

Exploring School Staff's Experiences of Working with Trans-spectrum Young People: A Psychosocial Approach

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Abstract

This research examines the experiences of school staff working with trans-spectrum young people (TsYP) from a psychosocial perspective. While existing research has often prioritised the voices of TsYP or educational psychologists (EPs), little attention has been given to how school staff themselves experience this work. This is despite school staff being integral to shaping school environments and influencing the safety, belonging and wellbeing of TsYP. The research is set in the evolving socio-political and educational context of the United Kingdom (UK), where ongoing policy changes, the politicisation, and the scrutiny of gender diversity in schools amplify the complexity of school staff roles. A psychosocial approach was therefore applied to understand experiences by exploring the complex interactions between the evolving external context and their internal worlds. Five secondary school staff members participated, all of whom had previous experience working with TsYP. Principles from the Free Association Narrative Interview Method (FANIM), which draws on psychoanalytic theory, were used to deepen understanding of the complex dynamics at play (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). A psychoanalytically informed approach to data analysis was employed (O'Reilly et al., 2025), revealing that participants' experiences carried emotional weight. School staff are concerned about TsYP's well-being but feel stretched by the demands of their roles and constrained by the changing and unchangeable systems around them. The findings highlight how to support school staff in feeling competent and capable in their roles. The methodology also emphasised how the psychosocial approach could be used further within the EP role, including the importance of understanding the complexities of school staff's experiences. Opportunities for further research to build on these findings are also proposed.

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List of Abbreviations

- TsYP- Trans-spectrum Young People
- LGBTQ+- Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Transgender, Queer (+)
- EP- Educational Psychologist
- EPS- Educational Psychology Service
- PEP- Principal Educational Psychologist
- TEP-Trainee Educational Psychologist
- BPS- British Psychological Society
- NHS- National Health Service
- GIDS- Gender Identity Development Service
- CAMHS- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
- LA- Local Authority
- DfE- Department for Education

- UK- United Kingdom
- ONS- Office for National Statistics
- FANIM- Free Association Narrative Interview Method
- UNCRC- United Nations Convention in the Rights
- HRA- Human Rights Act
- EHRC- Equality and Human Rights Commission
- GRA- Gender Recognition Act
- GRC- Gender Recognition Certificate
- GEO- Government Equalities Office
- NAHT- National Association of Headteachers
- ASCL- Association of School and College Leaders
- KCSIE- Keeping Children Safe in Education

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to the Research

The research reported in this thesis explores school staff's experiences of working with trans-spectrum young people (TsYP). In the contemporary UK context, there are tentative indications of a rising TsYP population (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2023; Zhang et al., 2000) alongside increasing awareness and openness of gender diversity (Müller & Böhlke, 2023; Wiltz, 2018; Simmons, 2020), making TsYP a growing consideration for school staff in their roles. Schools remain highly gendered systems (e.g., uniform policies, changing facilities, language used and segregated lessons), and TsYP report having variable school experiences from positive and affirming experiences (Leonard, 2022), to experiences of violence, discrimination and social isolation (Horton, 2022). School staff are central to TsYP's school experiences and play an important role in making a tangible difference (Evans & Rawlings, 2021; Leonard, 2022), highlighting the value of centring their experiences. Nationally, there are shifts in political and social discourse, legal frameworks (House of Commons, 2025) and guidance for school staff working with TsYP (Department for Education [DfE], 2023). School staff are navigating a unique context of change, with heightened public scrutiny (Payne & Smith, 2014) and policy changes (House of Commons, 2025), reshaping expectations of what good practice looks like. This study, therefore, asks how school staff are experiencing this changing societal context and how they experience it psychologically in their roles. The qualitative methodology employed draws on psychosocial principles to examine the complex interplay between school staff's inner and external worlds, adding depth to the understanding of experience seldom considered in this research area. With this theoretical lens, the aim was to

increase understanding of what current practice with TsYP looks and feels like for secondary school staff. Information gathered will help inform reflections and discussions around changes to practice in the profession, both to allow school staff to feel more supported when working with TsYP and, in turn, to work towards improving TsYP experiences of school.

This chapter will first discuss the definition and concept of the trans-spectrum before exploring the national and current context. The conceptual framework used with this research will then be outlined alongside considerations of what the theoretical framework means for the context of this research. Finally, this chapter will share the motivations and rationale for this research, whilst considering what contributions this study makes to the education system and the EP profession.

1.2. Terminology

1.2.1. LGBTQ+ Community

The acronym LGBTQ+ is used as an umbrella term to describe a community of people who are lesbian, gay, bi, transgender and queer/questioning. There are variations of this acronym (LGBTQIA+) to include those intersex and asexual. The plus symbol signifies the additional identities not covered by the acronym. It serves as an inclusive term for a wide spectrum of people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (Stonewall, 2025).

1.2.2. Gender Identity- 'Trans-spectrum'

Gender identity refers to a person's psychological sense of self in relation to their gender (American Psychological Association, 2023). Those who identify as trans or transgender typically feel their gender does not correspond or fit comfortably with the sex they were registered at birth (Doyle, 2023). Therefore, someone who is cisgender would feel as though their gender aligns with the sex they were registered at birth (Stonewall, 2025). As in other modern literature, the term 'trans-spectrum' is used in this research to refer to the range of gender-diverse people (Markland et al., 2023). Spectrum is used as a term to encompass a range of identities that share a common experience or commonality. Therefore, the trans-spectrum includes all gender-diverse or questioning individuals, such as non-binary, genderqueer, and gender-nonconforming individuals.

It is important to acknowledge that this definition is derived from a Western psychological lens. In cultures, religions and historical periods, understandings of gender identities vary. For example, the 'Kathoyes' in Thailand, 'Hijras' in India and 'two-sprits' among the Native Americans (Zito & Valerio, 2013). Therefore, we must exercise caution before assuming the universality of definitions and classifications of gender diversity.

1.2.3. *Transitioning*

Individuals in the trans-spectrum may take steps to live in the gender with which they identify, commonly referred to as transitioning. Each person's transition is unique to the individual and may include medical interventions (e.g., hormone replacement

therapy and surgeries) or social transitioning (e.g., telling friends and family, dressing differently, changing documents, pronouns, or name) (Stonewall, 2025).

1.3. The National Context for TsYP

1.3.1. Prevalence of TsYP

There is growing awareness of the trans-spectrum population in England and Wales. The 2021 Census included an optional question on gender identity for the first time, and according to this dataset, 0.5% of the population had a gender different from the sex registered at birth (ONS, 2023). The South of England was found to have a significantly higher LGBT population, with an estimated 1% of 16-24 year olds having a different gender from the sex registered at birth (ONS, 2023). The local authority (LA) where this research is based was found to have one of the largest trans-spectrum populations (ONS, 2023). Concerns regarding the gender identity statistics were raised due to an overrepresentation of particular groups, such as those with English as an additional language. Biggs (2024) suggested that the voluntary question used in the 2021 Census was flawed and had impacted the findings. In response, ONS has issued guidance emphasising the use of data as broad patterns rather than precise data of the trans-spectrum population (ONS, 2025). However, past data estimate that in an average-sized English secondary school (986 pupils), there would likely be 27 TsYP (Zhang et al., 2000).

1.3.2. Laws and Legal Frameworks

In England, Wales and Scotland, important legislation exists to recognise and protect TsYP, which school staff are professionally bound to adhere to. Whilst not law in England, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1990) is a legally binding agreement that defines the fundamental rights of every child. The following rights are particularly significant when applied to working with TsYP:

- Article 2- “Every Child Without Discrimination”. Every TsYP should be able to live without discrimination regardless of their identity, which includes their gender identity.
- Article 3- “Best Interests of the Child”. Every decision made in schools should be in the best interest of the TsYP.
- Article 12- “Respect the Views of the Child”. TsYP views should be considered and taken seriously, particularly in decisions that affect them.
- Article 16- “Right to Privacy”. TsYP have the right to privacy and confidentiality, including with respect to their gender identity.
- Article 19- “Protection from Violence, Abuse and Neglect”. TsYP must be protected from all forms of harm, including bullying and harassment at school.
- Article 28 – “Right to Education” and Article 29- “Aims of Education”. TsYP education must be child-centred, child-friendly and empowering.

The Human Rights Act (HRA) (1998) stipulates that all people have the “Right to Education” (Article 2 Protocol 1); therefore, TsYP must have access to education and any exclusions, barriers or unsafe environments must be prevented. Moreover, the “Right to Respect for Private and Family Life” (Article 8) includes gender identity as a

characteristic of private life (HRA, 1998). “Freedom of Expression” (Article 10) refers to everyone’s right to hold opinions and express their views, either individually or in a group (Equality and Human Rights Commission [EHRC], 2014). The “Prohibition of Discrimination” (Article 10) protects people’s right to live free from discrimination on any ground, with gender identity recognised under “other status” (EHRC, 2014).

The Gender Recognition Act (GRA) (2004) outlines the legal processes for adults to have their gender legally recognised by obtaining a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC). Only those over the age of 18 can seek legal gender recognition in the United Kingdom.

The Equality Act (2010) prohibits discrimination against TsYP in all schools under the protected characteristic of ‘gender reassignment’. A person does not have to be medically transitioning, but must be taking steps to live in the gender with which they identify.

1.3.3. Tensions around Gender Identity Policy and Legislation

Until recent events, the core legal framework impacting school staff’s work with TsYP had not changed in over a decade. The current context is different. School staff are navigating a unique context of change, with heightened public scrutiny and policy alterations reshaping expectations of what good practice looks like and how the role is experienced. Interpretations of these changes differ among individuals and settings, leaving school staff uncertain about how to proceed and unsure what future practice with TsYP will look like in schools.

In 2020, the National Health Service (NHS) England commissioned an independent review of Gender Identity Services (The Cass Review [TCR], 2024). An interim report published in 2022 raised concerns about inadequate services and insufficient clinical guidance (TCR, 2022). This prompted the closure of the Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS) at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, which was replaced by two new hubs aimed at providing further regional support (NHS, 2023). The full report made 32 recommendations, prompting the ban on puberty blockers for under-18s (TCR, 2024). TCR was criticised for the unreliability of its scientific claims, the pathologising of TsYP and holding a cisnormative bias that, critics argue, undermines its recommendations (Grijseels, 2024; Horton, 2024; Noone et al., 2025). Nevertheless, TCR remains impactful for education. It calls for a holistic, multidisciplinary assessment and careful decision-making around social transitioning. Together with changes to NHS pathways, it is reshaping what healthcare TsYP can access and, in turn, the role of schools in providing support.

In a 2025 Supreme Court ruling, the Equality Act (2010) was deemed to refer to sex as biological sex rather than gender identity, so a person's GRC does not change their sex under the Equality Act (House of Commons, 2025). This affects the rights afforded to trans-spectrum people. The EHRC (2025) provided draft guidance outlining how this judgment has implications for schools, including the need to provide and monitor separate single-sex toilets and changing facilities. LGBTQ+ organisations have voiced concerns regarding the Supreme Court ruling and the EHRC draft guidance, stating that it is creating a "hierarchy of rights and a tiering of safety concerns, counter to the intentions behind the Equality Act (2010)" (Stonewall, 2025, p.1). Regarding school,

there are concerns regarding TsYP's privacy, the impact on sports/clubs, and how enforcing biological sex toilets may increase harm to TsYP (Mermaids, 2025). There are concerns regarding the dignity and rights of TsYP and whether these changes will make TsYP feel more unsafe at school (Gendered Intelligence, 2025).

1.3.4. LGBTQ+ Community in the UK

Research suggests that it can be challenging to be part of the LGBTQ+ community in the UK. The Government Equalities Office (GEO) conducted a National LGBT Survey (2019), which found respondents were less satisfied with their lives than the general population. Transgender people scored the lowest, being the least comfortable with living in the UK. Moreover, data indicate that 82% of transgender individuals have considered killing themselves and 40% have tried to end their life, with suicidality highest among transgender youth (Austin, 2022). With there being a rise in reported hate crimes (ONS, 2023) and high rates of homelessness, domestic abuse and overall discrimination and violence in this diverse group (Stonewall, 2017), it is clear that effective professional support and overall change are needed.

1.3.5. The Role of Schools

Section 28- Local Government Act (1988).

To understand the current educational context, it is important to consider the historic relationship between the LGBTQ+ community and UK school systems. Section 28 of the Local Government Act (LGA) (1988) banned LAs and schools from “promoting the teaching of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship”

(LGA, 1988, p.26). Section 28 was repealed in 2003, but the impact of this legislation persists in the education profession today, with school staff feeling hesitant about discussing sexuality and gender identity (Lee, 2019).

Relationship and Sex Education.

In April 2019, the government announced new regulations for Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) in England. The inclusion of LGBTQ+ teaching cemented sexual orientation and gender reassignment as important protected characteristics (Equality Act, 2010). The new RSE guidance became compulsory in September 2020, recognising heteronormativity and seeking to educate CYP on the wide variety of relationships in society. At the primary level, schools are expected to teach about families taking a variety of forms, which should be treated with respect, love and care. At the secondary level, schools are expected to teach the laws around sex, sexuality, sexual health, and gender identity in an age-appropriate and inclusive way. The guidance emphasises recognising stereotypes and bullying and understanding the importance of equality and respect for others in an age- and developmentally appropriate way (RSE, 2019). There is also an acknowledgement of differing perspectives (including those of faith groups) and of the importance of keeping parents informed throughout (RSE, 2019). These initial developments in the RSE curriculum were met with controversy and criticism over whether it should be taught in schools, with particular focus on sexuality and gender identity (Setty, 2024). Cumper et al. (2024) found, from focus groups with teachers, that there were concerns about implementing these new legal requirements in RSE, as well as optimism about the opportunities the curriculum provides. A revised RSE guidance was published in July 2025, which emphasised that school staff must remain neutral and “should not teach

as fact that all people have gender identity” (DfE, 2025, p36.). Additionally, school staff were instructed to avoid implying that social transitioning is a simple process, to avoid oversimplified materials, and to ensure parental transparency (DfE, 2025). The criticism surrounding RSE reforms stems from a complex mix of debates over age-appropriateness, parental rights, LGBTQ+ inclusion, perceived threats, societal issues, and cultural and religious conflicts (Marshall, 2025). The revised RSE curriculum is planned for implementation in September 2026 (DfE, 2025).

Draft Gender Questioning Guidance.

In December 2023, the DfE provided draft guidance for consultation named “Gender Questioning Children” (DfE, 2023). The draft guidance outlined a set of five principles for schools and colleges:

- **Prioritising the Safeguarding and Welfare of all Children-** Ensuring all actions are in their best interests, which may or may not be the same as their wishes.
- **Zero Tolerance for Bullying-** All should be treated with compassion and schools should be tolerant and respectful environments.
- **Default Parental Involvement-** Schools should prioritise engaging parents in decisions regarding social transitioning.
- **Duties are Framed by Biological Sex-** A child’s legal sex is always the same as their biological sex.
- **No Duty to Allow Social Transition-** Social transitioning is not a ‘neutral act’,” and therefore, schools should only accommodate requests with caution, being legally compliant.

During the consultation period, the responses and feedback collected varied, although many appeared to welcome the move towards clarity that the guidance provided (The

British Psychology Society [BPS], 2024; The National Association of Head Teachers [NAHT], 2024; Association of School and College Leaders [ASCL], 2024). The BPS criticised the guidance's unclear, biased terminology and the practicality of the suggestions. They called for case-by-case, safeguarding-led decision-making (not automatic parental involvement), an avoidance of pathologising language and respect and privacy-first choices that are inclusive and child-centred (BPS, 2024). Professional education bodies, such as NAHT, emphasised concerns that the draft was unclear and impractical, creating 'legal risk' for school staff and offering little support for implementing changes (NAHT, 2024). It is currently unclear how this guidance will fit with the recently published Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE), which is statutory guidance on the safeguarding and welfare of children and young people (DfE, 2025). KCSIE stipulates that when working with TsYP, school staff must take a cautious, case-by-case approach, considering them holistically and involving parents/carers when safe to do so. Trusted adults must be available, and bullying must be prevented so that TsYP feel able to disclose information if needed (DfE, 2025). The government is expected to publish revised guidance on how schools can support TsYP in response to consultation and the Supreme Court ruling later this year (Schools Week, 2025), which may make it clearer how these different forms of guidance will function together.

Trans-Spectrum Young People's Experiences of School.

TsYP in the UK continue to experience significant inequality, particularly in education (Children's Rights Alliance for England, 2016). TsYP experience high levels of discrimination and violence in schools (Horton, 2022). 64% of TsYP experience bullying at school, with 46% hearing transphobic language regularly and 9% receiving

death threats (Stonewall, 2017). McGowan et al. (2022) also found that TsYP can experience hostility and bullying whilst at school, including derogatory school staff behaviour. This creates a lack of safety in school, which can impact TsYP's mental health, school engagement and wellbeing (McGuire et al., 2010; Tyni et al., 2023). Schools are subject to safeguarding duties to protect CYP welfare and are therefore required to have clear anti-bullying policies and processes in place (KCSIE, 2025).

School staff play a crucial role in making a tangible difference to TsYP's experiences at school (Evans & Rawlings, 2021; Leonard, 2022). Research has found that affirming experiences for TsYP occur through supportive adults who respect their identity and privacy (McBride, 2021; Leonard, 2022), reduce cognitive load and increase capacity for learning (Evans & Rawlings, 2021), and protect them from daily stressors (Tyni et al., 2023). TsYP feel safer in school when connected to a trusted adult, and they feel able to build stronger relationships with adults in school when visible and inclusive strategies are in place (e.g., policy, curriculum and safe spaces) (McGuire et al., 2010). However, the support offered in schools has been suggested to be influenced by teachers' confidence, attitudes, and knowledge (Markland et al., 2023).

School staff can contribute to TsYP's negative experiences of school. They may witness bullying and harassment without intervening (McBride, 2021; McGuire et al., 2010), or schools may respond with apathy or indifference (McGowan et al., 2022; Kelley et al., 2022). In a national survey, 29% of respondents answered that teachers would intervene when present during transphobic bullying, and 68% reported that school staff rarely challenge transphobia (Stonewall, 2017). Without school staff intervention, TsYP frequently have to seek help themselves, which increases levels of

stress and pressure (Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017), and school staff's attitudes can harm wellbeing (Kelley et al., 2022). Evidently, school staff play a vital role in the effective education of TsYP.

Schools are also highly gendered systems (e.g., uniform policies, changing facilities, language used and segregated lessons) that can reinforce gender norms through everyday heteronormative cisgender social and cultural practices (Leonard, 2022). In TsYP's experiences, inclusive school-level processes (e.g., LGBTQ curriculum content, no gendered uniform lists and student groups) were found to enhance belonging and school connectedness (Evans & Rawlings, 2021). However, schools' approaches to supporting TsYP remain inconsistent and variable (Horton, 2020), and without inclusive practice in place, TsYP report feeling unsafe and anxious, particularly when using school toilets (Tankersley et al., 2021). A national survey found that 33% of TsYP were not known by their preferred name at school, while 58% were not allowed to use the toilets where they felt comfortable (Stonewall, 2017). These figures are likely to increase in light of the 2025 Supreme Court Ruling. Decisions on facilities, uniforms, and mixed sports are made by the school itself in line with current legal frameworks, but the lack of clear nationally recognised guidance currently contributes to inconsistent approaches.

Impact on UK School Staff.

Despite the lack of definite data, there is a growing awareness of TsYP in UK schools. School staff are working with TsYP in a uniquely complex context; they operate within legal frameworks (UNCRC, HRA, Equality Act, and GRA). However, the real-world implications of these changes are yet to be determined. School staff are therefore

having to navigate compliance with new and existing legal frameworks, whilst managing competing expectations and continuing to support TsYP effectively. With TsYP experiencing bullying, social exclusion, and psychological distress at school (McGowan et al., 2022), ensuring that effective practice is in place is imperative. This context, therefore, brings emotional complexities well suited to exploration through a psychoanalytically informed methodology, as it enables further exploration of what is explicitly shared, considering the emotional and relational processes occurring as they are seen within the broader context.

1.4. Conceptual Frameworks

This research will apply a psychoanalytically informed psychosocial framework to explore school staff's experiences of working with TsYP. Psychosocial research has been described as a "new paradigm" (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009, p.1), "situated at the borderlands of social and psychological theory" (Archard, 2021, p.1). It is understood differently across disciplines (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013), but a consistent aim is to construct meaning from experience rather than to measure it (Frosh, 2003). This research approach emphasises the interplay between inner and outer worlds, acknowledging that neither can be fully understood without the other (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). Therefore, experiences are understood as being a complex interplay between both psychological (conscious and unconscious) and social (cultural and institutional) influences. Psychosocial research recognises that internal drives cannot be fully understood without considering the wider social context in which they operate. Psychosocial research assumes that both researchers and subjects are defended and that employing a psychoanalytic lens enables the exploration of these unconscious processes. Consequently, this research approach

emphasises that the researcher's own subjectivity, emotional responses, and assumptions are integral parts of both data collection and analysis (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009) and applies psychoanalytic theory as a lens to explore these unconscious mechanisms.

The approach will refer to individuals' internal worlds and defence mechanisms. Freud (1984a/1984b) pioneered the idea that a considerable part of a person's experience lies below conscious awareness, referred to as the unconscious (Bartle & Eloquin, 2021). The unconscious is where difficult, uncomfortable or intolerable drives, urges, and experiences reside, and while consciously forgotten, still continue to influence behaviour and feelings (Bartle & Eloquin, 2021). This unconscious mind is illustrated as not being immediately accessible to the conscious mind, but it can influence judgements, feelings and behaviour (Wilson, 2004). The concept of defence mechanisms is central to Freud's theory, depicted as a psychological process that functions to avoid painful feelings and affects and to return them to the unconscious (Cramer, 2015). Further psychoanalytic theory is outlined in the methodology chapter.

1.5. History of Psychoanalysis and Transgenderism

Psychoanalysis has a challenging and complicated history with the LGBT community and particularly trans-spectrum people. Early Western psychoanalytic literature often depicted gender diversity through pathologising and deficit-based approaches, perceiving trans-spectrum people as developmentally disturbed or experiencing ongoing psychological conflict (Krafft-Ebing, 1886; Davidson, 2001). Over time, post-Kleinian approaches have offered a more nuanced understanding of identity and

emotional life, creating opportunities for more affirmative and exploratory practice with trans-spectrum people. However, a tension still exists between psychoanalysis's historical assumptions and more contemporary trans-inclusive practice, particularly as many psychoanalytic constructs are based on gendered assumptions. Understanding that this research sits within that tension is important, as it highlights the risk and possibilities of applying psychoanalytic ideas in EP work with TsYP. Further reflections on my experiences of this tension as the researcher can be found in the discussion.

1.6. Motivations for the Research

My motivations in this research area are wide-reaching, born out of my own experiences in school as a queer person and of my deep care for the dignity, safety and well-being of the LGBTQIA+ community. However, this was further developed through conversations and relationships I had with TsYP, who attended an LGBTQIA+ youth group I facilitated as a youth worker. Their experiences in school varied significantly: some described connection, inclusion, and affirming experiences; others reported social isolation, bullying, and discrimination, but all described school staff as central to their school experiences. Many of the TsYP I met also spoke to the complexities of navigating a cisnormative system where gender binaries were heavily embedded in everyday routines. These contrasts prompted me to ask: What does current school practice look like? Why are TsYP experiences so varied? What is the role of school staff? What needs to happen to improve educational settings for TsYP? There was also a shifting national and local context at this time, in which increasing politicisation and media attention to TsYP were influencing education. Working in schools myself and hearing about school staff being so central to TsYP accounts, I

found myself increasingly curious about educational professionals' experiences of this changing context.

My motivation to apply a psychoanalytically informed psychosocial framework was developed through my training, placements and practice as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. The organisation has a long history of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic thinking, and this is embedded throughout the professional doctorate training. Undertaking modules on psychodynamic and systemic theory and receiving training in projective techniques provided a basis for understanding, which was further developed by applying this to practice during my Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Educational Psychology Services (EPS) placements over the past three years. I have found that applying psychodynamic and systemic theory in the EP role provides unique opportunities to engage with service users to build a deeper understanding of the interplay between their inner and outer worlds, as well as self-in-role, which helps bring about meaningful change. As psychodynamic and systemic thinking became integral to my professional practice and to the way I understand the world, I turned to the research literature in search of methodological alignment. This search led me to a psychosocial approach, evidenced across multiple theses (Cole, 2017; Barrett, 2023; Denholm, 2019; McLaughlin, 2020; Stone, 2019), and to a potential methodology to be explored (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).

1.7. Implications for Educational Psychology Practice

This research aims to inform EP practice with school staff, including practical implications for directing work with school staff and TsYP in schools. More broadly, the research's implications are to inform LA and governmental guidance on how schools respond to and support TsYP. This research methodology also has implications in considering how EPs can engage with psychosocial research and apply psychoanalytic thinking in practice to foster a deeper understanding of the experiences of CYP and school staff. These implications are explored further in the discussion, with consideration of the study's findings.

1.8. Chapter Summary and 'Road Map' of Thesis

This first chapter has provided an introduction to the current context and the theoretical framework that supports the rationale for this research. Chapter two will outline the systematic literature review conducted to understand the current research in this field. Chapter three presents the research methodology, illustrating the ontological and epistemological positioning of the study as well as the psychosocially informed interview methodology employed. The findings are then outlined in chapter four, being presented through themes, including information from pen portraits, research diary entries, supervision notes and verbatim transcripts of the interviews. The final chapter examines the study's findings in relation to the research question and the existing literature in the field. The strengths and limitations of the research are considered, and final reflections on the implications for future EP practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Chapter Overview

The chapter provides a detailed account of the systematic, comprehensive approach used to review the literature in this study. The aims were to establish what is already known about school staff's experiences of working with TsYP by mapping, critically appraising and synthesising the findings of previous research, also informing the aims, rationale, and research questions of the present study.

The findings are synthesised and reported in relation to addressing two literature review questions:

- How have school staff's experiences of working with TsYP been explored in existing research?
- What does the existing research tell us about school staff's experiences of working with TsYP?

2.2. Literature Searches

Research literature addressing the review questions was identified in various ways. The primary approach involved a systematic search of relevant databases on EBSCO host using key terms.

