



Queer ethics and fostering positive mindsets toward non-binary gender, genderqueer, and gender ambiguity

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ABSTRACT

Background: Alongside the growth in visibility of gender identities and presentations such as genderqueer, non-binary and gender neutral, there is ridicule and backlash in wider culture, as well as more subtle invisibility and misgendering. While there exists social psychology research about negative and positive attitudes to trans people, this is restricted to those whose gender identity is at odds with their sex assigned at birth, and who identify with binary gender. Social psychology has extended to the more subtle workings of transphobia, but there is little consideration of the distinctiveness of attitudes and responses to those whose genders cannot be attributed in binary ways, and thus how these may be challenged.

Methods: In keeping with the methods of social theory, this article brings together a diverse and complementary range of conceptual fields in new ways to diagnose a novel cause and solution to these negative attitudes. Using queer theory, feminist ethics, and empirical studies in post-tolerance sociology and social psychology, it argues that negative social responses to genderqueerness stem not only from overt prejudice in the form of transphobia but from binary genderism, the conviction that there are only two genders.

Results and conclusion: This article proposes fostering greater diversity-literacy and empathy for difference as a more effective approach than minority identity-based 'prejudice reduction' approaches. A norm-critical approach to deconstructing gender norms is proposed, thus fostering positive attitudes to genderqueerness. It is therefore demonstrated how best to foster enabling social contexts for genderqueerness, with positive implications for the physical and social health and wellbeing of gender variant people. This approach can be applied in organizations, institutions, and by service providers who interact with genderqueer individuals, in that it can inform a shift to approaching diversity positively in ways that are not restricted to pre-determined and binary identity categories.

KEYWORDS

bigenderism; cisgenderism; prejudice; Queer theory; transphobia

"Listening in a way that creates trust [is] ... essential to hearing a 'different' voice, meaning a voice that didn't make sense according to the prevailing categories of interpretation" (Gilligan, 2014, p. 91)

Introduction and background

Given the increase in identities and understandings of self outside of binary gender classifications (Smith et al., 2014), it is increasingly important for the physical and social health and wellbeing of gender variant people that there are 'cultural resources' for wider society to understand and engage with people on their own terms. This is particularly crucial with gender

identities and expressions that are outside of binary classifications or self-identifications, such as non-binary or genderqueer identities, non-gender and also gender ambiguity¹ which have enjoyed less cultural representation than more binary trans identities and presentations (Wolf & Schweisberger, 2013) and resultantly, harsher responses. Social psychology research has measured negative and positive attitudes to trans people – understood as those whose gender identity is at odds with their sex assigned at birth, and usually restricted to binary gender – and more recently the more subtle workings of transphobia, but there is little consideration of attitudes and responses to those whose genders cannot be

attributed in fixed or binary ways. For these individuals, there is a particular necessity for cultural resources to enable binary people, in particular professionals interacting with genderqueer individuals, to interact with gender diversity without predetermining or mis-attributing identity should it not “make sense according to the prevailing categories of interpretation” (Gilligan, 2014, p. 91). This paper proposes that fostering a more positive ethos toward differences and a less predetermined framework toward identity in general will result in reduction of the desire to categorize which, while most urgently addressing the needs of less easily attributed gender presentations, would of course have run on effects for people who can be read and attributed according to established cultural categories, given that gender and its constant attribution is restrictive for those in and outside of its norms (Nicholas, 2014).

Genderqueerness that challenges prevailing categories or attributions still receives extreme negative social responses. In Australia, for example, alongside the growth of visibility of terms such as genderqueer, non-binary and gender neutral (discussed more below), media and political commentary has perpetuated ridicule and backlash for these new identity categories and presentations (York on ABC-TV, 2016; Nicholas & Agius, 2018). Social psychology and sociology have argued that these negative social responses cannot be understood as stemming only from overt prejudice in the form of transphobia but, rather, from more insipid biases that either invisibilise them as impossible or conceptualize them as not natural or ‘normal.’ This has been described variously with the concepts of cisgenderism (naturalizing cisgender), bigenderism (naturalizing two genders), gender normativity (promotion of normative binary gender) and heteronormativity (promotion of heterosexual norms) more broadly (Gilbert, 2009). While most of these mechanisms impact all trans people, what Gilbert calls bigenderism (which I will here call binary genderism to distinguish it from the identity of ‘bigender’) impacts uniquely those whose self-identity lies outside of the established categories, or whose gender presentation is ambiguous. This article is intended to be an argument for the desirability and ethical preferability of a nonidentity based approach to fostering diversity that focuses on broader normative mindsets. This has more scope to avoid

reification of normativity and binaries and will be useful for diversity and inclusion practitioners and mental health professionals considering how best to support genderqueerness and challenge the unique set of social attitudes, and thus negative impacts upon the individuals, that it provokes.

