower GPAs which decreases the sense of belonging. (Mountz et al., 2020). In many instances victimisation in the school leads to the

aggressive behaviour which leads to punishment by the administrators and these can be seen through Stryker's lens as manifestations of rage used for self-defence and agency (Mountz et al., 2020).

In healthcare, transgender people face significant disparities due to a shortage of providers who are culturally competent and knowledgeable about transgender-specific health (Lim et al., 2014). Many individuals are denied care or face providers who operate only within the rigid gender binary, effectively excluding trans people from necessary services (Katy, 2017).

Legal Recognition and Human Rights

The laws for protecting transgender individuals remain inconsistent globally. While different countries like Argentina and Malta have passed legislation which allows for gender self-determination without requiring psychiatric evaluation, 71.6% of countries remain in a "persecuting" category (Dicklitch-Nelson & Rahman, 2022). In the Indian context the NALSA judgement of 2014 was a significant victory that recognised the right to self-identify one's gender. But the subsequent legislative efforts such as the Transgender Persons Bill of 2015 have been criticised for introducing a screening committee that prioritises biological essentialism over the right of self-determination.

Research Objectives

Building upon these foundations, this study investigates the intersection of legal recognition, healthcare access, and community resilience. The research aims to identify the mechanisms that most effectively foster the well-being of transgender individuals in an often-unprotective global environment. Specifically:

- To investigate the mechanisms of acceptance and rejection in society and the family unit.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design focused on capturing the "lived experiences" and unvoices of marginalized individuals through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Informed by feminist values that privilege narratives, storytelling, and multiple truths, this methodological approach seeks to capture testimonies of experiences before, during, and after institutional involvement. The analysis prioritizes participant perspectives to explore the mechanisms and dynamics that contribute to poor functional outcomes or foster resilience.

Analysis of Lived Experiences

The responses of the participants have been analysed into different categories.

Negotiating Conditional Acceptance in a Context of Persistent Marginalization

From the focus group discussions it is revealed that the transgender individuals faces social reality which is marked by the experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Participants has described that the acceptance is situation specific and it is inconsistent and fragile. For instance, one participant explained, *"In some places people treat us with respect, but in many situations they still see us as different and do not treat us the same as others."* Another participant mentioned, *"Society is slowly changing, but there are still people who avoid us or behave differently when they know we are transgender."* while another noted that although societal attitudes are changing, avoidance and differential treatment persist. And this social friction influences the ability of the transgenders to move freely in the society. The fear of being judged forces the individuals a careful monitoring of self. One participant said, *"Sometimes we feel afraid to express ourselves openly because we do not know how people will react"*. Even in spaces where they might feel safe, there is an underlying tension because, as another participant shared, *"there are places where we feel accepted, but in many situations we still feel*

uncomfortable because people judge us". Consequently, the call for equality is framed not as a radical demand, but as a basic human necessity. This conditional acceptance resonates with the Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity which states that this type of frictional behaviour disrupt dominant gender binary and elicits regulatory responses from the society. Additionally Stigma theory of Goffman (1963) provides an insight on how non-conformity develops the 'othering'. Though there are increasing visibility and awareness among the people still the normative structure of the society limits the genuine inclusion.

Equality, Rights, and the Politics of Recognition

The responses of the participants reflect their aspiration for social recognition and dignity. Their responses *"We are also human beings, so we should have the same rights as everyone else"* and *"Transgender people deserve respect, dignity, and equal opportunities..."*, shows that struggle extends beyond the formal rights. Fraser's theory of recognition and redistribution argues that both material equality and cultural recognition needs social justice. The experiences of the participants show that though legal frameworks acknowledges the rights of the transgender people still at the societal level their recognition remains incomplete.

Educational Marginalisation and Early Exclusion

Educational institutions should act as a gateway to opportunity but in some cases they served as a place for early exclusion and trauma. One participant recalled how their very presence became a source of ridicule: *"When I was in school, my classmates treated me differently because of the way I behaved and expressed myself"*. This type of attitude has long term prospects. Sometimes the emotional toll may become so severe that it may lead to discontinuation of their education., as one respondent shared, *"Because of the rejection and lack of support, I eventually stopped going to school"*.

Family Acceptance and Role of Chosen Family

For the participants well being family dynamics plays a very important and critical role. For many home is to a safe space but a place of forced conformity. One participant shared a heart-wrenching account of domestic suppression: “I liked keeping my hair long and dressing in a way that made me feel comfortable, but my parents forced me to cut my hair”. This lack of understanding often leads to a breakdown in communication, as “sometimes transgender people cannot share their problems with their families because they are afraid of being rejected”. One participant explained that after leaving home, *“living with other transgender people who understood me better”* helped them gain the confidence to embrace their identity. Others echoed this, finding strength in collective support: “When friends and community members support us, it gives us confidence to live openly”. In the end, participants expressed a core desire for parity, as one participant stated: “We just want to live our lives free and be accepted as equal human beings”.

Discussion

The experiences of the respondents being treated as ‘different’ or ‘other’ are consistent with the work of Stryker (2008) who stated that the historical marginalisation occurs because of the limited understanding of gender sensitivity. The participants also described the social stigma which is inconsistent with the work of Schilt and Westbrook (2014) who found that rigid gender norms continue to elicit the unequal treatment in everyday social interactions. The fear of discrimination and psychological burden reported by participants can be interpreted according to Meyer’s (2003) Minority Stress Theory. According to this theory the marginalized group experiences the stressors even after the change in attitude among the people.