Table 1

Databases Searched and the Rationale for Their Selection

Database	Rationale
PsychINFO	Being created by the American Psychological Society, this is a key database for psychology research. It stores notable educational and psychological journals.
PEP Archive	Key database for psychology research. Stores key psychoanalytical journals which may be of interest due to the position and methodology of the study.
Education Source	Stores education research which is relevant to this study (e.g., secondary schools)
ERIC	Stores education research which is relevant to this study (e.g., secondary schools)
SocINDEX	Stores sociology research which would be important to consider within this psychosocial methodology, combining psychology and sociology in research.

Relevant information was also sought through hand searches of key journals, such as Educational Psychology in Practice, British Journal of Child, Educational Psychology, and Journal of Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, and grey literature, in the form of theses, was also searched to minimise the risk of publication bias. This was carried out by searching open-access repositories from academic institutions for different research outputs, strategically searching the open web, reviewing conference proceedings, and monitoring professional networks. Bibliographies and reference lists were hand-searched to ensure that no important published studies were missed. Finally, additional research papers were located by reviewing the references cited in papers already identified and by identifying papers that cited studies of interest.

2.3. Search Terms

Following a scoping review to isolate key terms and trialling of different search terms, a systematic search of databases was carried out in August 2024. The thesaurus

function was used to identify relevant terms. The following numbered terms (Table 2) were used to identify literature. Each numbered term was searched individually using the Boolean truncation operator 'OR', then these were combined with 'AND'. A summary of the trial searches can be found in Appendix A.

Table 2

Rationale and Overview of Search Terms Used

Subject mapping terms	Key word search terms	Rationale
"Trans-spectrum" AND	<i>OR "transgender" OR "non-binary" OR "genderqueer" OR "gender non-conform*"</i>	This review intends to focus on the experiences of school staff working with young people from the trans-spectrum community
"School staff" AND	<i>"teach*" OR "educator" OR "special educational needs coordinator" OR "SENCo" OR "learning support assistants" OR "support staff" OR "pastoral staff" OR "school administrators" OR "headteacher"</i>	This review intends to focus on school staff's experiences and therefore is not limited to teachers, but a range of different roles found in a school
"Experienc*" AND	<i>"feelings" OR "perspective" OR "perception" OR "thoughts" OR "views"</i>	This review intends to focus on the lived experiences of school staff

2.4. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

At the initial search stage using the databases, several limiters were applied to focus the search. These included limiting the results to academic journal articles only to ensure that the papers had been adequately peer reviewed and were written in English. The titles and abstracts were then screened in line with the remaining inclusion and exclusion criteria. As the main area of interest for this literature review was school staff's experiences, papers were excluded if they focused on the views of pupils, parents, or other non-educational professionals. The same inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to the following hand searches and grey literature searches. A summary of the inclusion and exclusion criteria is provided in Table 3.

Table 3

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Establishing Relevant Literature

Reason	Inclusion	Exclusion	Rationale
1) Study design	Research studies (empirical papers which are peer reviewed). Have experimental or quasi-experimental or survey design. Theses will be included as they have been defended and arguably peer reviewed themselves.	Position papers, editorials, book reviews. Studies will be excluded if they are opinion pieces or position papers which were not reporting on the results of an empirical study.	The review sought to describe actual experience and practice rather than ideas about what it could be.
2) Focus of experience	Literature that explores the views and experience of working	Literature that explores other views and	The review seeks to focus on lived

	with a trans-spectrum young person in a secondary school setting.	experiences (e.g., home life)	experiences in the school setting
3) Participants	Literature that explores school staff's views and experiences	Literature whose focus is on populations other than school staff (e.g., young people, parents)	I am interested in the views of school staff.
4) Location and Language	Studies were included from all countries. with the research being published in English.	Studies were excluded if they were not written in English.	Research must be readable and accessible to the researcher. The review seeks to see the methodology of all research in this area.

2.5. Search Returns

The search strategy was applied, and the following outlines the returns. Results are presented in a flowchart adapted from the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (2020) diagram, shown in Figure 1. The PRISMA diagram was developed to support authors in reporting their studies in a complete and transparent way through systematic reviews (Moher et al., 2009). The most up-to-date guidelines for creating a PRISMA diagram were followed (Page et al., 2020). Final studies are then outlined in Table 4.

Figure 1

Flow Chart Documenting Systematic Search

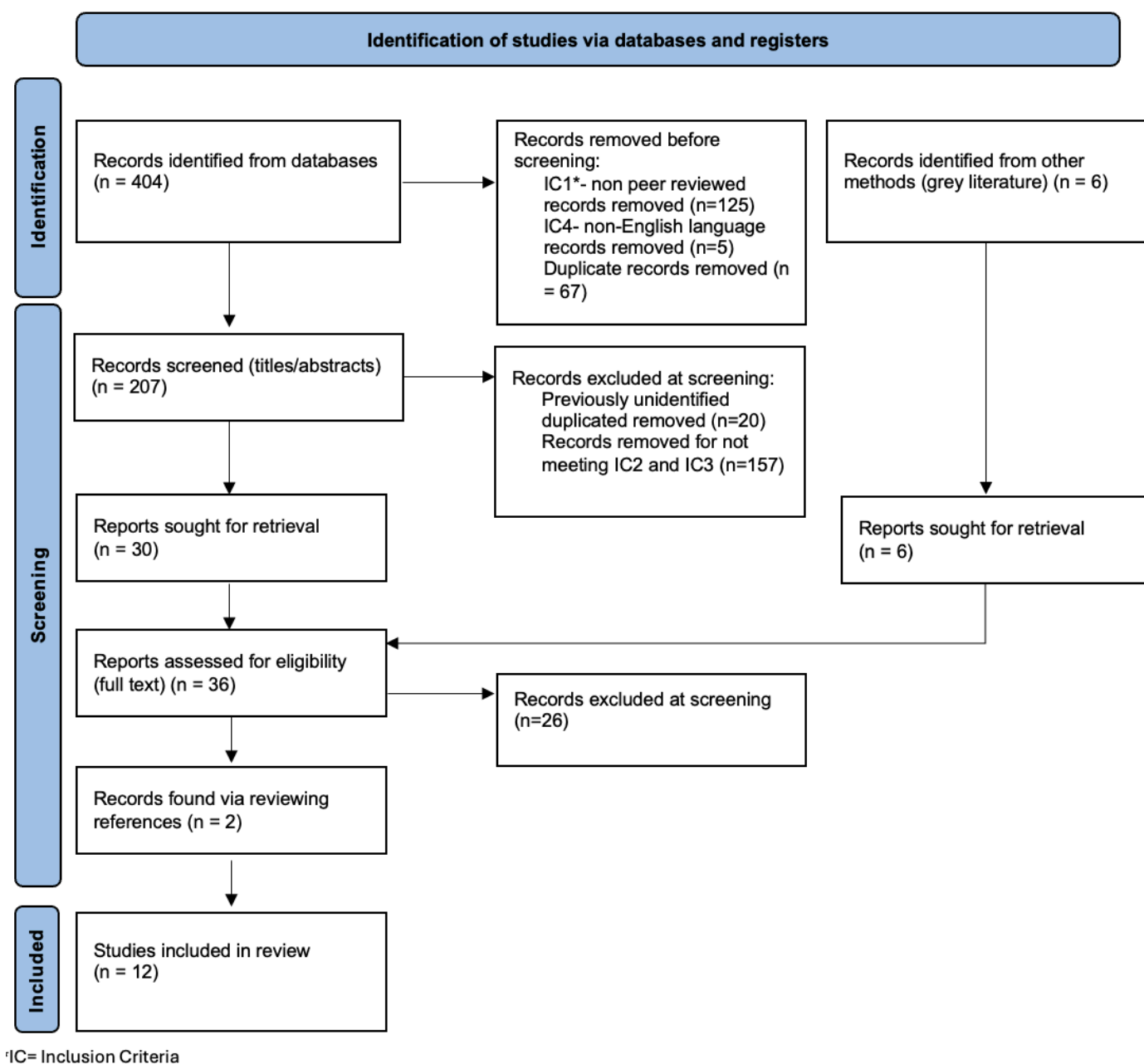


Table 4

List of Studies Included in the Review

Literature Included

- A) Müller, J., & Böhlke, N. (2023). 'Those students who are really self-confident about their homosexuality usually have considerably fewer problems': how physical education teachers perceive sexual and gender diversity in PE. *Sport, Education and Society*, 28(9), 1021-1033.
- B) Kuhlemeier, A., Goodkind, J. R., & Willging, C. E. (2021). Production and maintenance of the institutional in/visibility of sexual and gender minority students in schools. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 91(4), 558.
- C) Mangin, M. M. (2020). Transgender students in elementary schools: How supportive principals lead. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 56(2), 255-288.
- D) Meyer, E. J., Tilland-Stafford, A., & Airton, L. (2016). Transgender and gender-creative students in PK–12 schools: What we can learn from their teachers. *Teachers College Record*, 118(8), 1-50.
- E) Payne, E., & Smith, M. (2014). The big freak out: Educator fear in response to the presence of transgender elementary school students. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 61(3), 399-418.
- F) Simmons, Z. (2020). *Exploring Teachers' Experiences of Working with Transgender Young People in Northern Ireland* [Doctoral Thesis, Queen's University Belfast]. QUE Repository.
<https://pure.qub.ac.uk/en/studentTheses/exploring-teachers-experiences-of-working-with-transgender-young-people-in-northern-ireland>
- G) Markland, B., Sargeant, C., & Wright, S. (2023). Teachers' beliefs: How they shape the support offered to trans-spectrum young people. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 124, 104019.
- H) Curtis, C. (2019). *Working with Transgender and Gender-variant Youth: Teacher Knowledge, Attitudes, and Perceived Competence* [Doctoral Dissertation, Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine]. PCOM Psychology Dissertations. https://digitalcommons.pcom.edu/psychology_dissertations/499
- I) Charlton, L. (2020). *School staffs' views regarding transgender pupils and the role of the Educational Psychologist* [Doctoral Thesis, Cardiff University]. ORCA Repository. <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/135589>

- J) Wiltz, J. (2018). *Secondary School Teachers' Perceptions of Working with Students Who Identify as Transgender* [Doctoral Dissertation, Sam Houston State University]. SHS Repository. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11875/2558>
- K) Frohard-Dourlent, H. (2016). 'I don't care what's under your clothes': the discursive positioning of educators working with trans and gender-nonconforming students. *Sex Education*, 16(1), 63-76.
- L) Grant, R., Beasy, K., Emery, S., & Coleman, B. (2021). Beyond "safety": teachers and school staff approaches to LGBTI-inclusion in Tasmanian schools *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 25(3), 394-410.
-

2.6. Method of Critical Appraisal

2.6.1. Critical Appraisal

Critical appraisal tools were applied to the final literature review articles to critically assess the literature in a structured, systematic, and in-depth manner. Dixon-Woods' (2004) systematic review of critical appraisal tools found that there is no perfect tool for any study design or a generic tool across study methods. Therefore, research needs to consider the properties and intent of the critical appraisal tool. The search yielded research that used quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches, and thus a combination of established critical appraisal tools was required. Justifications for the chosen tool are provided below.

2.6.2. Critical Appraisal Tools

Qualitative Critical Appraisal.

The diverse nature of qualitative research often makes it difficult for a novice researcher to critique. It can be hard to find an appropriate tool for every piece of

qualitative research (Aveyard, 2023); however, the “Critical Appraisal Skills Programme” (CASP) tool is commonly used in qualitative evidence synthesis (Noyes et al., 2018) and is considered to be user-friendly. This checklist was also selected for its consideration of reflexivity. Examples can be found in Appendix B.

Quantitative Critical Appraisal.

One article in this literature review had a quantitative methodology, using a questionnaire/survey. The “Quantitative Checklist” by Long et al. (2002) is an established tool for appraising quantitative research and was used to appraise Curtis (2019). Examples can be found in Appendix C.

Mixed Methods Critical Appraisal.

An article in this literature review adopted a mixed-methods approach, using both questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Appraisal methods for mixed-method research are less developed than those for single-method studies, which can lead researchers to use single-method tools in combination and fail to see the contribution of both methods (Aveyard, 2023). The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) is a tool designed to consider both separately and together (Hong et al., 2019). The research was therefore critically analysed using this tool. Examples can be found in Appendix D.

2.6.3. Impact of Critical Analysis

The literature was critically appraised for methodological quality and relevance to the research question. The papers collected met the acceptable standards for the

research question and were methodologically appropriate, so no papers were excluded. The process improved my understanding of the research, drawing attention to the strengths and limitations of the methodological choices used to inform the literature review below.

2.7. Review of Literature

2.7.1. LRQ1- How have school staff's experiences of working with TsYP been explored in existing research?

Mapping Review.

To answer the first literature review question, principles from a mapping review approach were applied. Mapping includes characterising the sample and then depicting the categories in either tabular or graphical form (Booth et al., 2021). Extraction forms, initially used to gather this data, are provided in Appendix E.

Table 5

Data Summary Table

	Authors	Year	Country	Method of Research	Participants
A	Müller, J., & Böhlke, N.	2023	Germany	Semi-structured interviews (qualitative)	13 P.E. teachers
B	Kuhlemeier, A., Goodkind, J. R., & Willging, C. E.	2021	USA	Semi-structured interviews (qualitative)	96 high school staff
C	Mangin, M. M.	2020	USA	Semi-structured interviews (qualitative)	20 school principals
D	Meyer, E. J., Tilland-Stafford, A., & Airton, L.	2016	Canada	Semi-structured interviews (qualitative)	26 educators
E	Payne, E., & Smith, M.	2014	USA	Individual and group interviews (qualitative)	9 (individual) and 12 (group)
F	Simmons, Z.	2020	UK	Semi-structured interviews (qualitative)	8 teachers
G	Markland, B., Sargeant, C., & Wright, S.	2023	UK	Focus group and an individual interview (qualitative)	15 secondary school teachers
H	Curtis, J.	2019	USA	Survey (quantitative)	76 teachers
I	Charlton, L.	2020	UK	Questionnaire and interviews (mixed methods)	54 (questionnaire) and 7 school staff (interviews)
J	Wiltz, J.	2018	USA	Semi-structured interviews (qualitative)	6 secondary school teachers
K	Frohard-Dourlent, H.	2016	Canada	Semi-structured interviews (qualitative)	62 educators
L	Grant, R., Beasy, K., Emery, S., Coleman, B.	2021	Tasmania	Semi-structured interviews (qualitative)	16 school staff

Research Methodologies.

Data Collection.

This mapping review shows that some of the included studies utilised different methodologies, which may affect how their data can be applied and interpreted. Commonly, researchers chose to employ a qualitative research design, namely through semi-structured interviews (Frohard-Dourlent, 2016; Grant et al., 2021; Kuhlemeier et al., 2021; Mangin, 2020; Markland et al., 2023; Meyer, Tilland-Stafford & Airton, 2016; Müller & Böhlke, 2023; Payne & Smith, 2014; Simmons, 2020; Wiltz, 2018). Researchers such as Simmons (2020) and Frohard-Dourlent (2016) justified this approach to data collection, arguing that it enabled the exploration of complex and subjective experiences. They emphasised the importance of allowing participants to narrate their experiences in depth, ensuring the collection of rich qualitative data which aligned with their social constructivist and constructionist epistemologies and ontologies. Conversely, the researcher's choice to use a quantitative or mixed-methods design could be justified by their aim to focus on a specific aspect of experience, such as school staff's perceptions of inclusivity policies, training, and professional development (Curtis, 2019). However, the surveys/questionnaires used required participants to respond only to predefined statements, which may have limited the depth and authenticity of their responses. Caution is warranted when interpreting these findings, as they may not accurately reflect participants' experiences and are constrained by the research design. The quantitative and mixed-methods research is also unpublished grey literature, and although it has undergone a viva assessment, it

has not been scrutinised in the same way as the published literature through the peer-review process.

Qualitative researchers, particularly those conducting semi-structured interviews, provided limited information about what the interviews entailed, including which questions were asked, how they were developed, and what considerations there were regarding the environment or the relationship between the researcher and the interviewer. The theses reviewed all provided greater explanation regarding the qualitative methodology. However, this may be due to the length and depth of a thesis research project (Frohard-Dourlent, 2016; Simmons, 2020). Müller & Böhlke's (2023) use of a problem-centred interview (PCI) method enables a focus on a particular topic, with practical implications for policy and practice. Though the interview could have a too-narrow focus, which can influence the participant and the data gathered. There was little consideration of interviewer bias, which affects the generalisability of the findings. Similarly, Kuhlemeier et al. (2021) used a mixture of open and closed questions with predetermined topics of discussion. Having these predetermined topics may have influenced the responses, and there was little consideration of how to mitigate this.

Data Analysis.

Accounts of methodological rigour of data analysis appeared to vary across studies, with some providing limited details about how themes were developed or how contradictory data were handled. Wiltz (2018) and Curtis (2019) used thematic analyses but lacked a detailed discussion of how to integrate differing perspectives. This omission may weaken the credibility of the findings and their capacity to capture the full complexity of the topic.

Contextual Differences Between Research.

Across the literature gathered and included in this review, it is clear that school staff's experiences of working with TsYP are shaped not only by their individual knowledge and confidence but also by the broader sociocultural and policy contexts in which the research was conducted. This research spans 2014 to 2023, a period during which significant shifts in public discourse, legal recognition, and educational policy related to gender diversity occurred. These changing times are reflected in school staff accounts through feelings of uncertainty, fear of getting it wrong or concerns about community reactions. More recent studies (Markland et al., 2023; Müller & Böhlke, 2023) were conducted in contexts where gender diversity had become arguably more visible and socially recognised, which may explain why participants reported greater awareness and described gender diversity as increasingly common in their schools.

It appeared that geographical context also shaped school staff experiences with research based in the USA (Meyer et al., 2016), reflecting on the politically polarised environments and inconsistent state-level protections, whereas UK-based research (Markland et al., 2023) was situated within national safeguarding frameworks that emphasise equality but still offer limited guidance on TsYP. Alternatively, Grant et al.'s (2021) Tasmanian study outlined how local histories and policy shaped practice with school staff, specifically Tasmania's previous hostile legal environment, alongside more progressive reforms.

Reflexivity.

Much of the research gathered failed to consider the application of reflexivity in the design. The critical appraisal CASP tool was used in the qualitative research, as it considers reflexivity and the relationships between the interviewer and the researcher. While several studies acknowledged the potential influence of the researcher's positionality (Payne & Smith, 2014; Simmons, 2020), critical examination of how biases may have shaped the findings is often limited. For example, Markland et al. (2023) discussed reflexivity in the context of sharing a researcher's non-binary identity, encouraging open dialogue during the data collection stage, but were limited in assessing the influence this may have had afterwards. Furthermore, Frohard-Dourlent (2016) discussed systemic constraints but did not fully address how the researchers' interpretations might reflect their own position.

Actionable Recommendations and Value of Research.

Across studies, there was evidence of actionable recommendations made from the findings. For example, a consistent emphasis on the need for professional development, inclusive policies, and systemic reform (Charlton, 2020), a framework for addressing systemic barriers through teacher training and school-wide interventions (Meyer et al., 2016) or actionable steps for fostering institutional inclusivity (Kuhlemeier et al., 2021). These recommendations serve as practical guidelines for policymakers, educators, and administrators to create supportive environments for TsYP. However, there is a lack of research to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of these interventions. This is shown by Meyer et al. (2016) and Kuhlemeier et al. (2021), who advocated for systemic reforms and professional training, but failed to assess the sustainability or long-term impact, leaving a critical gap in understanding the longevity of proposed solutions.

2.7.2. LRQ2- What does existing research tell us about school staff's experiences of working with TsYP?

Thematic Review.

To support the answering of literature review question two, a thematic approach to reviewing the literature was applied. An approach was followed, as suggested by Aveyard (2023), to identify, compare, and discuss the research themes. After completing the data summary table (Table 5), the papers' findings and discussion chapters were coded. Themes were developed by grouping similar findings, combining evidence, and iteratively refining theme labels to synthesise the research. Images taken of reviewing the literature can be found in Appendix F. The process highlighted a range of challenges, insights, and recommendations about school staff experiences of working with TsYP, which were grouped into three broad themes: (1) "School Staff's Understanding of TsYP Varies", (2) "Negotiating Safety Amongst Fixed School Processes", and (3) "Practice Shaped by the Networks Around TsYP". The following is a summary of these broad themes.

School Staff's Understanding of TsYP Varies.

School Staff's Awareness of TsYP.

The literature gathered revealed differences in how school staff (and researchers) understand and conceptualise the LGBTQ+ community. Some focused solely on TsYP (Mangin, 2019; Meyer et al., 2016), others focused on the LGBTQ+ community as a whole, without differentiating between the various identities (Kuhlemeier et al., 2021), and some grouped school staff's experiences of the entire LGBTQ+ community and occasionally explored nuances with TsYP specifically (Payne & Smith, 2014). Müller &

Böhlke (2023) also adopted this approach, enabling them to make useful reflections on how school staff's experiences differed across the various identities within the LGBTQ+ community. They found that school staff rarely referred to the TsYP in their schools compared to the lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) CYP, with school staff depicting more acceptance and inclusivity for LGB CYP than TsYP. Having diverse experiences as school staff of various identities within the LGBTQ+ community made it essential in this literature review to ensure that findings specifically referred to TsYP and, when they didn't, to make this clear. Additional clarity was provided on how school staff may differ in their conceptualisation of TsYP individually and as part of a wider community of sexuality and gender identities.

Therefore, when focused on experiences with TsYP, the literature emphasised that school staff perceive the TsYP population in their schools differently, depicting a journey of navigating both the visibility and invisibility of TsYP. Kuhlemeier et al. (2021) found that school staff frequently estimated the number of TsYP in their schools based on anecdotal evidence, TsYP self-advocating, and TsYP fitting preconceived stereotypes, with these assumptions influencing the extent of support offered. Similarly, Grant et al. (2021) and Markland et al. (2023) found that school staff would assume a culture of acceptance of TsYP if no discrimination was observed, and Wiltz (2018) summarised this as schools having an "out of sight, out of mind" approach. Understandings of visibility and invisibility extended to school staff's concerns about maintaining the confidentiality of TsYP, with Payne and Smith (2014) finding that school staff felt both fear that other students would find out and fear that parents and CYP should be informed. However, their participants did recognise their professional responsibilities to respect TsYP's choice of privacy and confidentiality. Even when participants were aware of the population of TsYP in the school, and they were visible

to them, ongoing dynamics and considerations persisted regarding how visibility was managed and its impact.

Generally, however, school staff reported an increasing awareness of gender diversity. Müller and Böhlke (2023) found that school staff recognised an increase in gender diversity in their schools, and Wiltz (2018) found that this was perceived as the norm. Simmons' (2020) participants described the increase in prevalence as a generational change, whereas Müller and Böhlke (2023) suggested that the increase in gender diversity was due to greater publicity of prominent queer individuals and educational campaigns. Broadly, the literature appears to highlight a shift in how CYP understand diversity as a whole, with people becoming more tolerant, accepting, and open to change (Wiltz, 2018) and holding an increasingly positive view of diversity and a negative view of discrimination (Müller & Böhlke, 2023; Simmons, 2020). Therefore, some school staff believe they are navigating a changing context in which gender diversity is becoming more prevalent.

School staff's awareness of TsYP in schools frequently included acknowledging co-occurring needs, which presented as an important part of their experiences. References were made to behavioural and learning needs (Meyer et al., 2016), as well as a high prevalence of autism, anxiety disorders and difficulties sustaining attention (Simmons, 2020). Hesitancies regarding the risk of pathologising TsYP were evident in school staff accounts, emphasising that gender diversity does not necessarily imply co-occurring needs (Simmons, 2020). Meyer et al. (2016) also raised caveats that co-occurring needs (e.g., behavioural and learning needs) could be indicative of, or related to, the difficulties and strain associated with repeatedly self-advocating, or be intensified by the challenges of the school climate. Despite mixed understandings of

why co-occurring needs exist, they are evident in school staff's experiences, suggesting that a one-size-fits-all approach is infeasible (Meyer et al., 2016; Simmons, 2020).

School Staff's Perceived Lack of Understanding.

School staff felt they had a limited understanding of TsYP, which cast doubts about their competence and confidence. Researchers found that school staff's perceived lack of knowledge and confidence increased their fear of negatively impacting TsYP through making a mistake or causing offence (Markland et al., 2023; Simmons, 2020). A perceived lack of knowledge heightened the emotional experience of school staff, as Payne and Smith (2014) identified feelings of anxiety, unpreparedness, and uncertainty among their participants. Similarly, in Müller and Böhlke's (2023) analysis of latent in the data, they recognised school staff's uncertainty through their hesitations and language use (e.g., 'maybe' and 'actually'). When considering the implications of this uncertainty for practice, Markland et al. (2023) found that school staff's uncertainty and concern about offending TsYP often led to reluctance in openly engaging with TsYP or related issues in the school setting. However, this was not a universal experience among all school staff, as Mangin (2014) found that principals felt a distinct responsibility to avoid uncertainty and, therefore, educated themselves to, in turn, educate the rest of the school. Conversely, Meyer et al. (2016) found that gay and lesbian school staff seldom sought further learning and development as they were often already perceived and positioned as experts in working with TsYP. Being positioned as experts increased the pressure on them in their role and limited the support being offered to TsYP in school (Meyer et al., 2016). Therefore, school staff's lack of confidence (or occasional overconfidence) in working with TsYP is an important

part of their experiences and can be a barrier to providing support to TsYP who seek it.

Perceived lack of knowledge about TsYP appeared to be linked to discussions surrounding a lack of comprehensive training for school staff. Meyer et al. (2016) highlighted how school staff feel underprepared due to the limited focus on LGBTQ+ topics in their professional training. Without sufficient introduction to TsYP, they struggled to navigate complex issues related to gender identity, leaving them feeling stressed, anxious and incompetent (Payne & Smith, 2014). Curtis (2019) found that school staff who received even minimal training on these topics reported greater confidence in supporting TsYP, which emphasises the importance of investing in professional development. Markland et al. (2023) found that school staff felt that specific training on supporting TsYP would be helpful, particularly because individuals have varying levels of knowledge, leading to inconsistent support. However, some researchers highlighted mixed opinions on training, with Simmons (2020) finding that current training focused on safeguarding mental health or the entire LGBTQ+ community rather than on working with TsYP. Charlton (2020) emphasised that school staff instead need tailored workshops and practical resources to address this knowledge gap and help create inclusive classroom environments. The literature indicates limited training for school staff in working with TsYP, and researchers argue that professional development in this area should be more widely available (Wiltz, 2018).