Method/approach

Social theory entails the creation or extension of frameworks to explain social phenomena, and often to diagnose problematic elements and propose how they may be different (Calhoun, 1995; Coleman, 1990). This work follows in this vein by bringing together existing social, social psychological and political theories that cover partial elements of the phenomenon discussed in new ways, alongside existing empirical work in order to offer a new social theory of the causes and solutions of this phenomenon. Due to extant conceptual limits in psychologically-based prejudice reduction work, such as in unconscious bias training, it is especially important in this area to ‘incorporat[e] sociological reasoning into what has been principally a psychology-led diversity initiative’ (Noon, 2018, p. 199).

The core conceptual argument is that fostering more diversity-literacy and empathy for difference would be an effective approach to challenging *all of* the norms outlined above. By fostering positive social attitudes toward difference and critical mindsets toward gender in the binary population, it proposes that there would be greater affirmation of genderqueerness. Influenced by queer theory, it argues that instead of focusing only on tolerance or a reduction in prejudice for pre-established minority (trans) identities, a more effective, expansive and long-term aim for gender variance would be fostering criticality and relativity in the binary population. This ‘gender intelligence’ (Gendered Intelligence, 2017) toward the constructedness and contingency of normative identity would in turn, I argue, foster positive mindsets toward and a comfort with differences and ambiguity more broadly. I have previously described such a mode of thinking and relating as a “queer ethic” (Nicholas, 2014). This paper will propose an alternative ideal mode of thinking for wider society, which can be applied locally in therapeutic and organizational contexts, that does not require binary

categorization and attribution. This may sustain positive relations and perspectives from binary society toward genderqueer individuals in a way that does not in turn foreclose changes and proliferations in, or indeed rejection of, identity categories. Focusing on reduction of ‘phobias’ requires a pre-established population with common characteristics to whom the phobia is directed. Focusing instead on a general positive mindset to differences means that an additive approach to the ‘phobia’ model can be avoided, and the unique mechanisms underpinning negative responses to genderqueer genders can be addressed, in addition to transphobia. Using queer and feminist ethics, the practicability of this will be argued for, and related empirical social psychology studies will be drawn upon to evidence that such a ‘majority population’ approach may be more effective long term and may indeed be possible in practice.

To some extent, this aim of fostering wider cultural resources that challenge normative gender and sexuality is an aim shared and carried out by ‘whole school,’ ‘whole community’ or whole society approaches to challenging homophobia and transphobia and, more ambitiously, the more subtle workings of heteronormativity and gender normativity. Thus, community practices that already do this will be drawn upon to complement the conceptual work. What is useful from these approaches is the practical implication of their premise that, by requiring normative members of a community or society to reflect on the cultural foundations of their *own* identities, they will become more empathetic toward the possibility of other formations of gender and understandings of selfhood. Other empathy-oriented practices will also be drawn on to complement this. This article will outline how queer and feminist theory, social psychology and community practices can be brought together productively to consider how best to foster enabling social contexts for genderqueerness.

Discussion

The problem: Lack of cultural resources for genderqueerness

It is established in gender research that a norm of transgender identity has emerged, and that

binary identity is more easily accepted by wider society and healthcare professionals than ambiguous gender presentation or self-identification, or identities or presentations that are between or outside of established binary gender categories (Hausman, 1999; Lovelock, 2017). This is evident in legal recognition for socially or medically ‘transitioned’ trans individuals (Cowan, 2005; Sandland, 2005), medical and psychological practices that focus on ‘full’ binary transition (NHS, 2016) and in cultural representations. For example, Lovelock argues that transgender identity has

become culturally legible through the wrong body trope. Problematically ... this process has worked to demarcate ideals of ‘acceptable’ transgender subjectivity: self-sufficient, normatively feminine [or masculine], and eager to embrace the possibilities for happiness and social integration provided by the commercial domain. (Lovelock, 2017, p. 1).