At the institutional level, the stories of educational harassment and subsequent dropout rates are consistent with the findings of Russell and Fish (2016) who found that bullying and social exclusion in schools significantly damaged the academic performance and mental health

of transgender student. Similarly, the employment challenges reported by participants are consistent with those reported in the National Transgender Discrimination Survey (Grant et al., 2011) regarding widespread unemployment and discrimination related to hiring and retention. Finally, the literature repeatedly emphasizes the important role of support systems, both family and community-based. The emotional distress of participants who reported family rejection is consistent with Ryan's (2009) work that found family support to be a fundamental component of mental health and emotional wellness.

On the other hand the confidence gained from community support is consistent with Lev's (2004) argument for the significance of social acceptance in enhancing the quality of life and decreasing isolation for transgender people. The responses of the participants that together demand equal rights reinforce the arguments of Currah, Juang and Minter (2006) who claimed that legal recognition is a precondition of achieving social justice and real inclusion. Based on the narratives, the following recommendations are made to address the systemic barriers and social exclusion experienced by transgender people. These recommendations are designed to bridge the gap between growing public awareness and the actual realization of equality and dignity.

1. Many Educational institutes are often sites of early trauma, where bullying and lack of support result in significant academic withdrawal. Schools should create and rigorously implement robust anti-bullying policies that explicitly safeguard students on the basis of gender identity and expression. Training should be organised for educators and administrative staff to create supportive environments where transgender students can feel "safe and respected" rather than "treated differently" for their self-expression.
2. The main obstacle is economic exclusion. Participants said employers often judged them by their identity and not their professional qualifications.

3. Findings reveal that participants consistently demand for “respect, dignity and equal opportunity” in all walks of life. Legislators should concentrate on formal legal recognition and equal rights as “key to social justice and inclusion”. Public policies should work to eliminate the lingering fear of discrimination in public spaces so that transgender persons can live and express themselves freely without fear of judgment or shunning.
4. While awareness of social issues has improved, it is still not at a point of full acceptance, and that means people are often isolated in their homes. Public awareness campaigns need to go beyond raising visibility to encouraging genuine social understanding and ending the “othering” that occurs in neighborhoods and social circles. Community groups help people feel “not alone. These networks must be formally recognised and supported as crucial lifelines for building confidence and resilience.
5. Sources report mixed experiences of inclusion in social or religious events. Community and religious leaders should work to be more inclusive of transgender persons in functions and gatherings, some of whom prefer to ‘keep distance’ because of lack of understanding. These multi-sectoral recommendations can bring society one step closer to the goal expressed by participants of a world where they can “live lives freely and be accepted as equal human beings”

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Copyright: © 2026 by Rima Das, Dr. Tarali Pathak, Dr. Arunima Borah Author(s) retain the copyright of their original work while granting publication rights to the journal.

License: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, allowing others to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon it, even for commercial

purposes, with proper attribution. Author(s) are also permitted to post their work in institutional repositories, social media, or other platforms.

References

- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). Greenwood Press.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence*. Verso.
- Currah, P., Juang, R. M., & Minter, S. P. (Eds.). (2006). *Transgender rights*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Dicklitch-Nelson, S., & Rahman, I. (2022). Transgender rights are human rights: A cross-national comparison of transgender rights in 204 countries. *Journal of Human Rights*, 21(5), 525–541. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2022.2100985>
- Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review*, 3, 107–120.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Prentice-Hall.
- Grant, J. M., Mottet, L. A., Tanis, J., Harrison, J., Herman, J. L., & Keisling, M. (2011). *Injustice at every turn: A report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*. National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.
- Herman, J. L. (2016). Gendered restrooms and minority stress: The public regulation of gender and its impact on transgender people's lives. *Journal of Public Management & Social Policy*, 22(1), 65–80.
- Katyal, S. K. (2017). The transgender property project. *California Law Review*, 105(1), 57–134.
- Lev, A. I. (2004). *Transgender emergence: Therapeutic guidelines for working with gender-variant people and their families*. Haworth Clinical Practice Press.
- Lim, F. A., Brown, D. V., Jr., & Kim, S. M. J. (2014). Addressing health care disparities in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender population: A review of best practices.

American Journal of Nursing, 114(6), 24–34.

<https://doi.org/10.1097/01.NAJ.0000450423.89759.36>

Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(5), 674–697. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.5.674>

Mountz, S. E., Capous-Desyllas, M., & Pourciau, E. (2020). Because we're fighting to be ourselves: Voices from former foster youth who are transgender and gender expansive. *Child Welfare*, 98(5), 173–199.

Russell, S. T., & Fish, J. N. (2016). Mental health in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 12, 465–487. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-021815-093153>

Schilt, K., & Westbrook, L. (2014). Doing gender, determining gender: Transgender people, gender panics, and the maintenance of the sex/gender/sexuality system. *Gender & Society*, 28(1), 32–57.

Stryker, S. (1994). My words to Victor Frankenstein above the village of Chamounix: Performing transgender rage. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1(3), 237–254.

Stryker, S. (2008). *Transgender history*. Seal Press.