Similarly, a lack of guidance and policy is impacting school staff's experiences of working with TsYP, heightening feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and lack of confidence

(Simmons, 2020). Payne and Smith (2014) found that school staff sought policy and guidance when working with TsYP, as they were fearful of unfamiliar situations and wanted protection and clarity; however, they became frustrated when such guidance was unavailable. School staff sought additional guidance during early transition conversations because decisions were perceived as significant, increasing fear of making mistakes (Simmons, 2020). Across the literature, the current guidance was perceived as largely generic (e.g., safeguarding policies for the whole school community), and there were hopes that any new guidance would be more specific to factors directly related to TsYP (Markland et al., 2023; Simmons, 2020). Having suitable guidance appears important, as Curtis (2019) found that participants who worked in schools with existing policies and practices felt more knowledgeable, were more likely to implement support for TsYP, and felt more competent and confident. However, they noted that many participants were unaware of the current policies and guidance in place in their area. Therefore, the school staff's perceived lack of understanding is influenced by inconsistent policies and guidance, which, in turn, affects their well-being and ability to work effectively in their roles.

Perspectives Vary Amongst School Staff.

School staff working with TsYP hold a range of personal perspectives that appear to shape their interpretation of their role. Rather than being neutral professionals implementing policy, Grant et al. (2021) found that school staff's interpretations of policy were filtered through personal values, shaping their sense of what was possible in supporting LGBTQ+ young people. This is mirrored in other research, which found school staff negatively described LGBTQ+ YP with stereotypes of being "loud", "flamboyant" or "unmotivated" (Kuhlemeier et al., 2021; Müller & Böhlke, 2023), which shaped expectations of their behaviour. Personal identity also influenced school staff

responses in more complex ways. Simmons (2020) found that school staff who were parents struggled to advocate for TsYP when parents' and young people's views were not aligned, while staff who identify as feminists described TsYP, particularly trans men, as challenging their worldview. Similarly, Markland et al. (2023) highlighted how constructs around the vulnerability of cisgender girls positioned TsYP as a potential risk to others. Payne and Smith (2014) further argued that supporting TsYP is often perceived as “dangerous territory”; partly because sexuality and gender diversity are frequently conflated with sex, which is seen as inappropriate for school settings.

Despite initial apprehension, many studies have emphasised that school staff often find working with TsYP professionally enriching (Curits, 2019; Simmons, 2020; Wiltz, 2018). Principals and teachers describe their experiences as powerful learning opportunities that positively impact further inclusive practice and increase feelings of competence among school staff (Curtis, 2019; Mangin, 2019; Meyer et al., 2016; Simmons, 2020). Ultimately strengthening their ability to address a wider range of CYP's needs (Wiltz, 2018). However, Meyer et al. (2016) outlined concerns about the pressure and responsibility placed on TsYP as the catalyst or reason for learning and development. Thus, while school staff often report positive professional gains, questions remain as to whether TsYP themselves find the relationship dynamic rewarding.

Negotiating Safety Amongst Fixed School Processes.

Making School a Safe Place.

Research consistently highlights the important role that school staff play in the lives of TsYP, as well as the pressure and responsibility that accompany this. School staff were

particularly concerned with cultivating a safe environment in which TsYP are protected from discrimination (Payne and Smith, 2014). Curtis (2019) found that more than 50% of participants described their schools as welcoming to TsYP, and more than 40% reported that TsYP received adequate support. Feelings of pressure and responsibility were particularly pronounced during the early transition stage, when school staff were involved, as decisions were perceived as life-changing and further shaped by safety concerns (Grant et al., 2021). Principals similarly reported heightened responsibility in their role of authority, as they seek to create a nurturing and supportive school (Mangin, 2019). However, how participants created safety in school varied. In alternative school contexts, Meyer et al. (2016) found that safety was linked to inclusive practices (e.g., a student-centred curriculum, an ethos that values creativity and non-conformity, restorative justice, and limiting sex segregation). Similarly, Wiltz (2018) found that school staff created safety through establishing a culturally respectful environment (e.g., using gender-inclusive language, incorporating TsYP topics into lessons, and respecting chosen names and pronouns), resulting in improved academic and social outcomes for the school. Across these accounts school staff perceived their relationship with TsYP and the school system as important to their wellbeing and safety; yet, Frohard-Dourlent (2016) suggests that this framing can lead them to perceive themselves as a source of safety, protection and support rather than being a source of unsafety themselves, in a system of power and discrimination. Frohard-Dourlent (2016) suggested that this framing is commonplace in research because participants self-select, meaning they are most likely to think of themselves as supportive.

Working within Systemic Constraints.

The literature shows that school structure and processes influence school staff's experiences of working with TsYP, often producing constraints that complicate practice. School staff frequently described the school environment as inhospitable to TsYP due to the embedded gender and sexuality norms, which impacted employees, students, and the entire school community (Meyer et al., 2016). Cisnormative structures also created practical concerns when working with TsYP (e.g., what facilities will they use, changing names and pronouns, uniforms, toileting arrangements, and certain subjects like P.E), with those in single sex schools having the greatest challenges (Markland et al., 2023; Müller and Böhlke, 2023; Simmons, 2020). Participants predominantly reported that these structural issues were solvable when there was open conversation. Curtis (2019) highlighted that systemic issues in the school environment can often undermine the efforts of even the most well-intentioned professionals, and Grant et al. (2021) stressed that the lack of resources or clear policy particularly impacts opportunities for best practice. These systemic barriers within schools affect school staff's experiences and hinder the effective support of TsYP. Yet, as Frohard-Dourlent (2016) notes, school staff often frame systemic obstacles as external to themselves, positioning the system as the problem rather than recognising their own participation within it.

Whole School vs Targeted Support-

Across the literature, there were differences in viewpoints, perspectives and experiences regarding the most effective ways of working with TsYP, revealing a tension between whole-school approaches or individualised, targeted support. Principal participants displayed hesitancy to explicitly address gender diversity in their schools, favouring more indirect approaches, such as adding inclusive books to the

library or facilitating discussions regarding gender diversity in the classrooms where TsYP were transitioning (Mangin, 2019). Similar hesitancy appeared in Kuhlemeier et al. (2021), who found that school staff rationalised the decision not to provide targeted support for TsYP as CYP should be treated equally and that providing targeted support would stigmatise TsYP, putting them at greater risk of bullying and harassment. Kuhlemeier et al. (2021) also suggested that school staff framing the addressing of LGBTQ+ needs as harmful may be an unconscious narrative to avoid responsibility for further support and rationalise their inaction. However, this stance was inconsistent across studies. Wiltz (2018) found that, as CYP spent the majority of their day at school, whole-school approaches and school-wide support (e.g., counsellor support, administrator support, and cultivating a culturally respectful environment) had the most beneficial impact on the success and well-being of CYP and the school. Grant et al. (2021) similarly noted that school staff often defaulted to reactive, safety-based interventions rather than proactive, broader, whole school equity approaches, reflecting ongoing ambiguity about what effective support entails.

Practice Shaped by the Networks Around TsYP.

Working with Peers/ Other Students.

Across the literature, school staff frequently described navigating peers' responses and actions to TsYP, with concerns centred on exclusion, bullying and peer harassment (Wiltz, 2018). However, they were occasionally assumed rather than actually being experienced (Charlton, 2020; Frohard-Dourlent, 2016; Payne & Smith, 2014), and on some occasions, being discussed in the abstract (Frohard-Dourlent, 2016). Simmons (2020) found that school staff feared that TsYP would stand out in single sex schools, which made them vulnerable to bullying behaviour and ridicule.

They emphasised the importance of fostering a culture of acceptance within schools to mitigate the adverse effects of harassment and exclusion. Meyer et al. (2016) also found that school staff frequently encountered transphobia in the form of bullying TsYP, noting that TsYP frequently would transfer schools due to the harassment from peers and that this impacted school staff's ability to effectively support them. Müller and Böhlke (2023) described how school staff found that direct abuse towards TsYP was relatively rare and indirect discrimination through exclusion was seen as more pervasive. However, Frohard-Dourlent (2016) cautions that this focus on peer aggression, typical of dominant bullying discourse, can individualise violence and fail to acknowledge heteronormative social systems of power that support acts of bullying. The prevalence of bullying discourses made it difficult to acknowledge how adults are involved in administrative violence and processes of educational exclusions.

Working with Parents/Carers and the Community.

The evolving relationships among school staff, parents/carers, and the wider school community were often illustrated in accounts from school staff. Researchers found that school staff experienced the need to navigate between the best interests of the TsYP, prioritising the TsYP's needs and deciding what to communicate to parents/carers (Grant et al., 2021; Meyer et al., 2016; Simmons, 2020). Similarly, Payne and Smith (2014) found that school staff were fearful about the dynamics outside of school, which challenged their decisions for TsYP support. School staff were cautious about opposition from parents and whether they were being perceived as "promoting" gender diversity. However, Simmons (2020) described how this "balancing act" creates varied experiences between the two extremes, with some school staff expressing fear of upsetting parents, encountering resistance, or causing offence; others reported

positive experiences of working with parents. Likewise, Mangin's (2019) principal participants found that their experiences with parents of TsYP were overwhelmingly positive. The researchers described how parents are essential to a child-centred approach, which is built on positive relationships, strong communication, mutual understanding, and active involvement. Notably, Mangin's (2019) participants were recruited because their parents identified them as supportive, implying a positive relationship. Despite school staff recognising the importance of positive relationships with the parents/carers and wider community when working with TsYP and how the school staff role could be well placed to support parents, it appears the context is key, such as having the correct infrastructure and resources for these relationships and conversations to occur (Markland et al., 2023).

Experiences with parents/carers typically extended to working within the school community and the wider societal context, often anticipating community backlash and resistance. Payne and Smith (2014) found that fears of being perceived as "pro-transgender" shaped staff hesitancy, with support for TsYP framed as politically charged or misaligned with parents' religious or political beliefs. Predicting or assuming community resistance was also found by Markland et al. (2023), though they suggest that feelings of unease could reflect the school staff's personal uncertainties. In Northern Ireland, for example, there were assumptions that the religious context would not be conducive to the acceptance of TsYP, yet Simmons (2020) found these assumptions unfounded and that compassion and acceptance were demonstrated in schools (particularly faith-based schools). Cultural assumptions also shaped staff perceptions of parents. Meyer et al. (2016) reported that white school staff assumed parents/carers' transphobia based on the family's race and religion (most

predominantly those from Muslim countries in Africa and South Asia)., reflecting ethnocentric assumptions which affected their effort and connections with families. Taken together, the context of the school community and the wider community influences practice, creating a fear of backlash and resistance; however, this resistance can, on occasion, be based on school staff's assumptions and worldviews.

2.8. Rationale for Current Research

From the mapping and thematic literature reviews, there is a clear rationale for UK-based research into school staff's experiences of working with TsYP using a psychosocial approach. There is currently limited literature in the UK context, with research commonly grouping TsYP within the broader LGBTQ+ category and predating the rapidly changing context (outlined in chapter one). School staff's experiences are complex, as they have to negotiate both the changing and unchangeable structures of school life whilst navigating their own emotional experiences. Across the literature, the researchers depicted school staff experiences as including an intense emotional load (e.g., uncertainty, anxiety, worry and fear); however, these affective dimensions were rarely explored in depth. At times, the research felt as though they were trying to gather school staff's experiences of working with TsYP as a way of better understanding TsYP's experiences, rather than sitting with the experiences of school staff themselves and considering them in greater depth. This was reflected in the methodology, where current research offers limited researcher reflexivity, focuses on practice, and pays little attention to participants' internal worlds, both conscious and unconscious (anxieties, identifications, defences). Kuhlmeier et al. (2021) were the only researchers included in this review to refer to unconscious processes, suggesting that school staff are unconsciously developing

narratives to rationalise their inaction, a dynamic that was simply noted rather than analysed. A psychosocial approach is therefore justified, as it would allow attention to how school staff's feelings, identities and defences influence, and are influenced by, institutional norms, guidance and wider sociopolitical discourses. Exploring this complex interplay between internal and external worlds, whilst situated in the new UK context, adds depth to this research area yet to be explored.

3. Methodology

3.1. Chapter Overview

This research aims to explore school staff's experiences of working with TsYP. This chapter begins by offering a detailed account of the study's aims and purpose, before proceeding to explain and justify the ontological and epistemological position that guided the research approach. The chosen research method and design are then presented, including the recruitment strategy, the subsequent participant group, and the methods of data collection and data analysis. The credibility and trustworthiness of the study are examined, as are the ethical considerations that were addressed. The chapter concludes with a summary of the discussion.

3.2. Research Questions, Aim and Purpose

3.2.1. Research Questions

The research questions this study aims to address are:

- **RQ1:** What are the school staff's experiences of working with TsYP at school?
- **RQ2:** What can be understood about the experiences of school staff working with TsYP from a psychoanalytical and psychosocial perspective?

3.2.2. Research Aims

This research aims to explore the school staff's experiences of working with TsYP. Previous chapters have examined the historical and current societal contexts that have shaped educational responses to gender diversity in the UK and, therefore, the experiences of school staff and TsYP. Building on the literature review, which focused on the perspectives of school staff, there remain under-researched areas within the UK context. By encouraging teachers to share their unique perspectives and integrating reflections from these accounts throughout the research process, this study seeks to generate new insights to inform and enhance school-based support. It also aims to identify potential applications for EPs in developing or refining their practices within this domain. Further research in this area carries significant implications for policy and practice by highlighting institutional cisnormativity and identifying strategies to dismantle existing systemic barriers (Horton, 2022). The intention, therefore, is that the contemporary findings may be used to inform changes to policy and practice, thereby improving the educational experiences of trans-spectrum young people in schools.

3.2.3. *Purpose of Research*

The purpose of this research is exploratory, aiming to explore school staff's experiences of working with TsYP in UK secondary schools from a psychoanalytically informed psychosocial framework. From the previous literature review, it appears that UK school staff's thoughts and experiences concerning this protected group have not yet been explored in depth, particularly from a psychosocial perspective. The rationale for applying a psychosocial lens (discussed in more detail later in the chapter) stems from the need to account for both internal and external worlds, especially given the

range of societal and interpersonal influences at play. Consequently, this research deliberately employs a psychosocial approach to uncover new insights that can inform future practice.

3.3. Ontology and Epistemology

This section provides an overview of how the nature of knowledge, truth (epistemology) and reality (ontology) informs the research questions and methodologies. Building on Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), ontological assumptions (beliefs about the nature of reality and its constituents) inform epistemological assumptions (approaches to investigating and understanding that reality), which in turn influence research instruments and data collection methods.

3.3.1. *Critical Realist Ontology*

Ontology refers to the beliefs about the nature of reality and the social world (Saadi, 2014). Ontological paradigms address the nature of existence, questioning whether reality can be objectively observed and measured or whether it is shaped by experience and context (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In qualitative research, social constructionism is often regarded as broadly the most used approach (Robson & McCartan, 2016), a perspective reflected in much of the literature discussed in the previous review. However, this study adopts a critical realist ontology, which holds the belief that truth exists but is difficult to know because it is influenced by context and by unobservable mechanisms, structures, and laws (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In this research context, participants' experiences are understood as shaped by real social,

institutional, and psychological forces that exist and influence them, whether they are aware of them or not. At the same time, participants' internal worlds, emotional responses, and unconscious processes are understood as equally important to individuals' experiences and to the social world. This fits with the psychosocial approach, which emphasises the interplay between objective and subjective phenomena's, making it impossible to separate one from the other (Hollway, 2008; Hollway & Jefferson, 2013).

3.3.2. Critical Realist Epistemology

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that examines the nature of knowledge, asking what it means to know and how knowledge is acquired (Crotty, 1998). Willig (2019) explains that epistemology seeks to answer these questions through exploring the nature, scope, validity and reliability of knowledge claims. Consequently, it is crucial to justify the chosen epistemological paradigm, as it shapes our understanding of what kinds of knowledge are possible and how they can be deemed both adequate and legitimate (Maynard, 1994).

This research adopts a critical realist epistemology, which understands knowledge as underpinned by unobservable mechanisms, structures, and laws; therefore, the 'truth' can be difficult to know, as it is context-dependent (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In this research, participants' experiences are recognised as real, but they can only be accessed in partial and interpreted ways. The accounts shared in interviews do not offer direct insight into the underlying forces shaping their work; instead, they provide starting points for developing the most plausible explanations for what is occurring.

Therefore, knowledge is understood as shaped by the complex interplay among participants' meaning-making, the wider socio-political context, and the researcher's own interpretative lens. The psychosocial approach aligns well, as there is the understanding that knowledge is influenced by both conscious and unconscious processes, as well as the dynamics of the interview itself. Rather than assuming a single, definitive truth, this research seeks to develop a deeper understanding of school staff's experiences with TsYP.

3.4. Research Method

3.4.1. *Qualitative Research*

Existing research into school staff's experiences of working with TsYP in secondary schools frequently employs a qualitative design, most commonly semi-structured interviews (Frohard-Dourlent, 2016; Kuhlemeier et al., 2021; Mangin, 2020; Markland et al., 2023; Meyer et al., 2016; Müller & Böhlke, 2023; Payne & Smith, 2014; Simmons, 2020; Wiltz, 2018). Researchers justify this choice by emphasising the need to explore complex, subjective experiences to understand the participants' perspectives (Willig, 2013). This trend reflects a broader recognition of qualitative methods as particularly well-suited for capturing nuanced personal experiences. This contrasts with the predominantly used quantitative or mixed-methods designs, which were historically used in UK psychological and social research and were considered too restrictive to represent subjective realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

To address the current research questions, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate, as it enabled a deeper exploration of the lived experiences and psychological processes involved (Elliot, 2011). Consequently, because this research aims to explore the experiences of school staff working with TsYP, it remains exploratory and qualitative, capturing experiences and descriptors that cannot be measured quantitatively.

3.4.2. *Psychosocial Research Method*

This research uses a psychosocial methodology to explore school staff's experiences of working with TsYP, recognising both psychological (conscious and unconscious) and social (cultural and institutional) influences. The methodology emphasises the interplay between these inner and outer worlds, acknowledging that neither can be fully understood without the other (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). Psychosocial methodologies for qualitative research include approaches such as the free-associative narrative interview technique, reflexive group discussions, and biographical interview techniques (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). These are all designed to holistically capture the complexity of the subjective experience (Hollway & Froggett, 2013).

The methodology applies psychoanalytic theory to explore the interplay between psychological and social factors. Within a psychoanalytic perspective, individuals' experiences are shaped not only by their conscious thoughts but also by internal unconscious drivers, such as fear, anger, anxiety and shame (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). The unconscious is therefore the repository for these difficult urges, drives and related

experiences and can influence current behaviour and feelings (Bartle & Eloquin, 2021). In response, an individual may protect themselves by employing unconscious strategies referred to as defence mechanisms. Psychosocial methodology assumes that both the researchers and subjects are defended, and a psychoanalytic lens enables the exploration of these unconscious processes. The existing literature, outlined in Chapter 2, suggests that school staff reported feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, worry, and fear in their experiences of working with TsYP, including fears of making mistakes or causing harm (Simmons, 2000). These are powerful feelings that could be defended against. Thus, a psychosocial methodology facilitates exploration of more unconscious mechanisms, moving beyond a surface-level reading of participants' narratives (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013).

In addition, a psychosocial methodology recognises that internal drives cannot be fully understood without considering the wider social context in which they operate. Schools are embedded in evolving social constructs (gender, race, ethnicity, religion and social class), cultural norms, institutional policies and political debates about gender diversity. This was outlined in the changing national and local context described in Chapter 1 and the influence of the school organisation and wider community discussed in Chapter 2. From this information, it is evident that experiences cannot be viewed in isolation; therefore, this research cannot be understood without acknowledging the wider social and political context in which it sits. These shifting contexts influence school staff's experiences and constrain or enable supportive practices.

Psychodynamic insights are not always identifiable without understanding self-in-role or researcher-in-role, to acknowledge the role of the researcher in subjective

experience. Reflexivity is therefore central to identifying unconscious processes. This approach emphasises that the researcher's own subjectivity, emotional responses, and assumptions are integral parts of both data collection and analysis (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). Psychosocial methods explicitly account for theoretical intersubjectivity, allowing researchers to consider their personal histories and emotional reactions as analytic tools. This is often overlooked in other qualitative and interview-based methodologies. Indeed, Clarke and Hoggett (2009) highlight the importance of being a reflexive practitioner by engaging in critical self-reflection to recognise emotional involvement.

A psychosocial approach was therefore deemed fitting for this research because, to date, psychosocial methodologies have not been used to examine school staff experiences with trans-spectrum young people. By treating psychological and social phenomena as inseparable, this research seeks to address this gap in the literature.

3.4.3. Psychoanalytical Theory

This research employs a psychoanalytic lens, assuming that both researchers and subjects are defended subjects (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008). Applying this theory allows for potential exploration of unconscious mechanisms. The following is an overview of psychoanalytic theories drawn upon in this research design for their applicability to the school staff role.

Bion (1962) proposed the concept of the “container” and the “contained” to describe how a caregiver can receive a baby's overwhelming affect, hold it, and return it in a

less threatening form. This process is described as freeing the infant from these unbearable feelings, allowing them to think, make meaning, and develop an internal capacity for holding and problem-solving (Bartle & Eloquin, 2021). Bion (1962) suggests that to feel contained is to know, consciously or unconsciously, that someone else is supporting you and holding on to the unmanageable affect. Moreover, when considering the concept of “holding” and “holding environments”, Winnicott (1960) described how the maternal care of a baby creates a safe place or “holding environment” which allows the baby to formulate a sense of self and relate to others. Not just providing physical holding, but also emotional regulation. When applied to the school context for TsYP, school staff are often among the closest adults to TsYP and take on a functional caregiving role. Here, the school staff role could be understood as serving as the container for the TsYP, as well as creating holding environments.

Building on Freud’s idea of a fragmented mind (Freud, 1941), Klein proposed object relations theory (Klein, 1935; 1946), which depicts the complex internal world of the child, built of internalised objects representing positive and negative parental figures. Here, splitting between the positive (wholly good) and negative (wholly bad) is a defence mechanism to manage unwanted aspects of the self and objects (Waddell, 1998). In the school context, this can be seen in school staff holding polarised views of individuals, groups, or whole organisations (Pellegrini, 2010). From a Kleinian perspective, schools that create an emotionally supportive environment could help move away from viewing objects within extremes. However, when there is nowhere for these uncomfortable unconscious feelings to go, Klein (1946) also proposed the concepts of projection and projective identification, in which intolerable unconscious

feelings are expelled from one person and located in another person or thing (Ellis, 2021).

Another psychoanalytic concept considered in this research is transference, which refers to past relational feelings being displaced onto a professional in the present (Sherry et al., 2021), which shapes how new relationships are experienced. Similarly, countertransference refers to the professional's psychological reactions evoked by the individual's transference (Bartle & Eloquin, 2021). Hence, the complex undertaking for the professional is to be attuned to themselves in role and the unconscious dynamics affecting the relationship.

3.4.4. *Free Association Narrative Interview Method (FANIM)*

In developing this approach, Hollway and Jefferson recognised key similarities between research and psychoanalysis/therapy. Both aim to create a space where the participant can share, with the researcher/therapist listening and providing gentle prompts to facilitate discovery (Thomas, 2019). These similarities led Hollway and Jefferson to consider whether psychoanalytic theory, commonly used in therapy, could be applied to research methodology. Therefore, Hollway and Jefferson (2013) built upon pre-existing psychosocial interviewing methods by utilising their narrative approach while applying the psychoanalytic concept of free association. Free association is a frequently used psychoanalytic approach that interprets thoughts that occur in sequence as having a linked meaning (Hinshelwood, 1994). The technique of free association was used to help unveil narratives structured not by conscious logic but by unconscious motivations, emotions, and concerns. Unlike other narrative

approaches, which prioritise coherence and structured storytelling, the FANIM embraces contradictions, omissions, and inconsistencies, recognising them as significant insights into underlying psychological processes. This follows a two-interview structure, as outlined in the research design.

The first interview begins with the participant being invited to share their narrative through an open-ended question. The researcher, without any predetermined questions guiding or influencing the interview, listens to what the participant shares without interruption. The interview methodology is designed this way to allow the participant to freely associate with Hollway and Jefferson (2013), suggesting that the participant freely associating allows for the researcher to pick up on the connections that the participant makes while being able to notice the contradictions, incoherencies, emotional tone and inconsistencies, which can evidence unconscious processes in the narratives.

In between the two interviews, Hollway and Jefferson (2013) recommend that the researcher listen to and review the audio recording, exploring the narratives and identifying contradictions, hesitations, or tensions based on what the participant has shared. Moreover, the researcher considers the themes present in the account as well as those absent. Based on these reflections, the researcher then formulates tailored narrative questions for the second interview.

Hollway and Jefferson (2013) suggest that the second interview is ideally conducted one or two weeks after the first. Moreover, they emphasise that, according to psychoanalytic theory, participants' accounts should not be taken at face value, as

they may not fully understand their own actions, motivations, or emotions; therefore, a second interview is helpful for allowing deeper exploration and analysis. The second interview, therefore, provides an opportunity for the researcher to revisit themes with the participant, assess their relevance to the participant's experiences, test potential hypotheses, and allow the participant to reflect.

3.5. Research Design

3.5.1. *Participants*

Participants involved in this research were adults working in a mainstream secondary school located in a city in the South of England. Each participant had direct experience working with a TsYP and was therefore able to speak to their experiences within the context of their school environment. This research recruited five individuals, each interviewed twice, providing a total of ten interviews for data analysis. The choice of five participants aligns with Hollway's (2004) suggestion that this number allows for the depth and nuance of analysis required in psychosocial research.

The role or title of school staff members was not limited, acknowledging that all school staff serve a function in the school system and, therefore, in the school experience of TsYP. Consequently, participants occupied varied positions, including senior leadership, teaching, and pastoral roles. They all worked in a mainstream secondary school, had 16 to 25 years of experience, and represented different genders (four female, one male). Four participants identified as White-British, while one identified as Asian, an ethnic distribution not fully representative of the wider local area. All

participants were asked to share demographic information, and what is presented here is the information they consented to be included in the research.