Additionally, much quantitative research has tended toward homogenizing according to gender categories pre-established by the authors, as opposed to self-identity of the research respondents, attributing identities such as ‘transsexual’ to any respondents who are non-cisgender and additionally attributing pre-established sexuality identities that fit with binary gender (Kuper, Nussbaum, & Mustanski, 2012, p. 244). Much research on trans and gender diversity has neglected self-identification and been led by the authors’ categories, rather than the participants’ (Kuper et al., 2012, p. 244).

However, the ways that people are understanding their own identities is far more complex and less binary than legal, medical, academic or wider social definitions and classifications would have us think (Richards et al., 2016). Indeed, “young people increasingly identify as ‘other’ to man/woman models of ‘sexed’ identity, positioning themselves as ‘queer,’ ‘genderqueer,’ and/or ‘gender questioning’” (Smith et al., 2014, p. 17). In popular culture, a proliferation of gender and sexual identities are observable, with non-gendered pronouns gaining mainstream media commentary in the Anglosphere (Guo, 2016), and mainstream pop music artists declaring themselves gender fluid and pansexual (Macpherson, 2015). A large scale online survey of gender self-identities of Transgender (used there as an umbrella term for those who identify with a

gender identity “other than, or in addition to, the gender associated with their birth sex” (Kuper et al., 2012, p. 244) individuals found that, in fact, the most commonly used gender self-identifier in their sample was ‘genderqueer’ (Kuper et al., 2012). A more recent survey of young people in Australia likewise found that the most commonly chosen current gender identity in the sample was genderqueer (Smith et al., 2014, p. 33). Kuper et al. note that “for a growing number of individuals, SRS [sex reassignment surgery] and passing as the other sex appears less central to identity” (2012, p. 250). Indeed, some individuals do not wish to be gendered at all (they may be gender neutral, non-gendered, agender among others, or just without a gender identity), and others may have shifting gender identities (bigender, gender fluid among others) that make permanent attribution undesirable (Barker & Richards, 2015, p. 166). This means that the problem of misrecognition is markedly different for those whose genders are not binary or fixed than binary trans folk.

Despite this grassroots proliferation of queer genders, then, “misrepresentation and misrecognition” (Robinson, Bansel, Denson, Ovenden, & Davies, 2014, p. 15) are dealt to genderqueerness from wider society, service providers, and sometimes from within trans communities (Gagne & Tewkesbury, 1998). Thus, while people may well self-identify or present in these multiplicitous ways, the social nature of identity means that they will encounter a different set of problems in a binary social world to people whose gender fits the binaries. Simply put, “for youth who challenge the culturally fixed gender dichotomy through nonconventional gender expression, societal reaction can be harsh” (Saltzburg & Davis, 2010, p. 87).

Gender has long been understood by sociologists as an interactively maintained and *attributed* phenomenon (Kessler & McKenna, 1978), with the ways that you are ‘read’ by others taking an important role in the construction of identity owing to the cultural resources that they have for doing this reading (Nicholas, 2014). Indeed, Richards et al. (2016) note that “while not being disorders or pathological in themselves – people with such genders remain at risk of victimization and of minority or marginalization stress *as a result of discrimination*” (95, emphasis added). Indeed, in the 2008 USA National Transgender

Discrimination Survey, “gender variant people who did not identify as transgender” or respondents who identified as gender nonconforming rather than binary-identified reported higher rates of harassment and sexual assault than the binary trans respondents (Harrison, Grant, & Herman, 2011-2012).

Research shows that the dominant resources for understanding gender identity remain oppositional, with some space for non-cisgenderism within certain boundaries of intelligibility (Gilbert, 2009). A report on young Australians who are gender variant and sexually diverse notes that, for young people who identify with newer possibilities of gender and sexuality, such as genderqueer, “the responses of others – *based on lack of knowledge and recognition of diversity in its multiple forms* – makes self-identification for young people even harder” (Robinson et al., 2014, p. 16, emphasis mine). That is, there is a chasm between self-identification and recognition and attribution.