Each of the five participants took part in two interviews, scheduled one or two weeks apart. The second interview allowed them to reflect on and respond to their experiences from the first interview, discuss their experiences of working with TsYP, and gain perspective on how their thinking may have evolved. In total, ten interviews, each lasting 30-60 minutes, were recorded and subsequently analysed.

3.5.2. Recruitment

Participants were recruited as a convenience sample from the secondary school staff in the LA, where I am a TEP. The participants were self-selected through volunteering themselves in a two-stage process.

In the first stage of recruitment, headteachers of all mainstream secondary schools in the LA were emailed a description of the research. This included the potential benefits of the research and the organisational requirements, such as two hours of staff time for two interviews (see Appendix G). Each headteacher was asked to respond by email or through a Microsoft Form poll (e.g., 'I do consent...' or 'I don't consent...') to confirm their interest and consent to the required organisational involvement. They were also requested to forward the attached information sheet to school staff, which provided a clear description of the research aims, the required commitments, and my email for any questions or expressions of interest (see Appendix H). Three participants (with the

pseudonyms Robin, Raven, and Sparrow) from a single-sex secondary school were recruited at this stage by contacting me directly.

In the second stage of recruitment, EPs in the LA were asked to share details of this research with schools and staff members who might be interested. The email outlined the research requirements, estimated time commitments (two interviews, both under an hour), and the potential benefits from participating (see Appendix I). Following the same protocol as in the first stage, headteachers were also asked to confirm organisational consent. Through this approach, two additional participants were recruited (Wren and Finch). Therefore, a total of five secondary school staff members were recruited and sent further details, including a participant information sheet and a consent form (see Appendix J).

3.5.3. *Data Collection*

In this research, participants were asked to share their experiences via two interviews. Most interviews were conducted at the participant's school; however, when this was not possible, interviews were conducted virtually. As a result, 4 of the participants (Robin, Raven, Sparrow and Finch) were interviewed in person, and 1 participant (Wren) was interviewed virtually via Zoom.

Before each interview began, participants were shown the information sheet again and were given an opportunity to ask questions or clarify any uncertainties about the study. Participants were then asked to provide consent by signing a consent form. I reminded participants that the conversation would be recorded for data collection purposes.

Audio was recorded using Zoom for the virtual interview or using Zoom as a digital recording device for in-person interviews and was securely stored to maintain confidentiality. While Zoom's automated transcription was helpful, it was not fully accurate, so I closely compared these transcripts against the audio recordings to correct any errors.

In producing the final transcripts, every effort was made to capture the dialogue verbatim, including nonverbal cues such as pauses, emphasis, and emotional intonation. These cues are important in psychosocial research as they can illuminate and help better interpret the conscious and unconscious dimensions of an individual's experience (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). This transcription process was conducted personally, following the recommendations of Braun and Clarke (2006) and Hollway and Jefferson (2013), who argue that this hands-on approach fosters deeper immersion in the data and serves as the first stage of analysis.

In addition to audio recordings, handwritten reflexive fieldnotes and reflexive diary entries were utilised as a supplementary data collection method. The fieldnotes allowed me to record non-verbal communication and document my observations in more detail. Following Clarke and Hoggett's (2009) guidance, these notes helped me interpret the dynamics of the interview, including my emotional responses and the participant's. Moreover, before and after each interview, a reflexive diary entry (see Appendix K) was completed to record observations and perceptions of my and participants' emotions, as well as any notable thoughts, reflections, or curiosities that arose.

These field notes were consistently revisited and expanded by adding further detail to specific observations and seeing how perspectives or feelings evolved. This development of understanding was impacted by psychoanalytically informed research supervision spaces. These additional perspectives and free associations provided further insight into potential unconscious processes during the interviews.

3.5.4. *Developing an Interview Technique*

Following an exploration of various psychosocial interviewing methods, the FANIM was selected as the methodology for this research. A brief pilot interview was conducted with a teacher to practice the FANIM approach, enhance my interviewing skills, and refine potential interview questions or prompts. The following are the key points that emerged from the pilot and informed subsequent changes.

Pre-Interview Preparation: Information Sheet, Informed Consent and Questions.

The pilot participant highlighted that having a thorough discussion about the research before the first interview was beneficial, allowing them to ask questions and clarify expectations. The interview structure differed from traditional question-and-answer formats and provided an opportunity to think about what psychosocial research means for the interviews and the participants. Evidently, this discussion helped set expectations, allowing the pilot participant to feel informed and to consent to being gathered, and therefore, it would need to be a key consideration in the research. Further reflections on informed consent in psychosocial research, from an ethical perspective, can be found in the ethical considerations section.

Ensuring Minimal Researcher Influence.

My post-interview reflections found that my contributions were too frequent, potentially disrupting the participant's ability to freely associate. Moving forward, I intend to minimise interruptions and allow for pauses and silences where necessary.

Focusing on Emotional Experiences.

Another reflection from the research post-interview was the need to pay closer attention to the internal experiences and emotional content in the participants' narratives to get as close as possible to their lived experiences. This would hopefully also avoid overly intellectualised responses.

A Positive Interview Experience.

Overall, the pilot participant reported that having the opportunity to verbalise their thoughts without interruption in the two interviews was a positive experience. They appreciated the opportunity for reflection and concluded the interview feeling listened to and generally positive about the process.

Refining Question Wording for Neutrality.

Reflecting with others after the pilot interview, such as my research supervisor and the Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP), revealed concerns regarding the wording of the interview questions/prompts. For example, the initial question was 'Tell me about a time when you have supported a TsYP was reconsidered. The word "support" could imply that increased adult intervention is required or that the participant is only being asked about this support. To minimise any influence on the data collected and to

ensure a more neutral and open-ended approach, the wording was revised to “Tell me about a time where you have worked trans-spectrum young people in your school”.

3.5.5. Interview Content

The psychosocial methodology of this research employed an adaptation of the FANIM (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013) as a psychoanalytically informed approach to data collection and analysis. As previously outlined, this interview method was developed by Hollway and Jefferson (2008), and the interviews follow a two-stage structure. These were one or two weeks apart, following the recommendations of Hollway and Jefferson (2000).

The content of the interviews was designed with the guidance of Hollway and Jefferson (2013) in mind. For example, Hollway and Jefferson (2000, 2008, 2013) adapted the strategies for eliciting narratives/meaning-frames and gestalts used by the Biographical Narrative Interpretative Method (BNIM) researchers (Rosenthal & Bar-On, 1992; Schutze, 1992; Rosenthal, 1993) and summarised them into four principles:

- Open-Ended Questions- Open questions help discover the participant’s meaning-making of the research area and how it relates to their life.
- Eliciting Stories- Questions are designed to encourage storytelling, anchoring accounts in real experiences.
- Avoiding 'Why' Questions- ‘Why’ questions encourage intellectualisation and move away from real narratives or meaning-frames, producing over-rationalised and over-structured responses.

- Ordering and Phrasing- The researcher listens and takes notes of the narration to follow the participant's structure rather than imposing their own.

These principles were adhered to, and my contributions were intentionally kept minimal, using only open-ended, clarifying questions and prompts to encourage elaboration while minimising potential researcher influence. The question sheet used within the interviews can be found in Appendix L.

The first interview invited participants to share their experiences of working with trans-spectrum young people, allowing them the opportunity to explore their narratives through free association. After the preliminary conversation regarding consent, looking at the information sheet together and answering any questions about the research, the interview began with the prompt, "Tell me about a time when you have worked with trans-spectrum young people in your school?" As highlighted previously, this question was intentionally broad to elicit storytelling and allow participants to freely associate, shaping the conversation in their preferred direction. Further questioning, therefore, was derived from the participants' narratives, rephrasing or reflecting back what they had said, or using further prompts, such as "Can you say more?" or "What made that come to mind?" These prompts were used selectively to maintain the natural flow of the interview and reduce my influence on the narratives as much as possible.

Between the two interviews, I designed a series of tailor-made narrative questions for the second. Each interview began with questions to support participants' reflection and to gather any useful information that had arisen between the two interviews. These were: "How have you been feeling since the last interview? Did anything stand out for you? Has anything else come to mind?" The questions after this point were designed

to deepen participants' understanding of their experiences by revisiting key themes from the first interview or exploring themes that may have been absent from their accounts, with a focus on contradictions, hesitations, or unresolved elements. "You alluded to a tension around the role of the professional and the role of the personal. I wonder if you can further describe this through your own experience?" Questioning in the second interview allowed for consideration of particular experiences, recurring patterns, and areas where the participant hesitated, avoided, or left things unsaid, as well as for noting potential interpretations arising from the material. These preliminary interpretations shaped the questions in the second interview, serving as follow-ups to see whether there was anything else they wanted to discuss. The process allowed participants to respond to clarify, or expand upon my initial understandings and to indicate whether particular interpretations resonated with them. In doing so, the meaning-making process became partially co-constructed, enabling participants to have an active role in shaping how their experiences were understood within the research. This approach is psychoanalytically informed in that it recognises the interpretative nature of knowledge production, attends to what is spoken and unspoken and acknowledges the relational dynamics between researcher and participant.

At the end of the second interview, participants were given an optional, short demographic questionnaire covering aspects such as age, gender, and sexuality. The demographic questions can be found in Appendix M. Participants were informed that completing the form was entirely voluntary and that they could choose which, if any, questions to answer. The questions were designed to provide contextual information

to support the analysis. Finally, the participants were asked questions about their perspectives and experiences of the research and its process.

“What has been your experience of the interviews? Has anything from these conversations been confusing or unsettling for you? Would you like to discuss this further?, Are there any other comments you would like to make? Would you like to know the outcomes of the research, and how would you like this shared?”

These questions helped determine whether further debriefing or support is needed. The interview was concluded with them being provided a debrief form (see Appendix N).

3.5.6. Reflexivity

Reflexivity in research can be defined as the practice of critically reflecting on the researcher's role, the research process, and the methodology. A reflexive researcher will consider what we do, how and why we do it, and how our actions influence and shape the research (Braun & Clarke, 2022). However, Berger (2015) emphasises the importance of the researcher understanding what reflexive position they adopt. For example, Wilkinson (1988) described different types of reflexivity to be: personal reflexivity, which examines how a researcher's values influence the research and knowledge produced; functional reflexivity, which examines how methodological choices and research design shape findings; and disciplinary reflexivity, which explores how academic disciplines frame and influence knowledge production. In this research, all three types of reflexivity were considered. Berger (2015) asserts that there are three distinct reflexive positions: (1) the researcher is an insider, sharing an experience with the participant, (2) the research transitions from outsider to insider in

the study, and (3) the researcher has no personal connection to the topic or participant. In this research, the researcher took a reflexive position one, which required heightened sensitivity and self-awareness at all stages.

As previously discussed, the psychosocial approach places significant emphasis on the need for a reflexive researcher, with reflexivity a key factor in psychosocial ontological and epistemological paradigms. In their development and subsequent description of the FANIM, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) highlight the researcher's responsibility in understanding the participant, much like the psychoanalyst's or therapist's role in understanding the client. In their application of psychodynamic theory to the role of the EP, Bartle and Eloquin (2021) argue that the psychologist's (or researcher's) subjective experience is a valuable source of emotional data, particularly for exploring unconscious processes such as countertransference. To effectively access and recognise the researcher's emotional involvement, Clarke and Hoggett (2009) emphasise the necessity for reflexivity, identifying critical self-reflection as a fundamental component. Reflexivity is therefore crucial in identifying unconscious dynamics within interviews and uncovering potential defences against anxiety.

The researcher's subjectivity, emotional responses and underlying assumptions are integral to data collection and analysis in psychosocial research (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009). Hollway and Jefferson (2000) further assert that the researcher plays an active role in shaping the interpretation of data and, therefore, reflexivity is also central to addressing questions of reliability and validity (Fleming, 2016). For instance, in data analysis, Elliott et al. (1999) argue that reflexivity is key to ensuring the quality and rigour of qualitative research. However, while the researcher's subjective experience

provides valuable insights, its limitations must also be acknowledged, including the need to ensure reflections are not understood in isolation but are triangulated with other sources of information. As Bartle and Eloquin (2021) stress, disregarding the emotional impact on the researcher overlooks an especially valuable resource. My reflexivity in this study was developed and informed through the following methodological approaches.

Research Diary.

Following recommendations by Hollway and Jefferson (2013), I maintained a research diary to document reflexive considerations. This diary was particularly utilised before, during (field notes), and after each interview, either by writing notes or by using a reflexive diary pro forma (see Appendix K). Keeping reflexive field notes enabled documentation of all aspects of the research encounter, capturing communication beyond verbal exchange. The reflexive diary entries allowed me to record thoughts, first impressions, unconscious dynamics and emotional reactions, helping to distinguish between my own projections and the participants' lived experiences (Elliott et al., 2012; Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). Additionally, these reflexive diary entries facilitated an exploration of the researcher-participant relationship, including visible and invisible, voiced and unvoiced similarities and differences in identity, and how these factors influenced the data collection and interpretation. By engaging in this practice, I was able to reflect on their subjective responses and, in turn, gain deeper insights into participants' experiences. As Braun and Clarke (2022) highlight, maintaining a reflexive diary is one of the most important practices a researcher can undertake in their research journey; therefore, priority was placed on ensuring that entries were consistent and detailed. Furthermore, key reflections from the research

diary and field notes were brought into psychosocial supervision, where I explored their emotional responses in relation to the participants' experiences. In addition, these entries contributed to triangulating information in the data analysis. Using a reflective diary also helped ensure that the thinking about the data was not significantly influenced by my perspectives or responses, which could lead to interpretative biases (Thompson & Thompson, 2008).

Supervision.

Psychosocial supervision was also integral to fostering reflexivity in this research. In the field of psychology, research supervision is understood as the process of guidance, reflection and professional support (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010). While psychosocial supervision aligns with this definition, Hollway (2015) emphasises its distinct focus on researcher subjectivity and its implications for the research process, and McLaughlin (2020) highlights how the supervisor and the supervisee utilise their psychoanalytic skills to be curious and reflexive. Therefore, supervision supported me in being reflexive and in critically examining my emotional responses, unconscious dynamics, and positionality in relation to the interviews (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009). Moreover, it provided a space for me (as supervisee) to explore the relationship with the participant, facilitating the identification of biases, blind spots and countertransference (Elliott et al., 2012). Psychosocial supervision was also helpful in obtaining multiple perspectives to ensure that the data collected was not over-analysed, thereby reducing potential researcher bias (Elliot et al., 2012).

3.6. Data Analysis

3.6.1. Development of the Data Analysis Approach

Finding a data analysis approach that aligned with my methodological, epistemological and ethical positioning was a journey of trial and error. I found myself initially deterred by Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) case-by-case approach to data analysis, as I was concerned about preserving participants' confidentiality as much as possible. Despite the research content being made clear to participants during the interviews, the extent to which personal details are referenced in "The Case of Ivy" (Hollway and Jefferson, 2011) felt misaligned with what could be ethically achieved in the context of this research. My preoccupation with confidentiality was intense, more than I had previously felt as an academic researcher, or than was necessary for the research. I believe this is also reflected in the use of gender-neutral bird pseudonyms. Exploration in supervision on confidentiality, considering my perception of the riskiness of this topic area, and the influence of the socio-political discourse surrounding TsYP at the time. This fear prompted a move towards a Reflexive Thematic Analysis approach, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), potentially in an attempt to alleviate uncomfortable emotions by adopting a familiar, structured approach to qualitative data analysis. Despite its helpful focus on reflexivity and the role of the researcher, this approach often felt overly preoccupied with identifying patterns across the dataset, without attending to the school staff's individual experiences in context. Much like Hollway and Jefferson (2008) suggest, I was concerned that focusing on coding was moving me away from the context and wider framework of the experience. Hollway and Jefferson (2020) propose a case-by-case approach, suggesting that there is no easy way to impose a single, clear, structured method on experiences that are complex and elusive. I revisited Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) approach and

considered how, as they are only guidelines, researchers can distinguish how the approach is undertaken depending on how psychoanalytically informed they are. The flexibility to mould the approach to fit within the methodological and ethical boundaries was deemed suitable for data analysis. O'Reilly et al.'s (2025) writing on the practical steps for Hollway and Jefferson's (2013) psychoanalytically informed analysis was particularly helpful in following this approach and will be outlined below.

3.6.2. *Process of Analysis*

The data analysis approach for this research followed Hollway and Jefferson's (2013) guidance, using the six steps for conducting psychoanalytically informed analysis (O'Reilly et al., 2025). The following is how the six steps were applied in this research: Interview-Derived Material- I took the data gathered from the interviews, which applied FANIM principles (e.g., open, participant-led interviews that allowed for associations and narratives to be shared)

- **Process Notes Alongside Transcripts:** I analysed the field notes and research diary entries alongside the audio recording and verbatim transcripts. These notes captured features that the audio alone missed, including the emotional atmosphere, non-verbal communication and my own subjective experiences of the interviews and the participants.
- **Deep Familiarisation-** I made sure to immerse myself in the data by repeatedly listening to the recordings and reading and rereading the transcripts and notes. As Hollway and Jefferson (2013) suggest, I transcribed the interviews myself to slowly engage with and familiarise myself with the data, and to highlight

nuances in communication and paralinguistic features that might not have been immediately evident in real time.

- **Detail the Whole Together-** I commenced a line-by-line coding process while holding the gestalt of each interview in mind. Gestalt refers to keeping the whole in mind whilst exploring the sum of its parts, or “you need to understand the structure before understanding its ingredient parts.” (Hollway and Jefferson, 2008, p.306). Manifest content and latent content were noted during a line-by-line coding process in Microsoft Word. Paying attention to sequences of associations made and repetitions within the narratives provided evidence to support interpretations, increasing trust in identified themes (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013).
- **Pen Portraits-** From the information gathered, I developed concise pen portraits for each participant that drew on the transcripts and process notes. I included tentative claims about possible psychodynamic processes that may have been occurring in the interviews and across experiences.
- **Building Findings and Staying Grounded-** I then used these pen portraits as the foundation for the findings, to set the scene and ensure I was aligned with those individual accounts and experiences. I regularly returned to the transcripts, audio recordings, and field notes, wrote research diary entries, and used supervisory spaces to avoid ‘wild analysis’ (Clarke et al., 2008). Using my own subjectivity to assist in the data analysis guarded against bad interpretations and assisted good ones (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).

To structure and guide the findings, I wanted to identify broad themes from the information and codes gathered from the process outlined above. Principles from

Braun and Clarke's (2006) Reflexive Thematic Analysis were employed to identify themes that guide and structure the findings chapter. As I had already identified codes in the above process, I used the following steps:

- Constructing initial themes- Codes were grouped into broader patterns of shared meaning.
- Reviewing and developing themes- Refining the themes by analysing how they fit with both the individual coded data and the full data set.
- Defining and naming themes- Writing concise accounts of what each theme captures and how it relates to the research question.
- Producing the report- Putting together the themes with data extracts and analytic commentary to tell a story

Images of this process can be found in Appendix P. Coding and theming the data at times felt like it distracted from the data's Gestalt (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). I, however, remained mindful of this throughout and employed an iterative approach, returning periodically to individuals' transcripts and audio recordings to ensure I did not lose sight of their accounts.

3.6.3. *Reflections from Data Analysis*

After a particularly challenging data analysis process, I engaged (both in supervision and independently) in a reflection on the themes. In the following reflective journal entry (25.07.2025) I shared the following:

“Holding a constant tension around wanting to stay as close to the participants’ narratives but being drawn to those experiences of TsYP. This pull feels meaningful. Are school staff’s perspectives often overlooked in favour of a focus

on CYP? Why is not coming naturally to me to stay solely with the participants experiences?”

Coming from a profession with a significant focus on CYP voice and their co-production in tasks, I found myself thinking about the experiences of TsYP, and at times this came into the data analysis process. Similarly, I found it hard at times to distinguish between the schools’ staff’s experiences of working with TsYP and their general experiences as teachers in the current context. The two often felt inseparable, particularly when considering the associations being made. These dynamics often appeared indicative of the complexities and messiness of making attempts to understand human experiences.

3.7. Credibility and Trustworthiness

Hollway and Jefferson (2013) acknowledge that, much like qualitative research, psychodynamic theory and psychosocial research often face criticism regarding validity. This section, therefore, examines how credibility and trustworthiness were ensured throughout this research. Yardley (2000; 2008) proposes the following criteria for assessing the reliability and validity of qualitative analysis: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, impact and importance. These are seen as open-ended, flexible principles to guide the quality of qualitative research. Yardley (2008) suggests that qualitative researchers should be prepared to answer the “so what?” question from critics of their research. Therefore, this criterion will be used to further discuss answering the “so what?” question and the credibility and trustworthiness of this research.

3.7.1. *Sensitivity to Context*

Yardley (2000) emphasises that credible and trustworthy qualitative research must engage with the theoretical and empirical contexts of the research, demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of prior research, relevant literature, and methodological traditions. I ensured a strong understanding of the psychosocial, philosophical, and intellectual foundations underpinning the research, to enable more insightful and nuanced analyses. The research, therefore, aimed to remain sensitive to the data itself, using reflexive diaries and psychosocial supervision to avoid overinterpretation or being overly shaped by theoretical preconceptions. This methodological approach also fostered sensitivity to the data's context, allowing for a deeper exploration of contradictions in participants' responses rather than merely noting them, ensuring that the richness and complexity of the data were fully engaged with and interpreted meaningfully.

Another essential consideration in qualitative research is the social dynamics between researcher and participant (Yardley, 2000), which is particularly significant in psychosocial research. In this approach, data is understood not merely as what the participant says, but as part of a cyclical, relational process that includes the researcher as an active participant in shaping the data. Given that neutrality is not possible, this research design accounts for the researcher's influence on the interactional context and data production. In addition, sensitivity to power imbalances between the researcher and the participant was considered essential in this research.

3.7.2. *Commitment and Rigour*

Credibility and trustworthiness in qualitative research are achieved through the researcher's commitment and prolonged, immersive engagement with the research topic (Yardley, 2000). The idea of prolonged commitment strongly resonated with the research, as the initial conception of this research idea began five years ago, during my previous professional roles. During that time, there has also been a three-year journey of exploring and learning about psychodynamic theory and psychosocial methodology during the doctorate, gradually developing skills in these relevant research methods. Throughout this period, I have been deeply engaged with the topic both professionally and personally, aligning with Yardley's (2000) argument that researchers should approach their subject not only through academic study but also through lived experience. Importantly, this commitment to learning is seen as an ongoing process, with no definitive endpoint. Further reflections regarding the commitment to the research topic can be found in Chapter 1.

Considerations were required to ensure research rigour and validity in the psychosocial research approach. Macmillan (2001) raises concerns regarding the validity of applying psychoanalytic thinking to research, particularly free association. Freud (1900) conceptualises free association as a method to allow patients to express thoughts originating from their own psyche, rather than being influenced by external suggestions or expectations. The use of free association in the FANIM is therefore intended to capture authentic psychological material rather than responses influenced by the researcher. However, in alignment with Yardley's (2000) suggestions for rigorous qualitative research, this study is grounded in clear psychosocial

epistemological and ontological foundations and triangulates multiple data sources to ensure depth and credibility. For instance, in this research, the data were collected through participants' interview narratives, as well as by exploring participants' emotions and by maintaining a researcher's reflexivity diary. The use of diary entries and field notes enhances the credibility and validity of qualitative research by fostering transparency and minimising interpretative biases (Burnley et al., 2024). Since the purpose of this research is to explore participants' lived experiences, I argue that the FANIM is valid, as it aligns with the research's aims by prioritising participants' narratives and meaning-making processes.

Ensuring rigour and reliability in psychosocial research can be challenging due to a lack of objective consistency among researchers in applying psychoanalytic theory (Arnold, 2021). Reliance on subjective interpretations, and whether these are scientifically robust (e.g., whether they have empirical testability, standardisation, and predictive power), are also considered critiques of the FANIM (Arnold, 2021). However, Hollway and Jefferson (2013) argue that the concepts of reliability and validity in research are not straightforward, as both participants and researchers may be defended and may not fully understand their own experiences. To enhance reliability and rigour, Yardley (2000) advocates triangulating multiple sources of information and using multiple approaches to data analysis to minimise the limitations of a single approach. In this research, Hollway and Jefferson (2013) suggest tracking the researcher's position and interview relationship, which is seen as information that can be used cautiously as data. Bringing this data to supervision to discuss further presented another layer of rigour and avoid over analysis. Yardley (2000) further argues that, in qualitative research, small sample sizes can reduce generalisability and

the opportunity to transfer the findings to other populations. However, this research argues that the rigorous approach used means even smaller samples can provide rich, saturated data.

3.7.3. Coherence and Transparency

Coherence and transparency are essential in credible and trustworthy research (Yardley, 2000). To achieve coherence, I have strived to demonstrate a consistent 'golden thread' connecting every stage of the research (e.g., research questions, theoretical framework, ontology, epistemology and methodology). The psychosocial approach underpins the entire research, providing a clear justification for each stage, with each step logically following from the research's theoretical foundations and positioning. Transparency has been upheld in this research by clearly detailing all aspects of the research process. I have aimed to ensure clarity and openness in reporting findings, providing a comprehensive account and making documents in the appendices accessible. In line with Yardley's (2000) suggestions, I used verbatim excerpts from the data to allow readers to assess whether the researcher's interpretations are well supported and credible, thereby enhancing the transparency of the research. Additionally, the reflexivity used throughout this research demonstrates transparency, enhancing the credibility of the findings and ensuring the research remains open, accountable, and ethically sound (Yardley, 2000; Nicholls, 2009).

3.7.4. Impact and Importance

Research should be evaluated based on its influence or usefulness to society, not just its thoroughness, as this is the most significant component in assessing the value of the research (Yardley, 2000). Research can have impact and importance in several ways, including the theoretical contributions, practical applications, socio-cultural change, and direct interventions in real-world issues (Yardley, 2000). This research is expected to generate impact across multiple levels, aligning with the categories outlined by Yardley (2000). The impact and importance of this research are discussed further in Chapter 5, which summarises them within the context of the synthesis and real-world applications of the findings.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this research was gained through the Tavistock Research Ethics Committee in June 2024. The ethics application document can be found in Appendix Q. Through this ethical approval process, consent was also secured from the PEP at the LA where the participants were recruited. To ensure adherence to professional and ethical standards, I thoroughly reviewed the BPS (2021) Code of Human Research Ethics, the BPS (2021) Code of Conduct and Ethics and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (2018) regulations, ensuring I was practising within the professional boundaries and keeping the sensitive data safe. Ethical considerations were approached as a dynamic, ongoing process, revisited not only during the planning and ethical approval stages but also throughout this research as new ethical concerns emerged. Research supervision played a crucial role in exploring these ethical considerations, offering guidance on how to navigate complex situations. The

four areas of the BPS' Code of Human Research Ethics (2021) were used to structure and guide this research's ethical framework, ensuring ethical integrity.