Whilst some (limited) research has advocated for individuals to be supported or affirmed by mental health professionals to explore ‘non-normative’ or non-binary gender identity, this has tended to remain at the level of self-identity (Richards et al., 2016). For example, some change-based psychological research aims to challenge the internalization of negative attitudes for the health and wellbeing of trans and gender diverse people (Scandurra et al., 2017), and other research analyses the resilience of gender diverse individuals (McCann & Brown, 2017). However, in these psychological approaches the ‘problem’ and solutions remain located at the level of the gender variant individual, and not at the level of the negative attitudes themselves. I argue here however that, given the fundamentally *social* nature of identity and the health risks identified above as a result of *social* marginalization, much of the focus needs to shift instead to the binary population with whom genderqueer individuals interact, whether their school or workplace population, or service providers. Indeed, speaking specifically of the general population of higher education contexts, Rankin and Beemyn (2012) note that “every day that too many students and educators remain ignorant about this population is another day gender-diverse students face overt

and unintentional discrimination” (1). Fostering a more diversity-literate and empathetic social context can then enable interaction that does not rely on binary attributions and result in misattributions and the more subtle invalidation of non-cis, non-fixed and non-binary genders that underpins such negative outcomes (Ansara & Hegarty, 2012). After discussing the underpinning binary genderism of these negative outcomes and the related limits of an aim of tolerance for pre-established identity categories, I will outline a relational social ethic that can be oriented to the ‘other’ and be affirmative of people’s own identifications.

Understanding the cause of the problem: Binary genderism and the limits of tolerance

The disposition to exclusion and closure inherent to identity means that restricting problems of discrimination to ideas of overt prejudice such as transphobia does not address the underpinnings of the problems encountered by those whose gender is outside of binary self-identification or attribution. Indeed, “‘transphobia’ addresses fear of transgender individuals instead of capturing the critically central and evidently flawed assumptions that underlie the pervasive cultural system of prejudice and discrimination directed toward the transgender community.” (Lennon & Mistler, 2014, p. 63). Queer theory and feminist post-structuralism are conceptual frameworks that have allowed for analysis of the prevailing modes of thought that explain why identity tends to congeal in to oppositions and hierarchies that are enforced in both implicit discrimination and bias and explicit violence.

The congealment of a norm of trans identity was foreseen by queer theorists who proposed that it is the nature of discourses of identity that appeal to foundation and essence that they will congeal in to new norms, in turn excluding other ways of understanding the self and others (Butler, 1993). This is what Butler calls the inherent “constitutive outside” (1999) of binary identity. That is, it can only exist and be a ‘norm’ in relation to what it is *not*, what it others, and what is not the norm. Because of this, queer theorists argue that striving for acceptance for

certain minority identities that remain within the binary does not address the root cause of marginalization and prejudice against differences (Nicholas, 2014).

Concepts that have usefully been developed for understanding the deeper roots of negative attitudes to, and outcomes for, gender diversity include cisgenderism (Lennon & Mistler, 2014), cis-normativity (Worthen, 2016) and genderism (Browne, 2004). This final concept describes the panic on the part of the normative population upon misreading or experiencing incapacity to read the gender of an individual: the “often unnamed instances of discrimination based on the discontinuity between the sex/gender with which an individual identifies, and how others, in a variety of spaces, *read* their sex/gender” (Browne, 2004, p. 332, my emphasis). Those who research both physical and more symbolic violence against trans and GD folk also use the term ‘gender fundamentalism’ (Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing, & Malouf, 2001, p. 91) which “operates by denying and stigmatizing any form of gender nonconformity, in the same manner heterosexism denigrates nonheterosexual relationships.” Most useful for understanding hostility to non-binary and genderqueerness, however, is the concept of bigenderism (Gilbert, 2009), that I call binary genderism here, which describes the impossibility of non-binary genders to exist in the minds of many due to the compulsarity and naturalizing of the two gender system.

Using these concepts, I propose that the problem is a lack of cultural resources or discourses outside of binary gender due to its ostensible neutrality and naturalness that make non-binary and other genderqueer people a social impossibility, or ‘unintelligible’ in broader heteronormative contexts (Butler, 1999).

These concepts allow for a shift of focus to the normalizing and privileging that perpetuates the more subtle othering of gender variance, in a similar way to analogisable sociological concepts such as heterosexism and ethnocentrism that articulate normal/other binary hierarchies. Indeed, binary genderism takes us beyond overt prejudice on the part of individuals to the less easy to identify levels of unintentional negativity resultant from privilege and norms. This can be

understood as operating at the levels of institutions, interpersonal interaction and modes of thinking (Nicholas, 2014).

This shift to problematizing norms across these levels and their inherent impulse to exclude or subordinate differences leads in turn to a critique of the limits of tolerance. Political theorists argue that tolerance as an aim for prejudice reduction leaves the norm intact, providing for the limited aim of the dominant group to ‘tolerate’ the existence of a pre-defined other (Hage, 2000). Minority recognition-based identity politics of tolerance have traditionally been applied to discriminations based on identity such as homophobia (homosexuality) and transphobia (transgender identity), but queer activists and political theorists alike have critiqued this concept for its inherent capitulation to normativity and its inherent negative bias. That is, tolerance does not require positive regard for difference, or for the superiority or presumed normality of the dominant group to be questioned. For example, in the Australian context, Hage (2000) has argued that the tolerance model of multiculturalism leaves minority groups as *objects* of a dominant ethnic bias. That is, tolerance does not necessarily undermine white supremacy. Likewise, in queer activism and queer theory, the idea of ‘respectability politics’ is argued to leave the heteronormativity at the root of homophobia and cisgenderism intact, and does not demand affirmation of queerness, merely quiet tolerance. For example, Duggan (2003) coined the term “homonormativity” to signify “a [gay] politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions” (p. 50). In my previous work (Nicholas, 2014), I have argued that what this leaves intact is the hierarchical binary ethic of othering itself, of neutral norm vs. tolerated other. As in my work that argued the root cause of sexism, heterosexism and cisgenderism is bigendered ethics or modes of relating, Rankin and Beemyn conclude that “only after a complete transformation of institutional cultures” (2012, p. 10) will gender diverse individuals feel equally welcome. From this same perspective, Carrera, DePalma, and Lameiras (2012, p. 1004) advocate for “conceptual change.” Elsewhere I have described this solution as change at the level of mindsets or cultural resources, proposing instead

a queer, open way of understanding selves and others that may more effectively address the underpinning problems that perpetuate othering. Such a shift in mindset can begin on the local levels, with service providers challenging their own conceptual frameworks, and organizations and institutions working to change mindsets in their own contexts.

A solution: Queer ethics and allophilia

“no political revolution is possible without a radical shift in one’s notion of the possible and the real” (Butler, 1999, p. xxiv).

What is required, then, is not an add-on approach of more identities to be tolerated in a minority model, as this will always be finite and have a resultant ‘constitutive outside’ (Butler 1999). Nor indeed is the solution an individualized greater resilience of those individuals whose gender is consistently negated or misattributed (Scandurra et al., 2017). Instead, I argue, a more long-term way of addressing the problem would be to address the mindsets in the binary population with whom genderqueer people interact that lend knowable gender identity such weight in social interactions and lead to attempts to attribute people’s gender identity according to existing models (Nicholas, 2014). That is, the aim should be something more abstract and long-lasting than mere tolerance for certain, binary transgender individuals. I, and other queer theorists and practitioners, argue that this should be done by attempting to disrupt and challenge the social tendencies to think of self and others in hierarchical binaries. This is based on the understanding of the “wide field of normalization, rather than simple intolerance, as the site of violence” (Morgensen, 2011, p. 52).

While this sounds like an abstract aim, below I will outline how critical practice in specific contexts may foster more positive mindsets to replace those which underpin many of the issues discussed above. This shifts the problem to the majority/normative population in institutions or communities to interrogate their own identity construction and understanding, to “choose to lose their gender expertise” (DePalma, 2013) rather than the onus remaining on the non-normative

individual to fit the norms, or articulate their identity in the language of the dominant. Drawing on queer theory, this can be understood as the ethical process of *queering*, with queer understood as a verb not a noun (Butler, 1993), that is a practice not an identity, thus demonstrating this severing of the onus from minoritised gender and sexuality variant individuals. Queering has since been extended “as a strategy for unsettling *all* normative categories” (Taylor & Blaise 2016, p. 591). In the context of the above critique of binary gendered norms as inherently exclusionary, this “endeavour ... to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relationship to [norms or discourses]” (Butler, 2004, p. 3) can be understood as beneficial not just to gender and sexuality diverse people, but to all people. Extensive literature has demonstrated the negative impacts of gender norms on cis men and women, as well as trans and gender diverse folk, and ‘undoing gender’ proposed as a way to remedy this (Nicholas, 2014; Risman, Lorber, & Sherwood, 2012).