3.8.1. Respect for Autonomy, Privacy and Dignity of Individuals and Communities

The psychosocial methodology used inherently aligns with The BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2021). Through actively listening to school staff's lived experiences, their knowledge, insight and expertise are respected. The participants have autonomy in shaping their own narratives through the free-association element. However, a key consideration in the research was the potential for researcher imposition within the psychoanalytic considerations included in FANIM and a psychosocial approach. As the FANIM suggests that individuals may not be fully aware of the deeper emotional or psychological influences (unconscious dynamics) in their narratives, the researcher, through analysis, may impose unhelpful interpretations. Additionally, Clarke and Hoggett (2009) caution that power imbalances may emerge when researchers assume authority over the unconscious meanings, potentially undermining participant autonomy. Frosh and Baraitser (2008) highlight the risk of overinterpretation, where the researcher's analysis takes precedence over participants' own understandings. To mitigate these concerns, the research was designed to centre the participant's voice throughout, and accountability was incorporated through reflexivity, diary entries, field notes, and psychosocial supervision to minimise the risk of my dominance in interpretation.

In the endeavour to ensure participant autonomy and respect, considerable attention was given to ensuring that participants were fully informed about the research before providing consent. Participants received an information sheet during recruitment, which clearly outlined the interview structure, psychosocial approach, and use of audio recordings. With this information, the participants chose to volunteer themselves, as recruitment was self-selecting. However, a key ethical question arose as to whether participants could fully consent to the psychodynamic aspects of the research, including the exploration of internal experiences, emotions and unconscious processes. To address this, a rigorous consent process was implemented, allowing participants to ask questions and clarify any uncertainties before agreeing to take part. Following Miller and Bell's (2002) recommendations, an ongoing consent process was used to check in with participants at multiple points to confirm their willingness to continue: at the end of the first interview, at the start of the second interview, and at the end of the second interview. The participants were also informed they were not obliged to take part in this study and were free to withdraw at any time, up to the point of data analysis. Withdrawal would be without disadvantage to themselves, including impact on EP service delivery and would be without any obligation to give a reason.

Maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of the participants was a central ethical consideration. Several measures were put in place to ensure that participants' identities remained protected:

- The information sheet explicitly stated the commitment to privacy and safety.
- Audio recordings were accessible only to me.
- Consent forms and transcripts were stored separately to prevent identification.
- All participants and school names were anonymised in the data.

- Participants were given the option to select their own pseudonyms, which were used in all handwritten notes, with all identifying details removed.
- Electronic data was password-protected and stored securely, while handwritten notes were kept confidential and later shredded.
- Data will be securely stored for six to ten years before being permanently deleted, in accordance with data protection policies.
- Participants were given control over the amount of demographic information they wished to share and include in the write-up of this research.
- All data generated from this research was handled and retained in accordance with the Trust's Data Protection and Handling Policies, which include the Data Protection Act (1998, 2018) and the University of Essex Guidelines.

Despite these efforts, Wengraf (2001) and Hollway and Jefferson (2013) highlight that the small sample size in psychosocial research can make complete anonymity difficult to guarantee. Participants were therefore explicitly informed of the limits of confidentiality due to the small sample size. Participants were told the following:

“Due to the small number of participants your contribution has a chance of being identifiable, meaning this may have implications for confidentiality, however all efforts will be made to anonymise the data throughout. Additionally, confidentiality may need to be breached if there is a risk of harm to self, harm to other, or a breach of law, however this will be discussed with you first.”

Hollway and Jefferson (2013) emphasise that respect is integral to offering containment and, therefore, recognising the professional duties and boundaries to confidentiality in the interviews is essential. After the data collection stage, further ethical considerations were made regarding how to maintain confidentiality during data

analysis and reporting. For example, having to be very mindful of boundaries about what information was included in the pen portraits.

Another important ethical consideration was that asking school staff to share their experiences working with TsYP could lead them to refer to specific students, raising additional confidentiality concerns. To address this, participants were provided with clear guidance at the beginning of each interview through the following statement:

“Thank you for your participation in this research. I would like to remind you that, as we discussed, your experiences today, specific students may come to mind. It is important that you refrain from sharing any identifiable information for the student and use a pseudonym, if necessary, to maintain their confidentiality.”

Furthermore, during the analysis and write-up stages of the research, anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by redacting identifiable details or omitting parts of the data that would directly compromise any young person's confidentiality.

3.8.2. *Scientific Integrity*

I ensured I remained accountable to scientific and scholarly standards in their research by staying close to how the literature depicts this methodology (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013) and engaging with a range of studies that have employed the same epistemology, ontology, and methodology. To further ensure rigour and methodological fidelity, research supervision was also utilised to provide a critical space for reflection and refinement of research practices.

3.8.3. Social Responsibility

I maintained a strong awareness of their personal and professional responsibilities, ensuring they operated within their area of professional competence. Through training in the Professional Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology, I have developed the necessary skills to respond appropriately to participants' potentially uncomfortable emotions. As part of this training, I was required to conduct consultations with staff, parents, children and young people, often engaging with emotionally complex topics and challenging situations. My competence in relational dynamics and psychodynamic thinking was developed through a year-long module on consultation, including video-enhanced reflective practice (VERP); weekly supervision to refine professional practice; participation in reflexive groups focused on relational dynamics; three years of learning in psychodynamic and systemic theory and experiential learning and a group relations conference to deepen understanding. Despite having a clear level of competence and capability in this area, my colleagues acknowledge the limits of their expertise and do not wish to claim to be psychodynamic psychotherapists or to have a role solely focused on psychoanalytic practice. To uphold professional integrity, I ensured that I remained aware of these boundaries at each stage, working in partnership with others (the participants, the research supervisor, other core staff, and students at the Tavistock). I actively engaged in self-reflection and remained open to critical feedback from others, ensuring accountability throughout the research process.

The BPS Code of Conduct (2018) emphasises the importance of acknowledging and understanding where the research would exist within the wider human society.

Generating psychological knowledge through this research was aimed at producing beneficial outcomes by enhancing support for trans-spectrum young people at multiple levels:

- Individual Level- The research provides insight into the experiences in the secondary school system for TsYP and the school staff who work with them from the current context.
- Microsystem Level (Schools and Educational Practice) - The research findings highlight current school practices, barriers, and facilitators for effectively working with TsYP, equipping educational professionals, including Educational Psychologists (EPs), with valuable information to inform their practice.
- Macro Level (Policy and Social Change)- The research aligns with Horton's (2022) assertion that further investigation in this area has significant implications for policy and practice, particularly in challenging institutional cisnormativity and identifying strategies to dismantle exclusionary structures.

Beyond its direct implications for education and policy, this research contributes to the broader social justice efforts, reinforcing the role of Educational Psychologists in challenging social exclusion, countering oppression, and amplifying diverse voices (Fox, 2015). These principles align with the HCPC Competencies and Proficiencies (2023) and the BPS Code of Conduct (2018), both of which emphasise the importance of inclusivity and ethical practice. Ultimately, this research aims to expand the existing knowledge base, offering practical insights that may contribute to developing safe, inclusive schools while fostering positive change for the LGBTQIA+ community.

3.8.4. Maximising Benefit and Minimising Harm

Given that the psychosocial methodology used in this research focuses on participants' emotions and internal experiences, it was anticipated that some participants might recall or discuss uncomfortable emotions. To safeguard participant wellbeing, I conducted wellbeing check-ins at both the beginning and end of each interview; if needed, these discussions took place off-record, with the audio recording turned off. Throughout the interviews, I remained attuned to the participants' well-being and emotional states, suggesting breaks as needed. For instance, uncomfortable feelings were acknowledged, and the participants were informed that they had the opportunity to discuss their feelings, pause, stop or reschedule the session at any time. They were also informed that they could withdraw their data before the start of the data analysis phase. After the interview, participants were debriefed and provided with a debriefing form (Appendix N) that included my contact email and external support services. Additionally, participants were given the option of a follow-up meeting, either in person or virtually, should they feel they would benefit from further discussion, and the option to receive the research with a follow-up call or to discuss the findings in more detail. Feedback was sought from participants at the end of the interviews to gather their thoughts on the research process and ensure they were not left with lingering discomfort. From these conversations, participants revealed they valued the space to share their views and perceived the involvement in the research as a positive experience.

To maximise the benefits of the research, careful consideration was given to creating a comfortable and supportive interview environment. I intentionally gave the participants the option to conduct the interviews either at the school where they work, in a separate space such as the LA offices, or, if necessary, virtually, allowing them to

feel most at ease. Before each interview, I made sure to arrive with time to rearrange items in the space to make it conducive to a face-to-face conversation, with distractions outside limited. By engaging in a research project in which their voice is privileged and a reflective space is provided, they have an opportunity to make sense of their experiences, which may empower them to continue using their voice and reflect on practice moving forward. This arose in the debrief conversations, with all participants commenting on the benefits they felt they had gained from engaging in this research.

3.9. Summary

This chapter has outlined the psychosocial methodology used to explore school staff's experiences of working with TsYP. This research aims to attend to both personal meaning and the wider social context through qualitative, psychoanalytically informed, narrative-based interviewing. The importance of researcher reflexivity, transparency, and rigour was discussed to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research. The next chapter will present the research findings.

4. Findings

4.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter will outline the findings of this research in line with the two research questions this study aims to address:

- **RQ1:** What are the school staff's experiences of working with trans-spectrum young people at school?
- **RQ2:** What can be understood about the experiences of school staff working with trans-spectrum young people from a psychoanalytical and psychosocial perspective?

This chapter will begin with more detailed introductions to the participants through pen portraits to contextualise the analysis and bring together multiple sources of information (e.g., transcripts, field notes, diary entries). Each theme will then be outlined and explored, looking at verbatim quotes and a second latent analysis of the data.

4.2. Introducing the Participants

To aid the understanding and accessibility of these findings, pen portraits were created. The aim is to provide context to the unique individuals who have taken part in this research and ensure there is transparency to any interpretations made. All material presented here was included with participants' consent, either taken from the optional demographic form provided to them or from points discussed within the

interview. Participants wished to share different amounts according to their comfort and therefore the accounts vary in detail.

4.2.1. Wren

“Just felt really, it felt like trying to walk through a really, really thick mud constantly.” (Wren). Wren was recruited through an EP colleague who had previously worked with them on individual casework involving TsYP. Wren was in between school staff roles when initial contact was made, but had previously worked in a pastoral role at a pupil referral unit. The interviews were conducted virtually.

Wren spoke about two specific TsYP during the interviews but one more explicitly whom they worked with over multiple years. They presented themselves in the interview as someone who held deep and meaningful relationships with the TsYP they worked with and strongly believed in respect, acceptance, and inclusivity. Wren communicated passionately about creating safe spaces at school, particularly when family support was absent at home and shared frustrations about advocating for TsYP in systems that feel inconsistent and hostile. Wider frustrations were also shared around the lack of societal progress and ongoing stigmas surrounding gender and sexuality.

I experienced Wren as both open and guarded. Arranging the interviews was challenging as it had to be rescheduled multiple times, and I wondered in supervision whether the several rescheduled interviews was a defensive postponement against uncomfortable emotions or a reflection of systemic constraints. This was also felt in

the length of the interviews, which were much shorter than the others. Difficulties scheduling the interviews with Wren, the short length and the online format seemed to create a distance which impacted my ability to connect and engage with what Wren was sharing. In my research diary, I wondered whether this distance was perhaps conveying internalised frustration that the interview was not being prioritised. I considered whether my feelings of frustration were a projective invitation to experience the pressure and constraints that Wren worked within, or whether they reflected Wren's experiences of not being prioritised in their role. Despite the disconnect, during the interviews, Wren appeared less guarded, comfortable with the free association approach and was able to follow lines of thought, seemingly getting close to their experiences without intellectualising or coming to conclusions. They shared that visiting these past experiences was a helpful and welcome reflection on practice.

4.2.2. Robin

“You just do what you do for any student in your care, and that is to make sure they're safe, they're happy, that they're progressing in their education” (Robin). Robin was recruited through the Headteacher. On the demographic form, they described themselves as a heterosexual woman over the age of 45, who had worked at the school for 25 years and currently held a senior role. The interviews were conducted in their school pastoral space.

Robin mainly spoke about two specific TsYP during the interviews and the systems around them. In the narratives surrounding the first TsYP, Robin described a pastoral role where they took a TsYP led approach, keeping an open dialogue with families and

staff who held differing beliefs. In the experiences surrounding the second TsYP, Robin communicated a senior/decision maker role where intersecting needs of the TsYP increased the complexity of the role, particularly when the TsYP experiences school as an unsafe space. Robin emphasised the significant emotional load of the role and the frustration of systemic barriers to support, leading to the view that children's services often 'let down' TsYP. Across the interviews, Robin illustrated a move from early career optimism and idealism to a pragmatic and boundaried stance in their later career to manage the emotional demands in role.

Robin appeared most at ease with the free association approach out of all the participants, stating in our initial consent conversation that talking about experiences comes naturally to them. They followed narratives of the experiences closely and reflected comfortably on self in role. Despite describing this interview space as cathartic, at times Robin appeared vulnerable and worried about saying the 'wrong thing' which prompted further conversations surrounding confidentiality. At times, the mild emotional discomfort could be seen through somatic cues (e.g., back pain) and hesitations. However, they shared that they were committed to the research process because they wanted to make a positive change for TsYP and the profession.

4.2.3. *Raven*

"It was like a huge big group hug...and I think that the student felt lighter afterwards...That was great and then it deteriorated, quite rapidly." (Raven). Raven was recruited through their Headteacher in the same school as Robin and Sparrow. Raven provided demographic information via the form but later asked for this not be

shared in the write up of this research. The interviews were conducted in their school pastoral space.

Raven discussed two contrasting TsYP and the peers around them, speaking from a pastoral role. They referred to working in a predominantly Muslim all-girls school, where TsYP were perceived as 'different' from the general school population. Raven described moments of joy where TsYP live authentically and are supported to do so by the school, but they also recalled times of difficulty around TsYP's mental health and peer/family acceptance. Raven described young people as being generally open minded and inclusive but emphasised an exhaustion around the beliefs of the adults in context. Raven named the emotional labour and strong personal responsibility of the tutor role and has undertaken mental health training to better support CYP. This was prompted by feelings from their experiences with a TsYP and feeling unprepared to manage SEMH needs.

I initially perceived Raven as being nervous and unsure. Their body language appeared to convey some uncomfortable feelings, and I felt compelled to spend more time in the consent stage to ensure they felt safe. I checked in during the interview and ended one interview early as they shared that they were feeling tired. Raven appeared worried about 'saying the wrong thing' and anxious about using the 'correct' terminology to refer to TsYP. In my research diary, I noted Raven's responses as short with frequent hesitation and self-censorship/editing, and I wondered whether they felt evaluated in the interview or that this is a risky topic to discuss candidly. This fear of being held accountable for saying the wrong thing was also present in Raven's decision to withdraw demographic information. It felt relevant that out of all

participants, Raven felt the most tuned into the politicisation of trans identities and current shifts in practice (e.g., RSE curriculum and proposals on parental disclosure), as it was mentioned multiple times during the interviews. The conversation often carried significant emotional weight, with Raven either smiling and laughing at moments of inclusion, acceptance and love or showing sadness when discussing responsibilities, burnout and supporting the mental health of TsYP. Overall, the interview experiences with Raven felt the most emotionally weighted and there was a frequent pull between both care and caution.

4.2.4. Sparrow

“That does...make me angry...sends me back to that kind of anger, but...there is a difference now... I am supported by this system.” (Sparrow). Sparrow was recruited through their Headteacher in the same school as Robin and Raven. Sparrow provided the following information in the demographic form; they described themselves as a heterosexual female aged 55-64. They listed their ethnicity as Asian and noted that they had 19 years of experience working in the school and currently held the role of Assistant Headteacher.

Sparrow spoke specifically about two contrasting TsYP and about the other young people around them. These experiences were told from a pastoral leadership role in a majority Muslim girls’ school. The narratives surrounding the first TsYP was described as progressing relatively smoothly with strong family and staff support and the second TsYP as having complex intersecting needs which made the support challenging. Across narratives, Sparrow described a general growing openness around gender

diversity while also describing tensions between navigating differing beliefs, with students often being more accepting than adults. They referred to the emotional labour and containment required in the role and spoke extensively about how they manage the demands of the role. Overall, it appeared Sparrow framed their experiences with TsYP as a long journey, with the goal of everyday acceptance and timely, practical support within school and beyond.

Sparrow's first interview took place after the school day had ended. This was the only interview to occur at this time. The daylight had gone, the corridors outside were dark and quiet, and the school was empty. The stillness of the interview setting increased intimacy and seemed to heighten the space's intensity, which may have led Sparrow to appear more guarded about uncomfortable emotions. The context of the interview stayed with me in my research diary. We both presented as fatigued from the workday and Sparrow kept their bag on their lap, which I understood as a readiness to leave. The narratives that followed felt quite surface level and intellectualised, almost rehearsed. At times I was losing engagement in what the participant was sharing, and I wondered whether this was indicative of the participant being matter of fact, predictable or there being insincerity present in a defended position. I had to hold the ethical tension between wanting openness and recognising that both Sparrow, as the participant, and I, as the researcher, arrived defended, consciously and unconsciously. The second interview was scheduled earlier, and we were able to follow 'under the surface' narratives of working with TsYP. Sparrow began to connect personal experiences of racism to experiences of transphobia. They spoke with conviction about their core moral values of love, ongoing conversation and education as routes from fear to understanding. These were reinforced by personal experiences with

gender diverse individuals, which I experienced as both upsetting and heartwarming in the interview space.

4.2.5. *Finch*

“Even though there are those different versions of myself...policy is...about fairness...It’s just, unfortunately, there are sometimes policies that are inherently unfair.” (Finch). Finch was recruited through a school I had previously worked in as a TEP. Finch provided the following information in the demographic form: they described themselves as a white-British, gay man, aged 35-44. They listed their ethnicity as White-British and noted that they had 16 years of experience working in schools and 10 years of experience at the school they are currently in. They described their role at the school as Assistant Principal.

Finch spoke about two contrasting TsYP in their narratives. The main difference between the two was that one TsYP was supported and had parental consent to begin socially transitioning, whereas the second TsYP, due to their family context, was unable to obtain parental consent and was therefore prevented from socially transitioning at school. Finch’s narratives focused on the implementation of guidance and policy for gender-diverse young people, emphasising rule-following as a safeguard and a source of fairness. They described tensions surrounding differing views among school staff and the need to adhere to the academy guidelines. In our second interview, Finch was able to move beyond policy and think more about themselves in the role. Finch described holding professional and personal versions of oneself and switching between them in different contexts.

I experienced Finch as someone under pressure, being pulled in multiple directions. The interview space reflected these pressures: the walkie-talkie making loud noises, the clock ticking, people coming to the door and Finch being clear about a fixed end time due to competing demands. I found myself experiencing these feelings of stress or panic and noted in my research diary that I was 'frequently looking at the clock' and that there was 'a palpable time pressure' in the interview. In supervision, I considered the impact that time pressure had on my role as a researcher and whether I rushed or failed to sit with experiences for longer out of fear of not collecting enough data. Moreover, I considered whether my stress was a projective invitation to experience the demanding role Finch is in, or indicative of the pressure I felt as a novice researcher. Finch's physical presence was one of fidgeting and restlessness, potentially suggesting a somatic strain, which only eased when they started talking about their home and family/personal life, a more comfortable experience that took them away from the stressors of work.

4.3. Analysis of Findings

4.3.1. Overview of Themes

During the interview's participants shared their experiences of working with TsYP. This included accounts of experiences of working with individual TsYP, their own past lived experiences and more general experiences in role in the current context. They reflected on their previous experiences and actions, thoughts or emotions and occasionally generated formulations or ways forward for them or the profession. This

information provided a rich picture of school staff's experiences of working with TsYP. Guidelines from Hollway and Jefferson's (2013) psychoanalytically informed data analysis were used to provide a structure for discussion about what school staff shared with me about their experiences. Themes were identified to structure the findings chapter and identify broad similarities; however, the goal of this process was not to assume shared experiences across participants but to help capture their narratives and experience near accounts.

Table 6

Overarching Theme and Themes

Overarching Theme	Theme
Professional Responsibility	• Feeling the Duty of a Caring Profession
	• Pressures of Deciding the Correct Approach
Professional Identity and Role	• Desire for Clarity and Structure
Navigating Multiple Perspectives	• School Staff Beliefs and Internal Tensions
	• Parental and Community Perspectives
	• Keeping TsYP Voices Central
Emotional Labour, Safety and Containment	• Desire to Create a Sense of Safety
	• Feeling Unsupported and Professionally Vulnerable
	• Holding Uncomfortable Feelings with Limited Space
Systems, Constraints and Change	• Feeling Constrained by Surrounding Systems
	• Change Brings Growing Pains and Exciting Possibilities

The five overarching themes will be presented, including an interpretative analysis of the data within the theme, exploring what can be understood from participants' experiences, looking beyond their conscious narratives.

4.3.2. Overarching Theme 1- Professional Responsibility

The overarching theme, Professional Responsibility, captures the ways in which participants experience their responsibility in role when working with TsYP. This includes a deep sense of care and responsibility for the welfare of TsYP in their schools.

Feeling the Duty of a Caring Profession.

Perceiving themselves as the closest caring professionals to TsYP, participants illustrated their role responsibilities, like gatekeepers to further support which increased pressure to provide adequate support. "We are obviously going to be the first line of response... we spend so long with these young people" (Robin). In my reflective diary, I noted the emergency undertones of a "first line of a response" (Robin). as this was one of several occasions where emergency terminology and associations were used when discussing experiences in school. This alluded to a high level of responsibility to remain vigilant, and triage needs on the "first line" but I also discussed it as indicative of a defended system, with school staff being on the vulnerable front with a hierarchy of systems behind them.

Referrals and safeguarding processes were seen as the primary task for protecting TsYP's safety and wellbeing, particularly when co-occurring mental health needs were

present. Participants in leadership roles (Finch and Robin) described the responsibility of the referral process more often than others. “We made all of those referrals (CAMHS)...managing that side of it to make sure X got professional help” (Robin). “As a professional, it tends to be more action-based...they’re not happy, so we refer them to (counselling service)” (Finch). I discussed the feeling of relief and containment that Robin and Finch may experience through their referrals to external agencies in supervision. Robin particularly emphasised the limits of their role and the shared responsibility for supporting TsYP. “We have to recognise that we are a cog in the wheel and my job is to try and open the doors to all the other cogs that are going to set everything in motion” (Robin). They continued to describe the sense of reassurance referrals to external agencies brings. “I have done everything I could do” (Robin). Conversely, Sparrow and Wren described the challenges of seeking support from external services, sharing their frustrations of them being “reduced and reduced” (Sparrow), and inadequate for the “specific need for trans kids” (Sparrow). Similarly, Wren shared that, “lots of these children are just referred to CAMHS...it’s not a mental health issue” (Wren). In my research diary, Robin’s cog metaphor stayed with me writing, “what happens when the other cogs are defective or don’t turn?” (Reflective Diary February 2025). School staff are an essential part of TsYP accessing support but if external services are reduced and unavailable the school is being positioned to hold onto more than they are able to.

For participants in pastoral roles, responsibility for TsYP safety and well-being was described as providing consistent daily support. “Yes, I think a sense of responsibility, yeah, because it’s my responsibility to check in with them every day” (Raven).“ However, they also emphasised the immediate safeguarding required in their role “In

another situation, I did have to call an ambulance because the child was literally climbing the wall, saying they were going to kill themselves” (Wren). The long pauses in Wren’s accounts seemed suggestive of them recalling the emotional distress of the experience. The omission of what happened next in Wren’s narrative seemed indicative of an avoidance of an uncomfortable memory. Although, the limited rapport at this stage of the interview and the constraints of a virtual setting may also have hindered emotional containment, making it feel too risky for Wren to share these uncomfortable affects. Conversely, Raven’s narrative followed the emotional impact of these pastoral role responsibilities when sharing their experience of supporting a TsYP who was at a crisis point with their mental health. Raven described the emotional impact this had on them as they felt unprepared to support mental health needs “I think I took it really personally; I felt that I really let them down...I felt that I should have noticed, because I saw them every day, but I didn’t...I found it really personally very tough” (Raven). It appeared this was a feeling that stayed with Raven because at the beginning of the second interview, they shared, “immediately after [the first interview] ...I hadn’t realised the impact that the conversation had actually had on me... feelings like guilt...and that maybe I could have done more to help the student” (Raven). I felt a sense of sadness as Raven discussed the “guilt” they felt because they “let them down”. I wondered if some of these uncomfortable emotions were being projected onto me in the interview. In my research diary I wrote “In the pastoral role Raven has an increased sense of responsibility compared to other participants. The close proximity of this role meant Raven felt if they did something differently, they could have prevented escalation but is this possible? I wonder if self-doubt and criticising yourself helps regain some control or agency over challenging experiences and complex

emotions. Is it easier than blaming the wider systems or thinking about whether it was unpreventable?” (Reflective Diary January 2025).

Hesitancies in the interviews appeared to centre on participants feeling responsible for representing an organisation. Robin, in a leadership role, discussed their duty to protect the whole school when safeguarding TsYP, stating, “You have to protect and safeguard the school and staff as well as the children within your care...that’s really hard” (Robin). Wren, in a pastoral role, explained how these responsibilities produced delays in support for TsYP. “I think from the school’s perspective, it was just protecting themselves...it was just the school basically protecting themselves” (Wren). The school having to “protect” itself could be understood as an institutional anxiety of accountability or criticism around gender diversity, meaning those within the system are more defended. In my reflective diary, I wrote “What is the school protecting itself from?” (Reflective Diary February 2025). Robin expanded upon the responsibility of the organisation sharing, “every choice you make, you have to make sure is made so that you do not put your school's reputation at risk... you've only got to read the Daily Mail to know there are aspects of society that will attack you for making choices that they do not agree with” (Robin). The defended positioning of the school representative was evident in the interview space, in the narrowing of what was shared, in stopping the flow of narratives, or in hesitating when discussing certain topics. For example, Sparrow, Robin and Raven, made initially little reference to how a gendered school system (all girls secondary) responded to TsYP when gender binaries are core to the school’s context. Open questioning to gently invite reflection in the second interview elicited surface-level reflections, although defences still appeared to be present. I found myself, as the researcher, facing parallel pressures in representing the

Tavistock and Portman and considering how this shaped my presentation. This awareness made me cautious at times and perhaps more guarded as I felt responsible for accurate representation and was conscious that my comments may be heard as the Tavistock position.