Queering as a practice has been applied most practically by those working in queer pedagogy who seek to address and challenge the reproduction of non-reflective normativity in children and “de-centre the straight and narrow vision” (Taylor & Blaise, 2014, p. 377). The insights of queer pedagogy have led to new approaches to tackling diversity discrimination in schools in particular, with ‘whole school’ approaches now considered more effective than a focus on tolerance for minorities (Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017). Discussing specifically the need for diverse sex education, Shannon and Smith conclude that “any changes to perception will come about only if dominant notions of sex, sexuality and gender are challenged through critical reflection on the legitimacy of alternative understandings of sex, gender and sexuality” (2017, p. 9). Applying this to institutions more broadly, in some European contexts and gaining particular usage in Sweden, a similar ethic, explicitly influenced by queer theory, has been developed in to the practical strategy of developing a “norm critical mindset” (IYGLO, 2015, p. 3). In particular, sharing this shift from minority politics toward an interrogation of power, “norm criticism looks at how

norms affect our values and everyday lives rather than focusing on the people who break them.” (IYGLO, 2015, p. 4).

This queer or norm-critical approach should not be understood as endless critique for the sake of critique, however, and can be understood as taking inspiration from and sharing much with feminist or care ethics that value the other-orientedness and empathy that has traditionally been associated with women’s ways of being (Nicholas, 2014). The ways that queer theory has been applied, outlined above, are to the end of fostering more positive perspectives toward difference, echoing feminist ethicist Carol Gilligan’s aim of seeking how we foster “the capacity to care, and ... learn to take the point of view of the other” (Gilligan, 2014, p. 90). Ultimately, it is argued that a more positive attitude or ethic toward otherness will be more valuable, long-lasting and transferable than attempts to tackle individualized ‘phobias’ (homophobia, transphobia etc.). This queer and feminist ethic of being led by the other ‘in their otherness’ (Beauvoir, 1976, p. 67) can be applied in interpersonal interaction, for example in therapeutic or service provision contexts, can influence policy and procedure in organizations that can be formulated around principles rather than identities, and can inform diversity and inclusion practices.

Social psychology has traditionally restricted work around difference to analyzing prejudice against minorities, with implications for how to reduce it. This stems perhaps from its context, with the classic ‘contact hypothesis’ (Allport, 1958) – the idea that meaningful contact with those of different identities than you can reduced prejudice – a response to desegregation in the USA. However, this has limited much work in social psychology to the aim of an ideal of tolerance of pre-defined minority groups and respectability politics critiqued above, with many of the underpinning assumptions unchallenged. Whilst there has been work on negative attitudes to trans and queer people that have extended prejudice to more broad conceptualisations of ‘phobia’, it still often remains on the level of understanding attitudes to pre-defined identity groups, such as ‘homosexual’ or ‘transgender’ (Morrison, Bishop, Gazzola, McCutcheon, Parker &

Morrison, 2017). This limits understandings of the mechanisms at play when people are faced with less intelligible identities. In the field of Psychology, most studies on transgender are implicitly referring to the wrong body narrative, with a notable exception a recent chapter about 'Further Genders' in the *The Palgrave Handbook of Psychology of Sexuality and Gender* (Barker & Richards, 2015). Additionally, in studies on prejudice, often the assumption of a predisposition to othering is naturalized, such that a limited aim becomes making this othering less negative (Nicholas, 2018). This is the case, for example, with psychology studies that analyze homophobia or transphobia (Morrison et al., 2017). More recently, however, there has been a shift to considering subtler forms of negative attitudes to difference such as 'discomfort' that are useful for considering the difficulties presented in interaction with queer or ambiguous genders and that underpin less overt prejudice but maintain qualitative inequalities (Monto & Supinski, 2014).

Shifting the focus to fostering positive attitudes and interaction, however, there has also been work in social psychology around 'Allophilia.' This concept is defined as "a positive feeling and attitude of openness toward an outgroup" (Alfieri & Marta, 2011, p. 1). This allows for thinking beyond discomfort, to considering the variables that maximize or inhibit positive regard. It seems that the work on Allophilia has a different ontological assumption that allows it to go beyond the limited aim of fostering tolerance. In its concern instead with "feelings of affection, engagement, kinship, comfort and enthusiasm for groups different from one's own" (Pittinsky, 2009, p. 363), it is much more useful to the queer ethics outlined here and one of the concept's key proponents argues that "we'll be able to do a lot more with it" (Pittinsky, 2009, p. 363) than sticking to concepts of prejudice. Speaking specifically to school and organisation-based initiatives to promote positive relations, Pittinsky argues that the concept helps with the "need to weed out prejudice, and ... to plant and cultivate allophilia" (2009, p. 363). Pittinsky, Rosenthal, and Montoya (2011) propose that the development of an Allophilia scale enabling researchers to measure positive attitudes that assist in understanding why

people support and help different others, will assist in promoting these behaviors. With the insight that "a change in negative attitude does not necessarily coincide with an equivalently countervailing change in the corresponding positive attitude" (Pittinsky et al., 2011, p. 43) then, how can this Allophilia be fostered? That is, how can the ideal queer ethics outlined above – positive regard for gender variant others – that it is hypothesized can aid in reducing the need for binary gender attribution, be realized on society wide levels?

Examples and evaluation: Community and pedagogical initiatives

Many community and school approaches are already carrying out the work of fostering Allophilia through provoking criticality in their majority populations as a way to foster more openness and empathy to difference, and their approaches could be usefully tested and extended. This section will offer a brief overview of some paradigmatic approaches that can be broadly understood as 'norm critical' in their strategies to creating more enabling educational or community environments for diverse populations. This includes queer pedagogies and ally, empowerment and empathy programs aimed at 'majority' populations that all exemplify the premises of a queer ethic and Allophilia as defined above and could usefully be extended to other organizations and institutions.

As indicated above, empirical research in to the health and wellbeing of gender diverse young people in Australia concluded that "if whole-of-school supports are put in place, it is possible to create inclusive and respectful educational environments where young gender diverse and transgender people can thrive" (Smith et al., 2014, p. 56). In education contexts this would entail making the implicit (norms) explicit. Carrera et al. (2012, p. 1008) argue that, just as there is an explicit and implicit cisgender curriculum, there needs to be an "explicit (trans) gender curriculum". Initiatives such as the *Safe Schools* program in Australia, the UK-based *No Outsiders* project and the Dutch *Norm Criticism Toolkit* (IGLYO 2015) offer(ed) just this. The *No Outsiders* project particularly emphasizes the benefits to both gender diverse students as well as

the wider student population, apparent in their vision of working toward “what a gender-variant safe classroom might look like, going beyond simple notions of creating safe spaces to a deeper interrogation of implicit norms and how far we might be willing and able to disrupt them.” (DePalma, 2013, p. 5). Extended to society more broadly, the activist approach proposed by Carrera et al. (2012) for greater valuing of gender non-conformity entails both explicit awareness about diverse genders and sexualities as well as the deconstruction of normative genders and sexualities. In their own words, “the long road to social justice needs to begin with re-imagining current understandings of sex and gender” (Carrera et al., 2012, p. 1007). Exemplifying this in practice and demonstrating a society-wide approach, a British not-for-profit call this “gendered intelligence,” claiming that “everyone can be more intelligent about gender” (Gendered Intelligence, 2017). Their vision statement demonstrates their approach which is about providing direct affirmation of gender diverse individuals *and* complementarily creating more broad conceptions of gender identity in society: “Our vision is of a world where people are no longer constrained by narrow perceptions and expectations of gender, and where diverse gender expressions are visible and valued.” (Gendered Intelligence, 2017). In most of these examples, this is done through both ‘norm criticality,’ described by IGLYO as a tool “to help reshape oppressing norms” (2015, p. 3) and the cultivation of positive values. That is, both deconstruction of oppressive norms and reconstruction of enabling values and norms, a key component of queer ethics (Nicholas, 2014).

Gonzalez, Riggle, and Rostosky (2015) emphasize that in order to reduce prejudice, as well as this critical work there needs to be a concurrent dedication to interventions that increase positive feelings and attitudes to difference through increasing ally behavior. Taking inspiration from the new Allophilia paradigm, their approach entails positive cultivation of values, understanding of privilege and oppression, and empathy in all members of groups and societies. An example of a context-specific youth focused program in the USA that takes this approach is SMS:

Students for a Meaningful Solution, that focuses on empowering all members of a school, including bullies and bystanders, to reduce the causes of bullying (Kalayjian, 2015). They use positive strategies such as empathy, relationship and communication building skills through the method of “psychosocial education” (Kalayjian, 2015). Some similar approaches have been used in programs designed more specifically to foster empathy toward gender and sexuality diverse students, and the Dutch ‘norm-critical toolkit’ (IYGLO, 2015) is a 68 page guide of activities to encourage identity criticality in schools or other organizations. In Australia, the *All of Us* resource, targeted at high schoolers, included some suggested role playing activities in order to foster empathy. For example, one activity intended to draw attention to the difficulty of living outside of binary gender or outside of gender itself, and to the arbitrariness of sex/gender attribution, was to imagine the arrival of genderless aliens and how you would explain them to other humans, as well as how you would explain gender back to them (SSCA, 2016, p. 30). Likewise students are asked to roleplay an interaction with others where they had to hide a part of themselves in order to foster empathy for non-normative identities. This is in addition to explicit gender diversity content that raises awareness of different modes of being and relating, alongside these activities that are deconstructive. Even those programs designed to address gender or sexuality diversity specifically are informed more broadly by a queer ethic of creating enabling contexts for self-determination, free from negative attitudes and the privileging of particular ways of being. In this way, it is hoped that they have enabling impacts for all participants.