Pressures of Deciding the Correct Approach.

Participants described the pressures and responsibility of making important decisions with TsYP at both the individual and whole-school levels. Those with leadership roles (Robin, Raven, Sparrow and Finch) referred to decision-making in their roles and associated feelings. “Every decision you make you are accountable for...pretty much every sentence you say you have to think it through” (Robin). “Is this child safe, right, what needs to be done, who do I need to get involved?” (Sparrow). This includes a responsibility to bring people together, gather information and choose the way forward. “This is all the information we have, these are everybody’s input, these are the decisions that I am making” (Robin). Listening back to the interviews, there is a firmness in how these quotes are delivered, which may emphasise a need to be decisive in decision making, with there being little space for uncertainty or unproductive emotions as there is opportunity for “criticism” and they feel “accountable”. However, Finch also noted that those in senior school positions don’t always know what choices to make. “Sometimes I don’t have the answer...so it’s interesting, isn’t it, that people come to me for answers about something I don’t always know” (Finch). I noted the following in my diary:

“Is Finch being positioned as ‘the knower’ in their school system? They are pulled in many directions, with people relying on them. Are they uncomfortable

feelings of uncertainty in the system being projected onto them? What is it like to hold this uncertainty for a system?”. (Reflective Diary February 2025).

Those not in senior positions shared frustrations about delays in decision-making when working with TsYP: “It just felt like no one was listening, and it was really frustrating.” (Wren). Wren and Raven shared experiences of the power, authority, and hierarchy of roles in decision-making, as well as the difficulties of feeling unsupported. “There was nothing I could hold anyone to account” (Wren). “No one communicated it with me” (Raven). When senior school staff are unavailable to set a way forward, participants are left holding safeguarding responsibilities and uncertainty, which appears challenging to hold without containing spaces. A common response amongst participants to holding these uncomfortable emotions was to create shared decision-making spaces. “There is a network of people. You’re not just on your own.” (Robin). “You need a little bit of a tag team around you to deal with that, so you are not the base all the time, you know.” (Sparrow). Raven also refers to a supervision offered in their school where school practice can be reflected on, providing safety and containment. “Sharing experiences with other teachers, talking about scenarios, things they’ve done that work, all of that is useful.” (Raven). Evidently, for participants, working with TsYP may involve making decisions while holding risk and uncertainty in a pressured system. This is only sustainable when decisions are shared, staff voices are heard, and the TsYP safety and identity remain central.

Participants described their responsibility for TsYP wellbeing as requiring a whole school approach. Wren highlighted their frustrations with the slow pace of whole school policy work. “These policies were taking forever to write.” (Wren) and “I just felt

I was banging my head against this brick wall for the young people, essentially because I couldn't move anything on for them.” (Wren). In response to the delay and lack of safe spaces in the local community, Wren felt motivated by their anxieties around inadequate support to set up an LGBTQIA+ Club, regaining control and turning inaction into action. However, there were resource barriers to the effectiveness of whole-school support. Similarly, Sparrow felt that an LGBTQIA+ space “would be lovely to have” (Sparrow), but after “the Equalities Club becoming a centre of misconceptions from parents” (Sparrow), an LGBTQIA+ club would have to be carefully considered. Raven described their whole-school approaches through LGBTQIA+ Pride Month assemblies, aiming to create a more inclusive school ethos. However, Raven emphasised how these whole school approaches to supporting TsYP feel riskier as you are subject to more viewpoints and opinions, especially in areas where “hate crime is rising” (Raven). “When you do an assembly like that, you sort of are more sensitive thinking that there might be pre ideas about this topic” (Raven). Finch expressed similar concerns in their narratives about using a whole-school approach. “We didn’t do like a big assembly...because we felt that that would create a lot of like umm...reaction, so...we just did very small...group work” (Finch). I wrote the following in my research diary when considering Finch’s description of whole schoolwork, “Finch’s pauses and ‘umms’ around the assemblies seem cautious, like they are hesitant or editing themselves. Are they concerned about how what they are saying will be perceived?”. The ambiguity around the “reaction” (e.g., not saying whose reaction) could be indicative of an anxiety to actually address the reaction further. Overall, these hubs, clubs, assemblies and groups were described as offering a consistent whole-school approach to gender diversity; however, they also appear to function as a space for containing school staff anxieties about inadequate support.

The unprocessed tensions surrounding gender diversity may be located there to support the defended system, as well as being a place for communities' anxieties (parent misconceptions) to be directed to.

Participants also saw their responsibility for TsYP wellbeing as an individual approach, accompanying TsYP on a unique, individual journey shaped by each of their contexts. Participants spoke positively about their role on this journey, of discovering themselves and living authentically. "He was being who he wanted to be. That's just a lovely scene...that's all I want for them" (Wren). The role was highlighted as unique, lengthy and undefined. "They associated as being nonbinary, and then it later became the association of being male. Umm, so that's quite a long journey" (Raven). Participants, therefore, felt the responsibility for identifying individualised support. "Everybody's individual...it's your job to try and unpick that and put the support in place that they need" (Robin). Many participants referred to a journey in their narratives, but those in pastoral roles emphasised a journey of relational closeness and mentoring. "So, over the next...gosh, a year and a half, we continue to mentor about that" (Wren) or having "regular meetings with him to...to see how things were going" (Sparrow). Conversely, participants in senior positions describe a journey of working closely with the adults around TsYP rather than the TsYP themselves. "So within my line management around SEND, I supported X and their family through the EHCP process" (Robin). In supervision, I wondered that, as the participants are within a school system that is built on structure (e.g., timetables, curriculum, assessments, grades), what does it mean for the participants to go on a journey supporting TsYP, where there is not one linear, prescribed process that they can follow? This is made more pressing when participants referred to intersectionality. For example, the intersection of gender

diversity and co-occurring neurodiversity among some TsYP prompts consideration of appropriate support. “The autism and ADHD [Uh huh] was not conducive to X being able to process the gender questioning, particularly the way that other people may approach it.” (Robin). However, Robin and Raven describe frustrations about there not being the correct resources to support the TsYP’s specific needs, with Robin stating, “they just weren’t there,” and Raven highlighting that they “went undiagnosed for five years”. Therefore, participants describe accompanying TsYP on their unique journeys, creating tailored support whilst holding uncertainty. Support is tailored to support intersectional needs amid limited resources.

4.3.3. Overarching Theme 2- Professional Identity and Role

The overarching theme, Professional Identity and Role, captures how participants experience their role when working with TsYP. This includes a desire for greater clarity and structure regarding the school staff’s role among a myriad of other professionals, in the hope of effective support for TsYP when needed.

Desire for Clarity and Structure in Role.

This theme captures how participants felt a need for clarity and structure in their roles to understand what was expected of them. Sparrow highlighted the ambiguity of the school staff role referring to shifting discourse surrounding gender diversity. They described that they experience a higher prevalence of gender identity conversations, “because we didn’t talk about kids transitioning 20 years ago” (Sparrow) and shared sadness over thinking back to times where discussions around gender and sexuality in schools were limited by law (e.g., Section 28). However, other participants are

finding the changes in the school staff role challenging, experiencing feelings of uncertainty, powerlessness and fear. “I think there's a lot of staff who are afraid to have conversations about anything outside their subject specialism [Right]...and actually being a teacher now is way more complex than just teaching geography or maths” (Raven). Participants added that the complexity and ambiguity of the school staff roles extend into the wider community, creating misconceptions and additional challenges. “There are very few people, even my own family, have very, very little understanding of what schools in 2024...in a deprived area actually do, you know as the deputy head” (Robin). Uncertainty about the role and expectations of school staff in supporting TsYP often left participants feeling disempowered or overwhelmed when responsibilities extended beyond what they felt equipped to manage. “There is a point at which your authority ends...you have to pass it on to the professionals” (Robin). Participants communicate a desire to recognise where the boundaries of the school staff role are to ensure staff feel competent and capable in their role, as well as limiting any negative emotional impact. As there are changes occurring in the school staff role with supporting TsYP, it appears participants hope for support to manage these multiple demands.

Conversely, Wren shared that delays in policy and guidance were impacting their ability to understand their role. Limitations to authority and power in role can produce professional disempowerment, for example, Wren voices difficulties understanding what their role is due to the lack of policy and guidance. “There was nothing I could hold anyone to account, and I couldn't address up and say well, according to this policy, I had nothing myself but just felt I was banging my head against this brick wall for the young people, essentially because I couldn't move anything on for them”

(Wren). Across participants' narratives, there was a desire for structure when working with TsYP. Structure could be found in numerous places, including guidance on gender diversity, safeguarding procedures and laws or legal frameworks. These were experienced as emotionally protective, seeking clarity of their role for containment of difficult emotions. "You need to be really tight on your policies... and that is backed up by your policy and by law... so that there is no room for anyone coming with any other agenda." (Sparrow). Robin echoed the protective function of guidance when working with TsYP, "There has to be guidance because it gives you a framework in which to operate and it means that you are not on your own. You have that framework to protect you, to protect the school, to protect your staff. It's a Wild West out there." (Robin). In my research diary, I wrote the following,

"Participants are finding emotional safety in guidance around how to approach gender diversity in schools. There is a sense of both protection and satisfaction in knowing you are doing the 'right' thing. In this changing social and political context for TsYP, is policy serving as a transitional object to provide comfort and security?" (Reflective Diary March 2025)

However, some participants felt as though they did not have these structures and therefore lacked this emotional containment in role. Raven's narrative included a time where TsYP did not wish to share their identity at home and stated, "As a teacher, we're not given a lot of guidance on how to manage these situations at all". Similarly, Wren noted a time where a TsYP was asking for their chosen name and pronouns, and they were waiting for guidance to proceed. "There were lots of policies being written at the time...these policies were taking forever to write...there is so much that needs to be done... there's just nothing". Feeling uncomfortable with a lack of structure was also shown through the responses from the participants to the FANIM, which itself

has a limited fixed structure. I experienced all participants as unsure with Finch, Raven, and Robin, initially showing their discomfort through their body language and the way they moved in the interview space, and Wren delaying the interview dates. However, there was also a freedom in the lack of structure, with participants describing the interview as ‘cathartic’ and ‘a good space to reflect’. A possible tension between the desire for structure and process and the feeling of being free and unconstrained when it does not exist.

Finch was the participant who referred to policy the most in their narratives. In my reflective research diary, I wrote the following: “Why is Finch returning to policy often? Proceduralism? Intellectualism? Or a way of staying with the narrative while avoiding uncomfortable emotions, but also could be indicative of the system Finch works within and what is felt permitted to share in the role?” Moreover, in the interviews, I noticed an urge to challenge or question the rules and policies when I felt misaligned with them. I had to be mindful of my presentation (e.g., body language, facial expression, spoken language) to prevent my views from impacting what the narratives Finch shares, there may have been unconscious dynamics I was not aware of. For example, where a change of name/pronouns was blocked due to lack of parental consent, Finch justified their position through fairness writing, “I don’t, I’m not...just following the policy, just because, well, it’s written there, so I have to, it’s about fairness...and so it’s about fairness and about equity and if there was a policy, then you can then you can apply it fairly...regardless of how you personally feel’ (Finch). Finch appeared to find the free-association process most challenging and seemed to prefer a more structured question-and-answer approach. When invited to stay close to the emotions of experiences of working with TsYP, rather than just what happened and why, Finch was

able to name the discomfort of upholding a policy that does not align with their moral instinct. “Kind of going against your...your moral or ethical compass” (Finch).

4.3.4. Overarching Theme 3- Navigating Multiple Perspectives.

The overarching theme, Navigating Multiple Perspectives, captures how participants navigate differing viewpoints from the range of individuals they work with. This includes emotional tensions that arise when TsYP’s needs sit alongside differing staff, parent and community viewpoints.

School Staff Beliefs and Internal Tensions.

Throughout the participants' experiences, it appeared that when working with TsYP, they were navigating multiple perspectives on gender diversity. “You, as a school leader, you have to keep the scales balanced... The... dichotomy of everything else around that student, and every decision you make, you are accountable for” (Robin). In a caring profession where the primary focus is effectively supporting and nurturing CYP, having to respond to and consider multiple perspectives had appeared to create a unique complexity, which at times felt difficult to navigate. Raven, Sparrow and Robin described the intricacies of taking care when navigating multiple perspectives on gender diversity the most out of all participants. It appeared this was due to both the school’s cultural context and a journey of change and development the school was experiencing. Raven, Sparrow and Robin described their school as a “predominantly Muslim and full of girls” (Raven,) and this context arose frequently in narratives around navigating multiple perspectives. For example, when working with TsYP Robin, Raven,

and Sparrow highlighted how school staff's belief systems, which do not recognise or permit gender diversity, had been a consideration in their work with TsYP.

"people were kind of led by their belief system rather than... this is how we operate... because of our acceptance and understanding of equality and diversity" (Sparrow).

"That's not to say that any member of staff would be prejudiced... but it may be that they personally in their heart don't agree with it which, you know, is that's their decision, isn't it?" (Raven).

"Staff can be very emotionally driven... we've got members of staff... that are professional around gender questioning children but probably don't believe in it because of their own worldview... but they recognise the professionalism that they need to have around gender questioning, and that's crucial.", (Robin)

I experienced the similarity between the three narratives when discussing school staff's views on gender diversity, much like a shared intellectualisation or professional script that is understood by the organisation. I wondered if there is a sense of emotional comfort that comes from this, as tensions from potentially different viewpoints clashing, or difficulties, are placed on a 'script' or framework of the profession to help maintain these working relationships and move forward.

Parental and Community Perspectives.

During the interviews with Robin, Sparrow, and Raven, the cultural and religious context of the area felt very much present. I noted that fear of parental and community criticism due to their religious beliefs was mentioned frequently across all interviews. It felt an important part of the identity of school and therefore the narratives provided. For example, when discussing their experiences with parents of TsYP and the broader

parent-school community. The influence of parental opinions on school practice is broad, as they ultimately have responsibility for their TsYP. Participants did describe accompanying parents on a journey where relationships are built over time. The importance of involving parents in conversations around gender diversity was present in participants experiences. “We need to keep children safe and part of that is talking to parents and involving parents... providing you don't hide things from parents, they can say no” (Finch). “What's the worst thing they can do... they say no! ... and if they say no and you think it's going to put the child at risk then you make a MASH referral... You can't save the world!” (Robin). Robin, Sparrow, and Raven made reference to cultural and religious community contexts in their work with parents of TsYP, but Robin was the only participant to follow the narrative of reflecting on their own religious context and the interplay between the two. “I do know that within some conservative religious communities, it isn't accepted... My own experience is mostly around conservative Christians... that potentially may have had an influence... On feeling that you couldn't be open and honest about it for fear of judgment.” (Robin). Despite personal views not aligning with all parents’ perspectives and beliefs, participants conveyed the importance of respecting and understanding others' positions.

‘I'm sure it has happened... which the parents or carers were accepting to a point... it must be quite a shift for the parents, you know, they brought up a student, a child who's a girl, and suddenly they say they're not a girl...That's fair enough that people would be, you know, not sure, confused, scared, maybe angry.” “I had a degree of frustration around Father... but I knew that X wasn't my child, so I had to be respectful of the boundaries that dad was laying down.” (Robin).

Overall, however, participants appeared hesitant about conversations with parents, particularly with those who may have opinions or viewpoints different from their own. This is reflected in Raven's call for more guidance, "we're not given a lot of guidance on how to manage these situations at all, and how to manage conversations with parents and carers who some can be really accepting, and others not so?" (Raven).

Keeping TsYP Voices Central.

Participants' narratives emphasised a feeling of tension about how to keep TsYP voices at the centre of everything they do. Those in pastoral positions described a relational approach, the focus was on truly understanding TsYP's' thoughts and feelings. "We looked, we would spend time together talking about how they felt about that, how that would be perceived or accepted by family members. [Mm hmm]." (Wren). For some participants, the thought of TsYP not being listened to felt uncomfortable.

"Where there's any questioning of gender identity... to take that autonomy away from a student to kind of be able to think about it even... and as soon as they share it, have to, like pass it on to the parents and carers. I don't know, this just feels like a lot." (Raven).

Whereas for others, it was sometimes unavoidable to ensure their safeguarding.

"It becomes like a safeguarding issue because the child was really clear that they felt that their parents would not be accepting of their status... lots of staff... may have honoured the child's wishes indirectly... but obviously as a school we couldn't sanction that." (Finch).

However, Robin holds a slightly different perspective,

“You have to be really clear with yourself that you are student first and all the decisions that you make, you have to make in the interests of the student, we had to take him on the journey with us... for X’s own safety... to try and make sure that that that student first approach.... but you also have to make sure that when you're making those choices and those decisions that you, you provide balance, so you take into consideration the parents” (Robin).

Therefore, there is a tri-relational process occurring between TsYP, parent and school staff where one person is influencing another and there are competing loyalties having to hold both relationships without disregarding TsYP wants and needs. However, having to hold onto these complexities can limit progress and moving forward.

Therefore, this theme captures the ways in which participants experienced their role as one of holding multiple perspectives in mind at once, from parents, peers and wider belief systems while striving to keep TsYP’s needs and voices at the centre. Participants described the challenge of working within broader cultural, religious, and societal belief systems, often navigating faith-based and conservative contexts with caution. Participants shared feelings of being caught between competing views which is emotionally and professionally demanding. This balancing act at times left participants feeling cautious and unsure but also provided opportunities to demonstrate core beliefs of respect and inclusivity.

4.3.5. Overarching Theme 4- Emotional Labour, Safety and Containment

The overarching theme, Emotional Labour, Safety and Containment, captures how participants worked to create a safety for TsYP while managing their own emotional

tensions. This includes holding the emotions of others while having little space for their own.

Desire to Create a Sense of Safety.

This theme captures how participants discussed safety in their narratives. Participants shared the meaningfulness and protectiveness of the strong caring relationships they held with TsYP. Those in pastoral roles discussed feeling protective of TsYP, as over time they have developed a relational closeness, having a deep understanding of their needs. Sparrow discussed the “really good relationships” they held with the TsYP they had worked with. Sparrow, Wren and Robin all emphasise a TsYP-led approach where the primary aim is to protect the TsYP’s wellbeing and authenticity, wanting them to “feel okay” (Sparrow), “be themselves” (Wren), “be accepted” (Wren) and “get through difficulties” (Sparrow). Participants appeared to experience protection through the perceived threat and risk for TsYP. “I was worried for them, about how this would work and what the response would be, and I didn’t want it to be devastating” (Raven). “It’s threatening, quite frankly...and all you want to do is fight for that kid” (Robin). Even when the risk is reduced, the protective stance remains. “That was misplaced...I was protective” (Raven). In supervision I wondered whether the commonality between this protection relational closeness participants felt with TsYP may be indicative of a selection/volunteer bias, where participants chose to take part in the research because of these deep and meaningful relationships, they held with TsYP where they wished to protect them. Also, acknowledging my own positioning, which may have influenced the affective tone of this theme. However, there appeared to be some variation in responses, with negotiation of the boundaries and the professionalism of this protection and care. “I was providing... I know we’re not meant to, but providing a

cuddle if they needed one and just listening... you care a lot about [them] because you've worked with them really closely for years and years" (Wren). Conversely, Finch found a sense of protection and safety through the safeguarding procedures.

"What I wish we would have been able to do... is create an environment here in which they were... able to kind of be truly accepted... but... we couldn't, because if we'd have done that then... the parent would have found out... there would have been a parent complaint" (Finch).

Finch notes more professionalism, which is seen as them being more action-based over emotions. "There's an element of emotional connection that was absent... as a professional, it tends to be more action-based" (Finch).

Included in many narratives about safe spaces is the discussion of the school and the wider community being unsafe. "Rising hate crime" (Raven), "a lot of stigma" (Wren) and "It's a Wild West out there... it's threatening, quite frankly." (Robin). The perception of the wider world being unsafe created a sense of fear, frustration and sadness across participants. Robin, noting you needed to be "made of Teflon", suggests that, in response to this fear and emotional numbness, it is required. Wren shared feelings of "frustration" (Wren) at wider societies and senior school leadership's inaction, with there being "stigmas" surrounding gender diversity. In participants' narratives around safety, it was experienced as fragile where once they leave the school, negative things occur for TsYP. "In that moment... they feel accepted... you're empowering them; the minute they step out that bloody door, they can... make a derogatory comment and then you're back to square one." (Wren). In my reflective diary at the time I wrote, "There seems to be a tension or divide between the safe

bubble in school and the unsafe outside. Is this a way of protecting themselves or holding difficult emotions?” (Reflective Diary April 2025).

Feeling Unsupported and Professionally Vulnerable.

This theme captures the ways in which participants experienced feelings of vulnerability in their role. Participants shared a sense of risk when working with TsYP, fear of criticism from parents and communities or fear of deviating from formal guidance. Participants communicated feelings of isolation and being unsupported by the systems around them, which has left them feeling inadequately trained, doubting their capabilities and lacking in confidence. These doubts of oneself seemed to lead to participants feeling fearful or guilty about making mistakes.

Across participants’ accounts, the idea of risk was shared, leading school staff to feel exposed and professionally vulnerable. A perceived prevalent source of criticism threaded through accounts was criticism from parents and the community, which was linked to the idea that social media and the news are unruly, uncontrollable and intensify the feeling of scrutiny and risk. “You’ve only got to read the Daily Mail to know there are aspects of society that will attack you. Decisions could be splashed across the pages of the Daily Mail... you have to be made of Teflon” (Robin). Participants’ experiences of risk and threat were also linked to a perceived threat to community norms and religion. For example, Wren shared that their schools were “very boy heavy, very Asian heavy, very Muslim heavy...a much more hostile environment to be different in” (Wren). Sparrow added that “for lots of our school community...it would have been quite hard for them” (Sparrow), suggesting that the TsYP population was low in their school due to the religious context of the school community. Participants

perceived certain religions and cultures as less accepting, which seemed to affect how open and inclusive they were. “Within some conservative religious communities, it isn’t accepted... You couldn’t be open and honest about it for fear of judgment.” (Robin). The perceived level of risk in discussing the implications of religion and parental criticism was experienced in the interview space as something highly defended against. When freely associating about this topic, Wren’s, Robin’s and Sparrow’s accounts had a high level of hesitations and pauses. Despite naming the perceived level of risk, none of them continued to discuss what actual implications this context had on their experiences and practices, beyond it feeling risky. They feel professionally vulnerable, and they moved on. During my questioning in the second interview, I decided to pose a broad question to lead us back down that narrative; however, none of them wished to discuss it. Due to the context of being recorded in the room, the idea of being professionally vulnerable was palpable, and therefore, these discussions are highly defended against. For some participants, the concepts of risk and professional vulnerability elicited fear, which was contained through engagement with the policy. “There has to be guidance because it gives you a framework... to protect the school and staff” (Robin). However, some participants found that guidance that was too broad, vague, or politicised added to feelings of professional vulnerability. “There’s a lack of guidance generally...even the wording of [RSE] is quite vague.” (Raven). Raven’s hesitations, self-edited and constant fear of saying the wrong thing in the interview added to the idea of risk and professional vulnerability. In supervision, I considered how the perceived risk was intertwined with practice, amplified by media narratives and policy ambiguity, pushing school staff towards greater defensiveness. This made decision-making and practice feel risky, and therefore some participants frequently emphasised the importance of complying with guidance. This is a parallel process,

which I believe I experienced in my role. The idea of risk and professional vulnerability was regularly shared by the participants, making me hesitant about my role as a researcher and ultimately leading me to be very preoccupied with confidentiality and with ensuring that the participants weren't professionally vulnerable.

Participants discussed feeling professionally vulnerable and unsupported in their roles, with narratives of no one preparing them to work with TsYP emerging. Specifically, participants raised concerns about feeling unprepared and unsupported due to gaps in training and practice guidance. "We didn't have any knowledge...I didn't get any training on it at all... I remember feeling a bit pissed off." (Raven). School staff communicated frustration about the lack of this support being in place and called for more concrete tools for specific moments when working with TsYP, such as Raven asking for particular guidance on "conversations with parents" and how, without this in place, participants described having to do their own learning and seeking to train themselves. The affective impact of this feeling on unpreparedness was experienced as personal and heavy at times, marked by self-doubt, guilt, and a sense of having missed something, as if the structural gap had become an individual failure. "I took it really personally; I felt that I really let them down... after [the interview] ... feelings like guilt...maybe I could have done more." (Raven). Unpreparedness was a feeling among the participants, but it was also reflected in the system. "We are finite in the resources that are available to us...we can't create resources that don't exist." (Robin), "I would have liked to provide that space at lunchtime...but it came down to staffing and space." (Wren). In supervision, when thinking about this theme, I noted that people may misinterpret that being unprepared may evoke the sense that there is also a lack of care, it is actually quite the opposite. Participants have to navigate an under-

resourced system with a perceived high level of risk, unclear guidance, and gaps in training. This led school staff to make defensive decisions, such as feeling compelled to undertake their own training and train independently. I wondered whether these feelings of being unprepared reflect the system's inability to meet the needs of school staff and TsYP. Until there is training close to practice, reflective supervision, and timely support, individual practitioners are often left to fill that gap on their own.

Holding Uncomfortable Feelings with Limited Space.

This theme captures the ways in which participants experienced both the need for containment and the provision of containment when working with TsYP. With limited space to process their own emotions, they often felt overwhelmed while simultaneously expected to absorb, hold, and regulate the emotions of TsYP and their families. All participants illustrated feelings of helplessness due to the pressures arising from their roles, and all participants described ways in which they manage these difficult emotions. Wren and Robin emphasised the limits to their role "Helpless because you know there's only do much you can do" (Wren). "I've learned that I have to sit with my feelings rather than fight my feelings... I recognise that we are educators. We're never going to save the world...I have to rationalise with myself that I've done everything that I could do" (Robin). Others commented that the emotional load at times means they have to create their own 'protections' or compartmentalise. "Personally my way of dealing with the difficulties around safeguarding is to create my own protections, and my own protections I call my armour" (Sparrow). "You just push it to the side and carry on." (Finch). Therefore, in the absence of spaces to hold these uncomfortable feelings, school staff are developing their own ways of coping with the emotional load, most of which involve defences (e.g., pushing it away).