Specifically norm-critical, whole of school/community approaches have thus far enjoyed limited evaluation. However, evidence about similarly whole-institution, norm-deconstructive and empathy-oriented approaches show promise. For example, evaluation of a whole-school bully, bystander and victim empowerment program similar to SMS, above, sought to establish the efficacy of an approach aimed at changing ‘the conditions in the social environment that permit bullying to occur’ (Pack et al, 2011, p. 133), with a focus on social norms. Evaluation demonstrates

this approach ‘increases the frequency of student intervention to stop mistreatment’ alongside ‘statistically significant reductions in discipline indicators seen at schools where the program was implemented with high fidelity’ (Pack et al, 2011, p. 133). Both at national and international levels, there is near consensus in the academic literature that tackling norms and fostering empowerment and empathy is the preferable way to tackle bullying, and other issues premised on gender and sexual norms such as gender-based violence in schools and for young people (Haberland & Rogow, 2015). Concomitantly, in institutions and business, unconscious bias training has become near pervasive. Unconscious bias training has been described as ‘a quick-fix,’ and thinkers with sociological background suggest instead - drawing on evaluation of existing approaches - that preferable is ‘an on-going and possibly lengthy process of reflection, discussion and awareness-raising, in keeping with cooperative learning approaches’ (Noon, 2018, p. 206), more in line with the approaches used in education contexts.

Conclusion

This article has proposed the conceptual argument that an important and long-lasting approach to reducing prejudice against, and creating more enabling environments for those whose genders cannot be attributed according to binary gender is to foster positive mindsets to otherness on the psychosocial level for all members of communities, institutions or organizations. This is not to negate work on other levels such as the political and legislative levels, but to complement, not replace, more pragmatic initiatives or approaches to rights and representation. Progress in rights and representation for trans folks whose gender is within the binary is still essential, and has a long way to go. However, it cannot be assumed that legislative change will necessitate attitude change, and it cannot be assumed that it will foster greater gender literacy in wider populations, especially toward those who self-identify or present as non-binary, genderqueer or gender ambiguous gender. As such, there is nothing to be lost and much to be gained by undertaking to foster more otherness-literate and empathetic communities. Additionally, such

approaches can be easily transferred, and have been influenced by work in other domains of difference and otherness. In conclusion, as well as making life more livable for genderqueer people, perhaps fostering a more diversity-literate and empathetic society can then enable interaction that does not rely on binary attributions, and may enable some feminist gains too, such that gender as an organizing principle of society and its associated hierarchies and exclusions may become genuinely less prominent (Risman, Lorber, & Sherwood, 2012).

Having said this, the approaches outlined above have been subject to greater backlash than traditional anti-prejudice campaigns, owing to their more transformative aims (Rhodes et al., 2016). In particular there is an increase in marginal but vocal conservative opponents to so-called ‘gender ideology’ and outcry in the Anglosphere and Europe over initiatives that mention the possibility of there being gender outside of man and woman (Nicholas & Agius, 2018). Approaches such as these tend to have limited lives in the UK and Australia for political reasons (as with *No Outsiders* and *Safe Schools*). No empirical work has been done to measure the attitudes of participants before and after norm critical influenced training so evaluation of its outcomes remain anecdotal. In this context, then, it is imperative that empirical work is undertaken to measure the efficacy of such approaches for increasing the wellbeing of genderqueer, trans and cisgender members of communities or organizations in which such practices are implemented.

Declaration of conflict of interest

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

Notes

1. In this article, the term ‘genderqueer’ will be used as an umbrella term for gender identities or presentations that do not fit the ‘dominant trans narrative’ of transitioning from your gender assigned at birth in line with your assigned sex, to the ‘opposite’ gender. That is, genders that are not understood in gender binaries and / or essences. With the acknowledgment that individuals may use this as an identity that pertains to specific things, in this article specifically it is used as a descriptor in order to invoke the non-

normativity and critique of binaries signified by the term ‘queer.’

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