4.3.4 Overarching Theme 5- Systems, Constraints and Change

The overarching theme, Systems, Constraints and Change, captures how participants experienced the wider structured shaping their work with TsYP. Participants described working within systems that often felt limiting yet still finding themselves adapting and responding to a changing landscape around gender diversity.

Feeling Constrained by Surrounding Systems.

This theme captures how participants experienced the systems around them. The participants reflected on feeling powerless in the face of broader forces, such as the politicisation of trans identities, socio-political pressures, and the overwhelming influence of media. Also, they feel limited by the systems around them and unable to change due to the high demands placed on underfunded services. Here, there are also considerations made to how gender is represented within these school systems, with many being shaped by cisnormativity (from the curriculum to policies), impacting inclusive practices. Overall, these systemic and cultural forces left participants feeling anxious, powerless and conflicted; even when motivated to support TsYP, they felt constrained by the wider structures and debates beyond their immediate control.

Across participants' narratives, references were made to the school structures, most of which are fixed and present constraints when working with TsYP. These structures included the physical school space (e.g., toilets and changing rooms), administrative systems (such as using preferred names on reports), school culture (considering what a typical assembly or class looks like), or the inclusion or exclusion of discussions

around gender within the curriculum. A tension existed between what the participants felt was feasible within their role and what was actually possible. One thing that did seem possible was some administrative systems, which, despite not being necessarily designed for trans inclusion, often defaulted to the name and gender given at birth rather than chosen names. Some school staff viewed these changes as straightforward and found simple solutions. “We changed the name on the school system and used... preferred names... and in any dialogue with the family, the birth name was used.” (Robin). However, even these modest adjustments felt challenging and risky for some, especially since they couldn’t change their name on the system due to the lack of parental consent and the way policies and guidance made this clear, which reflects how the system is set up to accommodate a binary norm. “We couldn’t officially make that change... parental consent... we did what we could within the school... but it wasn’t possible.” (Finch). When it came to physical spaces, participants described how gendered toilets and changing areas created practical challenges, with no clear solutions available. “For my young people, I was getting them changed in the toilets... not very nice... I understand the school’s point of view that there needs to be single sex changing rooms; they’re trying to safeguard everybody” (Wren). This was especially difficult in single-sex settings and strongly gendered contexts, which amplified these tensions. However, during interviews with Robin, Raven, and Sparrow, these issues were defended, and when I asked about the context of single-sex schools, all participants found it hard to explicitly consider how this impacts practice. In my research diary, I wondered how the constraints of the surrounding system led participants to bend to fit it rather than work to reshape it (Reflective Diary March 2025). The system imposes boundaries and constraints on the school staff’s roles, aligning them with what is within their authority.

Participants described feeling powerless in the current socio-political context, with dynamics outside of the school influencing school practice and work with TsYP. This included the politicisation, polarisation and framing of a culture war around trans-identities. “We haven’t actually moved on that much... there’s still a lot of stigma... a lot of hush hush.” (Wren). “It’s been weaponised...to divide groups...making political gain of something that is kind of life and death.” (Raven). This occasionally caused fears about being professionally vulnerable, as previously outlined, with some participants emphasising the need to remain “politically impartial” (Robin). Therefore, the politicisation and social discourse surrounding TsYP may be influencing schools to perceive them in the same way, and, as a result, remaining politically neutral impacts their experiences with TsYP. What was omitted from narratives and potentially defended against is the idea of what the impact of political neutrality is to school staff. These pressures from the socio-political context appeared to prompt some participants to change how they support TsYP, with Finch favouring smaller, more targeted approaches over whole-school ones, such as assemblies, for fear of a negative reaction. Raven emphasised how the social and political discourse surrounding trans-identities felt silencing for them and their colleagues through fear of saying the wrong thing. “Stuff in the press makes people more reticent to talk about it at all... a fear of getting things wrong.” (Raven). Therefore, the socio-political context was experienced as frustrating, fatiguing, and creating a sense of powerlessness, influencing and shaping education and the support provided to TsYP.

Change Brings Growing Pains and Exciting Opportunities.

This theme captures how participants experienced a journey of personal and professional growth and adaptation while working with TsYP. Growth and learning were described as occurring through collaboration, professional empowerment, and direct learning from lived experiences. Beyond individual progress, school staff noticed broader changes in discourse around gender diversity and recognised generational differences in how gender is understood. School staff's feelings about change were mixed; some expressed a desire for progress and social justice, whereas others felt uncertain, reluctant to challenge, or experienced a loss of optimism. Holding both hope and hesitation for the future.

In response to changing contexts, participants displayed a range of reactions and emotional experiences. Some held a genuine desire for social progress and things to change, framing this changing context as part of the evolving nature of the school role which now includes more social justice work. They supported and advocated for marginalised students by using the curriculum and small group spaces to foster a sense of safety and promote a school ethos rooted in acceptance and inclusivity. Others appeared cautious about change, feeling uncertain and less optimistic, often clinging to policies due to fears about consent and criticism from parents. For example, in response to change, some participants relied on compliance. "We abided by those policies...having a conversation about it is not really helpful...those thoughts are outside the policy; we can't do it anyway." (Finch). In the research diary, I noted that "they are opening up (students becoming more accepting and engaging in more open conversations) but also tightening (heightened resistance, polarised opinions)." I was curious whether a split was occurring around perceptions of people and policies as accepting or not accepting. "We have progressed and we've regressed...it's

frustrating... the politics around gender made people more reticent to talk at all... a fear of getting things wrong.” (Raven). Participants also described their curriculum responses, noting their early-career idealism and how, over time, they had become more pessimistic as a form of self-protection. This involved questioning practices, setting boundaries, and safeguarding themselves. Having initially held many hopes for change and social progress when starting their careers, they now tend to adopt a perspective that emphasises protecting themselves within a slowly changing system, rather than getting their hopes up. “You can’t save the world... you have to draw a line between knowing you’ve done everything within your professional boundaries... you have to protect yourself as well in this political environment.” (Robin). Overall, there were different responses to change: a desire, a hesitancy, an uncertainty, a reluctance and an excitement.

5. Discussion

5.1. Overview of Chapter

The objective of this research was to explore school staff's experiences of working with TsYP using a psychosocial approach. This discussion chapter aims to synthesise the research, enabling an understanding of where this fits within the existing literature. The chapter will begin by summarising the findings of this research in line with the research questions. The findings will be contextualised, explored and interpreted in relation to the existing literature to provide meaning for the profession. This will involve evaluating these findings by exploring how they support or challenge the broader literature. Proposed implications of this research for school practice and the EP profession will be outlined, along with opportunities for further research. The strengths, limitations and recommendations in this research are described before concluding this chapter with my personal reflections on the research and the journey of learning and development.

5.2. Commentary on the Findings

This research involved five staff members from three secondary schools in southern England. The psychosocial approach added a new depth not yet explored in this research area, allowing consideration of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and societal influences. The goal of this approach and the themes created during the data analysis process was not to generalise the data or assume shared experiences across participants, but to capture their individual narratives whilst identifying tentative

patterns within a group of educational professionals who have experience working with TsYP. The overarching themes are: Professional Responsibility, Professional Identity and Role, Navigating Multiple Perspectives, Emotional Labour, Safety and Containment, and Systems, Constraints and Change. However, within these themes, the participants were seen as individuals with their own unique ways of understanding and experiencing the world, both consciously and unconsciously. The previous chapter described the overarching themes from the FANIM interviews; this chapter will discuss the key findings for each research question, considering where these findings sit within the existing literature and theory.

5.2.1. RQ1- What are the school staff's experiences of working with TsYP at school?

Participants care deeply about TsYP but feel stretched by the role's demands and responsibilities.

Feeling the Duty of a Caring Profession.

School staff hold a legal responsibility for CYP's safety and wellbeing and are bound to laws, such as the Equality Act (2010). However, the care and admiration expressed by the school staff participants appeared to extend beyond legal obligations. Participants who worked closely with TsYP (typically in pastoral roles) described a sense of relational closeness to the TsYP they worked with, which increased their responsibility for their safety and well-being. Other participants, generally those in senior school roles, spoke of feelings of care, concern and responsibility when working with the adults surrounding TsYP. Their position of authority appears to have brought

responsibilities, such as making decisions, acting as gatekeepers to further support, and representing the school. These participants discussed difficult decisions about whether to offer whole-school or targeted support, weighing their responsibility to TsYP as well as to the rest of the students and the school. This responsibility for decision-making and representing the school system heightened feelings of uncertainty and a fear of criticism or public backlash. In participants' accounts, school was often depicted as the gatekeeper to accessing additional CYP services, serving as the initial "cog" (Robin) in a wheel. For some, referring to external services provided reassurance; for others, it evoked frustration and disappointment at the services' perceived inadequacies. Participants shared concerns that constraints on external services led to a shift in school staff expectations, such as providing more therapeutic support, which they did not feel competent to deliver effectively.

Pressures of Deciding the Correct Approach.

For those working closely with TsYP, it is unsurprising that a meaningful, caring relationship was described, as wider literature suggests TsYP view school staff as integral to their experiences of school, being central to their academic success and social and emotional wellbeing (Evans & Rawlings, 2021; Leonard, 2022; McBride, 2021; McGuire et al., 2010; Tyni et al., 2023). Similar to the wider literature, participants described the difficulties of decision-making when planning an appropriate way to support TsYP and creating an inclusive, affirming space. Some participants raised concerns about using whole-school approaches (e.g., assemblies and curriculum changes) because they feared community backlash. This is similar to Mangin's (2019) findings that principals are hesitant about whole-school approaches and favour indirect ones. However, Kuhlemeier et al. (2021) found that participants

preferred more whole-school, generalised support over targeted support, as they believed this was a less stigmatising and more equal approach. Finch was the only participant in this study who appeared to hold a similar sentiment that any support offered had to be fair; therefore, they favoured safeguarding policies, as it was seen as a way of ensuring a fair approach for all.

Where this finding also appears to differ from the wider literature is in the emphasis placed on external support services and on the school's role in making referrals to access them. This research is situated in a context where CYP services are under strain and undergoing development, such as long waiting times for EPs and speech and language therapists (DfE, 2024), high demand for appointments at gender identity clinics (Tavistock and Portman Foundation Trust, 2025), and ongoing changes being made to NHS pathways for gender-related healthcare (TCR, 2024). I question whether external support services are more prevalent in the data than in the wider literature, given the current context. However, referrals to external services were predominantly included in narratives surrounding co-occurring needs, such as autism and social, emotional, and mental health needs, which aligns with existing research (Meyer et al., 2016; Simmons, 2020). As not all TsYP will need to access CYP support services, I wonder whether a self-selection bias is present, where participants chose to volunteer in the research because they had more complex experiences that required increased support over time.

Participants seek clarity and structure in their role, navigating uncertainty about their professional position when supporting TsYP.

Desire for Clarity and Structure in Role.

The pressure and demands of responsibilities appeared to lead participants to seek clarity, structure, and boundaries in their roles, to understand where they fit within the context of other services, and to alleviate some of the high levels of responsibility that the school staff hold. Participants expressed the negative effects of increased expectations and the growing weight of responsibility on school staff, often without adequate policies, guidance, and support. They shared a desire for clarity and understanding of their role when working with TsYP, including the boundaries and limits of their power and authority, and how this role fits within other CYP support services. Without role clarity, participants reported feeling professionally disempowered and overwhelmed by responsibilities they do not feel equipped to manage. Most participants called for clear procedures to set boundaries around their work, though a few valued the freedom that comes with a less structured approach.

Feelings of uncertainty about the role and professional identity when working with TsYP are seldom found in the existing literature. I wonder whether this is more prevalent in school staff's current experiences, as this research is situated in a unique time of political and social discourse with changing legal frameworks (House of Commons, 2025) and guidance (DfE, 2023), so there may be some confusion and uncertainty about the school staff role and what good practice looks like. There has also not yet been any formalised guidance on gender questioning from the DfE, leaving school staff unsure about the future. However, the lack of concrete and clear guidance and policy is not a new finding. Payne and Smith (2014) and Simmons (2020) found that school staff sought policy and guidance when working with TsYP, as they were fearful of unfamiliar situations and wanted protection and clarity. However, they

became frustrated when this guidance was not available, which heightened feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. In line with existing research, the current guidance was perceived as largely generic, and there were hopes that any new guidance would be more specific (e.g., on how to approach and manage conversations with parents) (Simmons, 2020; Markland et al., 2023).

Participants are navigating differing perspectives on gender diversity, often feeling pulled by competing viewpoints.

TsYP, Parent, School and Wider Community.

Participants discussed holding multiple perspectives simultaneously and navigating them with caution, including faith, culture and wider belief systems. This appeared to function as a tri-relational process between TsYP, school staff and the school community (e.g., parents/carers). Participants described variable experiences with parents, ranging from resistance and anger to positivity and connection. Within the school setting, participants described their experiences of navigating various responses from peers and other staff members regarding gender diversity (e.g., from acceptance and curiosity to discrimination and harm). Some participants found these competing demands to be an emotional and professional strain, as they endeavoured to practice in a CYP-centred way whilst respecting and considering all these safeguarding-related perspectives. Participants described a balancing act, feeling cautious and uncertain about proceeding without adequate support and guidance; however, navigating these perspectives also offered opportunities to demonstrate core values or respect and inclusivity.

Within the broader literature, the need for school staff to navigate multiple perspectives and responses is a prominent feature. Staff have described having to respond to peers' bullying behaviours to ensure that TsYP are safe (Payne & Smith, 2014; Frohard-Dourlent, 2016; Simmons, 2020). Similarly, others have described balancing the needs and views of TsYP, deciding what to communicate to parents (Meyer et al., 2016; Simmons, 2020), and responding to resistance and anger from parents with limited support (Simmons, 2020; Mangin, 2019). Participants' experiences of narratives surrounding parental criticism were often associated with discussions of religion and culture, making assumptions that, as these schools are in predominantly Muslim areas, there would be limited visibility, support and understanding of TsYP. In line with existing research, these assumptions could exemplify ethnocentrism and the implications of assumptions or stereotypes (Simmons, 2020; Meyer et al., 2016). However, in line with the findings of Markland et al. (2023), school staff do not yet feel supported by infrastructure and support systems to facilitate these discussions with parents. I was curious whether parents' views were frequently featured in school staff's accounts, given the emphasis on their informed consent in recent changes to curriculum and guidance. For example, school staff are now expected to be transparent with parents about the contents of the RSE curriculum (RSE, 2019), and the recent draft guidance on gender questioning children emphasises that engaging parents in decision-making is the default (DfE, 2023). This may indicate an evolution of the school staff role, in which they are having to hold an increasing number of perspectives in mind whilst trying to centre the TsYP.

Participants' experiences are emotionally demanding, with limited support to themselves.

Desire to Create a Sense of Safety.

Under this overarching theme (Emotional Labour, Safety, and Containment), participants illustrated the emotional experiences of working with TsYP, shaped by their roles and school contexts. An important factor influencing participants' emotional experiences was the perceived levels of safety for TsYP in school and the wider community, as well as the desire to protect them. Those working closely with TsYP daily (typically those in pastoral roles) described a relational closeness which fostered a deep concern for their safety and well-being. Some participants sought to create a sense of safety and protection by establishing groups and clubs for LGBTQ+ CYP, describing feelings of sadness, guilt and shame when they felt they were unable to protect the TsYP in their school from negative experiences. Others in more senior leadership roles discussed safety in terms of safeguarding procedures, viewing safety and protection as more action-oriented than emotional.

Participants often framed the wider community as unsafe due to their understanding of current events, news, politics and media surrounding trans identities. Having little control or authority outside the school environment, which was perceived as unsafe and unpredictable, left participants feeling fear, frustration, and powerlessness. Some participants appeared to manage these difficult feelings by compartmentalising or detaching to cope, while some increasingly tried to prepare and equip TsYP for adulthood in an unsafe wider community.

A desire to create a sense of safety is reflected in the existing literature, with principal participants feeling an increased sense of responsibility for fostering a nurturing and

supportive school environment (Mangin, 2019). Similarly, participants in Frohard-Dourlent study (2016) framed themselves as sources of safety, protection, and support, but tended not to acknowledge their role within systems of power and discrimination, creating a sense of unsafety. This was especially evident among staff from single-sex schools, who were hesitant to acknowledge that their school structure was inherently biased towards cisnormativity. Where this research deviates from existing literature is that participants rarely discussed the specifics of how schools were developing their supportive and inclusive practices for TsYP. Some of the points briefly referenced included LGBTQ+ assemblies, groups/clubs, and focus groups; providing them with appropriate facilities; and respecting their chosen names and pronouns. This was similar to processes discussed in the existing literature that aimed to protect TsYP from discrimination and to create a culturally respectful environment (Payne & Smith, 2014; Meyer et al., 2016; Wiltz, 2018; Curtis, 2019). However, any support may have been hindered by a sense of unease and fear that any approach used would be met with community backlash and resistance (Markland et al., 2023).

Feeling Unsupported and Professionally Vulnerable.

Participants discussed feeling professionally vulnerable in their role due to fear of criticism and backlash from parents, carers and the school community. This perceived level of risk appeared to stem from the wider community being seen as dangerous and divisive, with polarised opinions on gender diversity and the school's role in this. This led to participants holding tightly onto formalised safeguarding guidance and policy, and to avoid stepping outside of it. Participants reported increased insecurity and vulnerability when these policies were unclear or non-existent, and they wanted clearer guidance and more comprehensive training. In participants' narratives, feelings

of unsafety were also increased by their perceived lack of support from their surrounding systems.

Across the existing literature, similar findings have been reported, indicating that school staff commonly feel concerned about how to support TsYP effectively (Simmons, 2020). Participants often felt nervous about making a mistake (Markland et al., 2023), anxious, unprepared, and uncertain (Payne & Smith, 2014), and doubted their competence and confidence (Simmons, 2020; Markland et al., 2023). In this study, these narratives were often associated with a perceived lack of professional training and knowledge of TsYP. Without sufficient introduction to TsYP, staff struggle to navigate complex issues related to gender identity, leaving them feeling stressed, anxious and incompetent (Payne & Smith, 2014; Meyer et al., 2016; Curtis, 2019). With most literature in this area dating back to the last ten years, it suggests that there may have been no developments in creating concrete training offers for school staff or in helping them feel more competent and capable of supporting TsYP effectively, particularly for those who are already professionally trained to be teachers. Therefore, this emphasises the importance of including specific training as part of professional development.

Holding Uncomfortable Feelings with Limited Space.

When considering the combination of a lack of safety and a lack of support in participants' narratives, they all shared a feeling of being overwhelmed and unable to support TsYP effectively, doing their jobs as well as they wanted. Participants discussed how having little time or space to process this emotional load in their role, while still responding to the emotional experiences of others (TsYP, parents/carers

and students), created an emotional weight that was challenging to manage. Some participants shared their previous experiences of supervision or their desire to create supervisory spaces to make sense of this emotional load, but nearly all participants emphasised the importance of school staff supporting one another. This finding was seldom discussed within the existing and wider literature in this area. However, there is literature depicting the importance of providing supervisory spaces for school staff and how EPs can play a role in developing or facilitating these. For example, in EPs' supervision of Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) (Atkin, 2019; France & Billington, 2020; Osborne & Burton, 2014; Ridley, 2017).

Participants' experiences are constrained by surrounding systems that are in a process of change.

Feeling Constrained by Surrounding Systems.

Across this overarching theme (Systemic Constraints and Change), all participants described how the wider systems around them influenced and limited their practice with TsYP. Some participants discussed feeling powerless in the face of broader forces, such as politics, news, and media, emphasising how trans identities are often politicised and how polarisation occurs between the 'left' and 'right'. Additionally, participants expressed feeling powerless within a cisnormative organisation (school) that segregates genders throughout the physical environment, curriculum, uniforms and pervasive school cultures. However, these discussions appeared less frequently than I expected in the wider literature, prompting my curiosity about potential hesitations and defences regarding how the school structure may implicitly contribute to negative experiences for TsYP. Beyond political and organisational perspectives on

TsYP, some participants (typically those in senior roles) referenced the government's systemic underfunding of schools and how this has affected the resources available to support TsYP. Overall, these systemic constraints in participants' narratives were described as causing feelings of anxiety and conflict about how to proceed, especially in the absence of clear guidance and policy. Even when highly motivated to support TsYP, they felt hindered by these external structures and debates beyond their control.

The idea of TsYP being perceived politically is reflected throughout this research and existing studies in this area. Similar to participants' accounts, Payne and Smith (2014) found that they were worried about being seen as 'pro-transgender' or 'promoting' gender diversity, which is associated with political activism. There is an ongoing implication across these findings and the literature that supporting TsYP is controversial and that the school must remain neutral. Although participants made little reference to their own political beliefs, they did recognise others' beliefs and how this affects practice.

From a psychosocial perspective, the notion that anyone could be completely neutral is, I believe, a misconception, as even if school staff avoid discussing gender diversity, they still hold personal beliefs shaped by different contexts and ways of understanding the world around them. We all have our own conscious and unconscious understandings and biases, and I believe it would be impossible to remain truly 'neutral'; doing so would mean not being your authentic self at work.

Historically and currently, schools are often asked to adopt a neutral stance. For example, the revised RSE guidance states that school staff must remain neutral and

“should not teach as fact that all people have gender identity” (DfE, 2025, p36). Concerns among school staff about being perceived as “promoting” gender diversity, along with changes in RSE guidance, seem reminiscent of Section 28 of the Local Government Act (1988), where school staff were prohibited from “promoting the teaching of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship” (Local Government Act, 1988, p.26). Historically and today, supporting TsYP appears to be perceived as a risky area, partly due to the conflation of sex with sexuality and gender diversity, which is regarded as inappropriate for children and young people (Payne & Smith, 2014).

Change Brings Growing Pains and Exciting Possibilities.

Despite the constraining, fixed structures present in participants’ experiences, they emphasised positive and negative processes of change. Participants discussed changes in public discourse regarding gender diversity and differences across generations in how gender is perceived. Feelings about this change varied: some expressed a desire for progress and social justice, whereas others felt uncertain, reluctant to challenge, or experienced a loss of optimism. Some participants described experiencing personal growth, both professionally and personally, while working with TsYP. When participants described their meaningful caring relationships with TsYP, they noted that profound moments of learning from the TsYP led to positive, enriching changes in their worldview.

This was also found in the wider literature, where working with TsYP was considered professionally enriching, alleviating fears, broadening perspectives, and deepening understanding of diversity (Curits, 2019; Simmons, 2020; Wiltz, 2018). Overall,

participants' narratives about change were mixed, having both a hope for change and social progress and improved practice, as well as personal and professional development, but also a hesitation, as change sometimes brings uncertainty and uncomfortable emotions related to the unknown, especially if the change is not perceived as beneficial.

5.2.2. RQ2- *What can be understood about the experiences of school staff working with TsYP from a psychoanalytical and psychosocial perspective?*

The psychosocial approach to this research has helped highlight the emotional experience of supporting and discussing support for TsYP in the current context, which has not yet been considered in this way. The analysis of the findings revealed that the emotional experiences of the role were identified across all themes, but they were particularly prevalent in the overarching theme three, 'Emotional Labour, Safety and Containment', as well as in the researcher's experiences, including feelings of stress, anxiety and fear. Potential defences against the discomfort of holding these emotions, both in the individual and in the system, were noted, adding a new layer of understanding of how staff manage and experience their roles in supporting TsYP. The following will discuss this further considering the individual defences that may have been present in the interview and sharing something of the emotional experiences, group defences in how staff have experienced being positioned by others in school and organisational defences in how staff have taken up their role in a system under pressure. Reflections will then be shared about applying psychoanalytical concepts in this research project.

Individual Defences.

When referring to individual defences present in the participants' interviews, attention was paid to potential indicators or threats, as well as defences such as hesitations, avoidances, intellectualisation, body language, and what might be hard to say. Attention was then directed to my experience to see what this might reveal about the emotional experiences present, applying the psychoanalytic concepts of countertransference and projection.

Across all the interviews, there was a potential presence of individual defences in what participants shared and the way they presented in the space. Throughout the research, there were observable moments of hesitation, editing, fidgeting, and internalisation that seemed to occur when narratives with emotional weight were discussed. For example, Raven's potential nervousness at the beginning of the first interview, holding the cushion tightly on their lap, stroking it, and folding their arms when approaching more challenging topics. Additionally, all participants used frequent hesitations and careful language editing, which may have indicated fear and anxiety about making mistakes or getting it wrong. Moreover, the repeated cancellation and rescheduling of interviews by Wren, alongside silences and omissions when following a narrative of a TsYP's emotional crisis, was tentatively perceived as avoidance of overwhelming material or difficulty in containing it within the interview space. Repeated listening to the interviews and frequent diary entries helped identify potential defensive dynamics, suggesting that working with TsYP involves an emotional weight unconsciously defended against. It also indicated that the interview space and context itself were developing a sense of discomfort and threat.

Across participants' narratives, there appeared to be some splitting around certain topics, most notably: safe school vs unsafe outside; supportive peers vs unsupportive parents; and TsYP who was challenging to work with vs TsYP who was easy to work with. As Waddell (1998) suggests, splitting becomes a mechanism for managing unpleasant aspects of the self and objects, in which objects are perceived as exclusively good or bad. From a Kleinian perspective, schools that create an emotionally supportive environment could help move away from viewing objects within extremes.

Group Defences.

Throughout the interviews, data emerged that could suggest group-level defences, such as school staff managing their anxiety by collectively projecting it onto one another or by taking on particular roles within the school. This may have been shown in how responsibilities were shared amongst the school staff, with them saying they would "tag team" or that supervision spaces were being created, and that they looked for networks to support decision-making. These group practices could be understood in relation to Bion's idea of dependency, in which the group unconsciously depends on others to handle anxieties that feel too much to manage alone. Additionally, certain people sometimes become the 'knowers' or protectors of the group, like Finch, who was often turned to for clear answers. This helped others avoid the stress of uncertainty. While these arrangements offered short-term relief, they could also place excessive emotional pressure on a few individuals.

Across participants' narratives, the container-contained dynamic appeared to be a common tension. There were times described in which school staff were the container or providing the containing space for TsYP, other students, parents/carers, other members of staff and the system. In this context, Bion's (1962) concept of the container and the contained could be applied to how school staff can hold onto others' intense emotions and return them in a less threatening form. Participants described providing containment through the relationships they developed but also through groups, clubs or form time. Here, it appeared that participants were holding on to more powerful feelings from others and making sense of them so they could be returned to the system in a more tolerable way. For example, when Raven described their positive form time space, or when Robin outlined difficult conversations they had with parents who were upset and confused, supporting them in making sense of the changes occurring. In the changing context of the TsYP potentially transitioning, as well as the changing context of policy, politics, and social discourse around gender diversity, it appeared that school staff were creating holding environments and potentially transitional spaces. In this context, Winnicott (1960) described holding spaces as places that provide not only physical holding but also emotional regulation, serving as a place for development and progress. However, there appeared to be a pull toward these containers seeking containment themselves. According to Bion (1962), feeling contained is to know that something else is holding onto the unmanageable, a feeling that ideally supports the individual. Across participants' narratives, there appeared to be a desire to find containment in different places. Some participants who felt a high affective load of anxiousness and fear about making mistakes found containment in relationships, procedures, and supervision. Others found relief and containment through referrals to external services, recognising the boundaries of their role and

having shared responsibility. Some participants commented on their lack of containment in role and how this left them holding more procedurally and emotionally, increasing the likelihood of overwhelm.

Organisational Defences.

Across participants' narratives, social and institutional defences were evident, particularly when discussing the high level of responsibility and pressure they experience when working with TsYP. These uncomfortable feelings of pressure were reflected in both the individuals and the systems/institutions they work within. In the interviews, school staff appeared to manage their anxiety and uncomfortable emotional experiences through defences such as intellectualising, avoidance, and routinising, especially when feeling at risk of scrutiny. This could be understood through Menzies Lyth's (1960) theories on how organisations and institutions unconsciously build social defences. For example, with participants' narratives at risk of scrutiny, the organisation uses compliance as a social defence, increasing its focus on standardisation and policy. This was most evident in Finch's experiences, where feelings of safety are rooted in procedures and policies. Overall, the defences shown in the interviews appeared to reflect a defended system.

Reflections on Application of Theory.

As highlighted in the introduction to this research, applying psychodynamic concepts to discussions of TsYP required awareness, as methodological tensions were present. I reflected on how these psychoanalytic principles may sit uneasily alongside my own position as a queer person who sees themselves as an advocate for TsYP. The gendered assumptions embedded in constructs such as containment and projection

may not have been explicitly interrogated during the analytic phase, and recognising this has prompted me to consider how my dual identities as researcher and advocate shaped what I was able to see and what remained unexamined. Upon further reflection, I have come to understand this research as enacting a reparative reading of post-Kleinian thought, an attempt to draw on its psychosocial insights to understand human experience in depth while implicitly working against some of its limitations. In acknowledging this, the research demonstrates an ongoing process of navigating theoretical frameworks, personal commitments, and professional identities, with the broader aim of contributing to the current literature and ultimately supporting our understanding of both school staff and the TsYP with whom they work.

5.3. Implications of the Findings

This section will now look at the implications of these findings for a range of educational professionals and organisations, including EPs. Fundamentally, the research has found that in this changing national and local context surrounding gender diversity school staff are having to navigate significant complexities psychologically and socially. EPs, as a close professional to school staff who have speciality knowledge of school settings, CYP and the application of psychology, are well placed to be able to support school staff through this time of change.

5.3.1. Supporting the School Staff to Make Sense of Their Role

School staff are feeling their duties and responsibilities in their role but feel that the role can be ambiguous and that they need some clarity about what is expected of them

and the role boundaries. Emphasising who does what, where authority ends and when to pass it on, so school staff are clear on what they need to do to support TsYP. Information could be shared via professional training, during inductions into the school staff role or on teacher training days. However, consideration would also need to be given to the referral pathways available for TsYP to access further support and whether the balance of responsibility and support provided to schools is adequate for triaging CYP and determining the type of support required. If waiting lists and referrals to CAMHS, GIDS and EPs are long, consideration is needed for what support can be offered in the meantime to ensure schools and TsYP are effectively supported and held. EPs are well placed as individuals who understand the school staff role and the organisation in close detail to help unpick and support the clarity of their role. This could support staff to think about what responsibility is theirs, what responsibility is theirs, and how we can get these others on board. Facilitating the clarity of the role could also come from providing school staff with workshops based on current laws, legislation and application of current psychology.

5.3.2. Containing the Container

School staff can feel unsupported in role and are holding uncomfortable feelings with limited space. They are providing containment and creating holding environments for TsYP but may not be offered these consistently in role themselves, meaning they are having to hold a significant emotional load. Commissioning group supervision spaces not focused on management or problem solving necessarily but holding a distinct focus on providing containment of difficult emotional experiences (e.g., guilt, shame and pressure) would help make sense of them moving forward. This would support

sharing the emotional load amongst the group and fostering a shared understanding and feeling of support and connection. This would be particularly important for those who hold more responsibility or have a closeness to risky or emotional experiences. For example, those in pastoral roles have to respond to a TsYP's co-occurring mental health needs without support themselves. Therefore, staff need emotional containment to ensure their safety and wellbeing, as well as ensuring that they will be able to continue in their role, providing effective practice, being the container for others.

EPs are well placed to provide containment for the containers (school staff) or support them to create spaces in which this can occur. For example, starting to facilitate a peer group supervision, modelling how the process runs and then letting this supervision group continue on its own. EPs can also offer consultation or 1:1 supervision to understand feelings of guilt, pressure to get it right and anxiety and help them sit with the unknown and maintain their curiosity. Instead of being tightly bound by policy or one way of thinking.

5.3.3. Supporting School Staff to Keep TsYP Safe

School staff expressed a desire to create a sense of safety in schools for TsYP, particularly when the outside world feels unsafe. In the absence of clear guidance, school staff have to make decisions about what support is needed and who could require help. For example, a separate space for shared decision making would be helpful for those experiencing the emotional load and responsibility of the decision maker. An example of this could be formalising an approach where any safeguarding decisions are not made alone but are decided together. This could link to a multi-

agency and co-production approach being used, where systems come together to foster a shared understanding and approach. This would be helpful for all school staff but particularly those who feel like they are on their own, such as Finch, describing how they are positioned to hold everyone's uncertainties about 'not knowing'. Shared decision-making or using consultation to redistribute roles could support the urgency or pressure caused by bottlenecks and being put on one person.

Additionally, supporting school staff with formulation, if one size does not fit all and each TsYP is unique, means there will be frequent moments where, despite policy being in place, school staff might benefit from support in considering how all these needs combine. Considerations are being made to complex intersectionality and the different aspects of seen and unseen, spoken and unspoken parts of our identities, and how these relate to power and authority. EPs are trained in formulation approaches; however, I am curious whether there could be the upskilling of school staff to support them with the decisions and support planning they have to do in role.

Another aspect of support could be helping school staff sit with the uncertainty of not necessarily knowing the right approach. Discussions about whether whole-school or targeted approaches are more effective in responding to gender diversity must take place. Is the approach reactive to the arrival of TsYP, or should there be an early-intervention approach that creates an inclusive, accepting school ethos and environment?

As hesitations were found around whole-school approaches, there should be further consideration and guidance on how these could be managed. There needs to be

support on how communications are provided to families ahead of time, brief school staff Q&A's to reduce feeling of anxiety, small group formats with an opt-in option. EPs are well placed to work with senior leadership teams to think about their policies, how they apply in schools, what sort of school community and ethos they want, and how they are going to get there. When there is pressure for school reputation, or there are concerns about rules and values clashing, EPs could support here by looking at processes to support school staff emotionally and practically in schools, for example, thinking about what follows acute incidents, like facilitating debriefs or working out the structure or routines for what happens next.

5.3.4. Supporting School Staff to Navigate Multiple Perspectives

Keeping the TsYP voice central among the many other perspectives was described as challenging, and school staff may require support to do so. This research has shown that school staff would benefit from support here by providing them with a space to try to make sense of all these competing perspectives, or the school staff could be upskilled in ways to facilitate meetings where multiple people with different perspectives are present and be able to facilitate a productive and open conversation. For example, supporting school staff to feel confident in facilitating a Team Around the Child (TAC) Meeting.

School staff require an adequate policy which aligns with the laws and legislation in place. Having this guidance clear and implementable would provide the sense of protection that they need. However, school staff will require time, resources, support, and training to implement any guidance, and as there is a spectrum of gender identities

where each TsYP's context is different, there needs to be a certain amount of flexibility for school staff to apply their professional judgement. Including case studies in the guidance, with examples of different ways the school staff and school can act in line with the legislation, would be helpful, including information on referral pathways and how the approach is staged. School organisations need to feel supported by the DfE, and there needs to be an acknowledgement of the need to protect schools so that fears of scrutiny don't prevent inclusive practice.

5.3.5. Engaging with Psychoanalytic Thinking and Using the Psychosocial Approach Within the EP Role

This research has revealed that to better understand individuals' experiences, we must hold the inner (psychic and defence mechanisms) and outer (institutional, cultural, political) factors, recognising the complex dynamic interplay between them. Unlike other research in this area, the psychosocial method has been used for meaning-making rather than measurement, understanding experiences as products of unconscious processes and context. This approach allowed anxieties to surface during interviews, such as concerns about policy, reputation, and public scrutiny, and facilitated reflections on how school staff defend themselves against these pressures. Methodologically, employing principles from the FANIM enabled free associations, allowing contradictions, hesitations, and omissions to serve as data, with the two-interview format helping to explore tensions more deeply.

This research demonstrates the practical value of recognising feelings as data and how this can be utilised to understand the wider system. For instance, naming

countertransference (e.g., my own guilt, urgency, protectiveness, frustration) suggests how school staff may be holding onto unprocessed affect from the wider system. Attending to 'what's mine' and 'what's theirs' helped develop an understanding of the dynamics at play, occurring at individual, group, and organisational levels.

When applied more broadly, the psychosocial lens aids consideration of how the socio-political context influences the environment; once recognised, we can begin to manage its impact on practice. Changing contexts, including news and media narratives, heightened anxious feelings and participants' fears of community backlash, prompting them to seek clarity and structure policies. Consequently, policies may simultaneously contain and restrict flexibility and curiosity. Without employing these feelings data, an important aspect of the experience remains overlooked, and although we can never fully grasp human experience, individuals do find ways to make sense of it. I argue that adopting a psychosocial approach and applying psychoanalytic theory in practice is beneficial for exploring individuals, the roles we assume, our relationships, group and organisational dynamics, and the complex links between these elements. EPs might consider the following to foster this way of thinking in their practice. Here are some examples:

- Applying principles from psychoanalytically informed interviewing techniques (e.g., planning a second consultation to discuss contradictions), using consultation and group or individual supervision to map relational projections and dynamics.
- Understanding experience involves both internal and external worlds. Incorporating reflexivity into your routine, via diaries, detailed notes and psychosocial supervision, adds subjectivity as an analytical tool in practice.

- Psychoanalytic thinking in formulation involves examining defensive dynamics in working hypotheses.
- Considering the roles we play in groups, and how groups and organisations function, can be approached through psycho-systemic lenses.

When applying psychoanalytic theory as an EP, it is essential to be aware of one's competence, capabilities, and ethical practice. Many practitioners are not psychodynamic psychotherapists or explicitly psychoanalytically trained, so observations should be considered tentative (much like in this research) and used to initiate discussions and new ways of thinking. Ensuring informed consent and that service users understand the approach being used is also vital. My experience indicates that reflective field notes and high-quality supervision are integral to applying this lens in EP work, and I believe such practice should not be undertaken without these safeguards.

5.4. Critical Considerations and Suggestions for Future Research

Like most qualitative research in this area, this study has a small, self-selected convenience sample (N=5). All participants are from the same LA. This limits the transferability of the findings; however, as the psychosocial approach applied in this research perceives each individual as a unique agent, it could be argued that no findings can be fully generalised. A self-selection bias may be present, potentially impacting the results. For example, all participants had previously maintained strong relationships with one or more TsYP and cared deeply about their well-being. All participants appeared to consider themselves accepting and inclusive and were

passionate about trans-inclusive practice. Every TsYP they worked with had co-occurring needs, which likely required additional support, further strengthening their relationships. There was also an overrepresentation of those in senior or leadership roles within the school, possibly because they had more time available to complete the interviews. This means there were more narratives about policy and management concerns, which may skew perspectives towards those decision-makers. It is also important to note the sample's narrow demographic range, which was not wholly representative of the wider population in the area (e.g., four White-British and one Asian). This will influence how the findings are interpreted and limit the exploration of individual characteristics such as race, culture, and religion. There are opportunities for further research to broaden the sample, including different groups such as those in pastoral roles, solely focused on SLT, or LGBTQ+ educators.

This methodology positions the researcher and all the supervisors as the experts (Archard, 2020), which can create an air of arrogance around the assumption of knowing something that the participant does not. Although defended, there remains a power in interpretation, and in our supervision, we focused on ensuring that the participants voice remained central throughout. When considering future research, we wondered whether it could be conducted through a focus group or incorporate more participatory elements, so that the power dynamics of the expert researcher are addressed and participants take a more active role in understanding their experiences. Moreover, both I, as a researcher, and the subjects being defended bring their own unconscious dynamics that influence the research, and reflexivity has been incorporated throughout. It remains impossible to fully understand these experiences because of the defences that occur (Hollway, 2001). Throughout this research, I

reflected on my positionality through reflexivity, considering the different roles I typically assume and how these influence my practice (e.g., being a TEP in the same LA). I am also a defended researcher with an emotional investment in this topic, which has been well documented through reflexivity; however, this remains a limitation to acknowledge.

Participants in the research were warned about the limits of confidentiality, which may have restricted what was shared, especially views or opinions that are less accepted. Choices were made throughout the research process, and confidentiality was maintained, including in the information shared in the pen portraits. Sometimes, safeguarding anonymity meant withholding potentially insightful details. However, obtaining full consent and ensuring that participants were well informed were more crucial. In psychosocial research, it can be difficult to guarantee participants' understanding of the subconscious exploration involved. I am confident that my consent form was robust and that consent was ongoing, but I found myself cautious about how deeply or analytically I would engage with the data, reminding myself of the extent to which these participants had agreed to a thorough analysis.

5.5. Dissemination and Impact Strategy

Dissemination of this initial research was presented at the Professional Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology All Years Event. I will share the research findings with the participants and meet with them to discuss further if they wish. I will also present the research findings to various children's services at the sites where the research was conducted, including the educational psychology team, the

SEND team, and the youth work service. This information, among other data, will be used by the working group to form local authority policy and guidance for schools. I hope to explore publishing a paper about the research findings and co-publish a paper reflecting on what it means to conduct psychosocial research as a TEP and how this approach could be utilised in the profession. I remain open to other opportunities, including presenting the findings and methodology at both local and national conferences.

5.6. Concluding Comments

To conclude, this research aimed to explore school staff's experiences from a psychosocial perspective. Throughout this research process, it has become clear that school staff care deeply about the safety and well-being of TsYP; however, they are currently working within a changing context with limited guidance and support. School staff shared a desire to feel supported in their role and protected by the systems around them, so they can provide the best possible practice for TsYP and surrounding students. The core takeaway from this study is the importance of wholeheartedly listening to school staff's experiences. Not just in relation to their role and their output, but sitting with them as complex humans, they are within a labyrinth of changing systems and structures. For EPs and other professionals, this means recognising the importance of listening to key adults around CYP, not making assumptions about their views and approaching them with an open mind, recognising that school staff are also complex emotional individuals.

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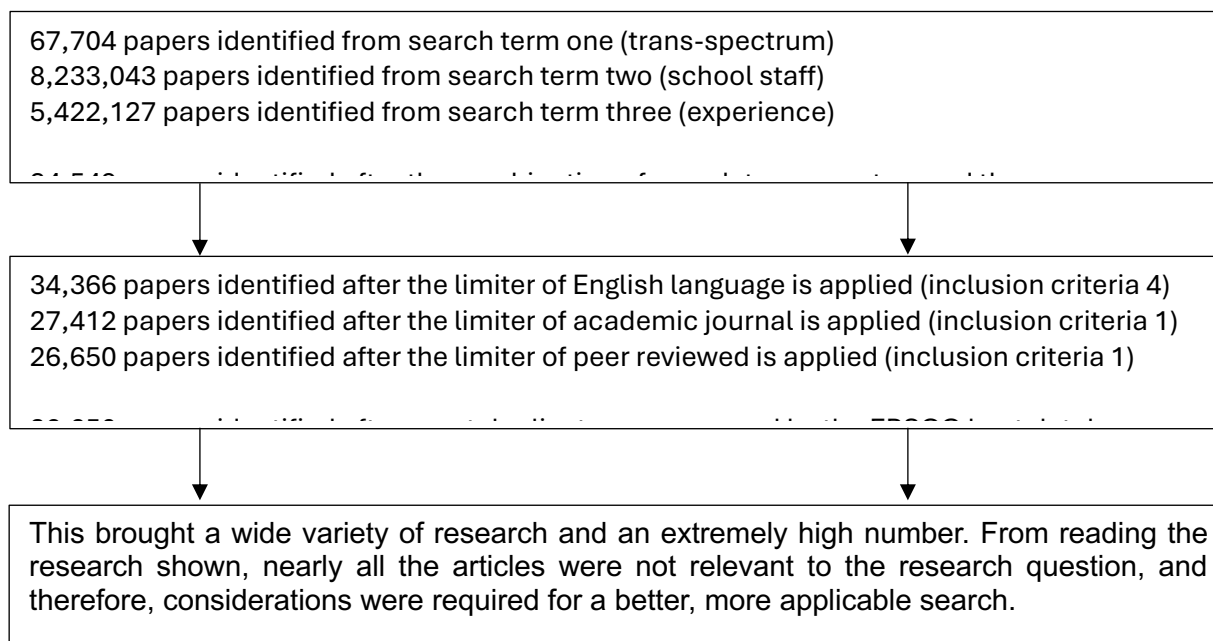
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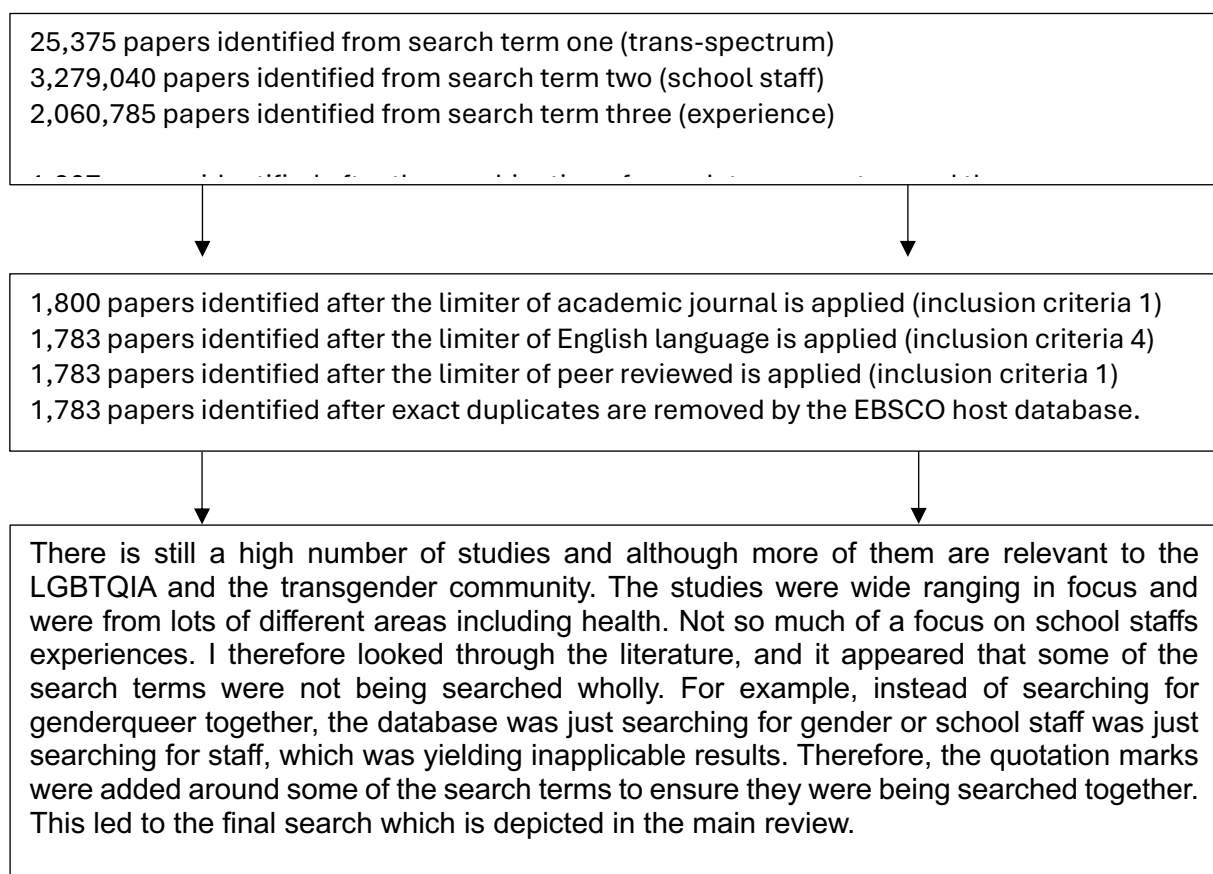
Appendices

Appendix A- Summary of Trial Searches

First Search (searching for the search terms within the full text)



Second Search (searching for the search terms within the abstracts)



CASP Checklist- A:
For Qualitative Research

Reviewer Name:	Charlotte Ridley
Paper Title:	'Those students who are really self-confident about their homosexuality usually have considerably fewer problems': how physical education teachers perceive sexual and gender diversity in PE.
Author:	Johannes Müller & Nicola Böhlke
Appraisal Date:	August 2024

Section A Are the results valid?	
Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't Tell The aims for this research were to answer and explore the research questions of: 1) How do PE teachers perceive sexual and gender diversity in PE? 2) How do PE teachers reflect on classmates' interactions with LGBTQ+ students? The researchers clearly highlighted the importance and relevance of the research discussing both the societal and educational implication of the research and inclusion in schools (p1021).
Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't Tell As this research aims to obtain and interpret PE teachers' perspectives and experiences, which are subjective, this qualitative methodology is appropriate (p1024).
Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't Tell As the research aims are to understand teacher's perceptions semi-structured interviews are appropriate. They discuss that these interviews allow for an in-depth exploration of teacher's views. They use a problem-centred interview (PCI) method, Witzel & Reiter, 2012. T). Benefits of this approach include its focus, flexibility, critical thinking and its practical implications for policy and practice. Limitations include its potential for narrow focus, the influence of the participant and interviewer bias and generalisability. (p1024)
Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't Tell This research used a theoretical sampling method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) based on theoretical considerations and (preliminary) analysis. This is appropriate for their grounded theory approach. Four study participants were recruited through personal contacts and nine through a snowball method. Participants were selected from various schools in Germany. Strength of the research is interviewing heterogenous P.E. teachers (in terms of age, gender, sexuality, teaching experience) and including different schools in rural and urban German regions. Teachers from different schools were interviewed as assumptions were made that teachers from the same school were embedded in the same school culture. This takes away from the idea of seeing a person's experience as individual and

	subjective. However, this recruitment strategy is justified and is appropriate for the research aims (p1024).
Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't Tell The data was collected through semi-structured interviews called problem-centred interviews (PCI) which were audio-recorded and transcribed. The researchers used both open and more focused questions, which allows for some depth of narratives but appears under threat of interviewer biases influencing the data obtained. However, the data was collected in a way which addressed the research issue (p1024).
Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't Tell There is some reflections/reflexivity discussed regarding the researchers influences on data collection and analysis. For example, they choose to code the data independently from each other first and compare afterwards for consistency. Although it is considered, further critical examination of the impact of biases would be beneficial (p1024-25).
Section B: What are the results?	
Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't Tell Ethical approval was obtained. Informed consent was gained. Anonymity and confidentiality were upheld, and pseudonyms were used. Potential impacts on participants were acknowledged (p1025).
Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't Tell A transparent Grounded Theory approach to data analysis was used (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The approach used appears rigorous with two phases of a systematic, inductive process, circling between data and theory. Both researchers independently code before coming together to assess consistency of codes. Core themes are developed through iterative coding (p1025). Sufficiently rigorous approach is used, but could be criticised for not fulfilling all criteria of GT methodology, such as not resulting in a new formalised theory (Weed 2009, 2017). Instead, they argue that their interpretations are 'theoretically saturated'.
Is there a clear statement of findings?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't Tell Results are presented over three themes and are explicit supported by the data found. There is a focus on discussing the contrasting perspectives of P.E. teachers on LGBTQ+ inclusion and exclusion as well as the implications being discussed linked to the research's aims (p1027-30).
Section C: Will the results help locally?	
How valuable is the research?	☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Can't Tell This research does contribute to the understanding of the perspectives of P.E. teachers when working with gender diverse young people, with a particular focus on peer relationships and LGBTQ+ inclusivity. The research identifies challenges and opportunities for creating inclusive P.E. environments. There are suggestions made in the research for application into teacher training and school policies. There is some transferability of this research to similar educational settings, however to country specific contexts must be considered (p1030-31).

APPRAISAL SUMMARY: *List key points from your critical appraisal that need to be considered when assessing the validity of the results and their usefulness in decision-making.*

Positive/Methodologically sound	Negative/Relatively poor methodology	Unknowns
• Relevance of the research is highlighted through both the societal and educational implication of the research and inclusion in schools (p1021). Suggestions are made to the application of the research findings to teacher training and school policies. • Appropriate qualitative methodology and robust recruitment strategy. • Rigorous data collection and analysis with transparent thematic development. • Ethical considerations were adequately addressed.	• Limited critical examination of researcher's potential biases, particularly in the context of using problem-centred interviewing method. • Findings are specific to German secondary schools limiting generalisability. • Significant focus on the students' interactions. Limited data on the teachers' full experiences. Not just what is seen (e.g., the students) but what is thought and felt internally and externally, what is the wider context? Lack of full accounts of experience excludes potentially helpful information. • Generalisations made to the whole of the LGBT+ community when some verbatim quotes refer to gay and lesbian students specifically. • Criticised for not fulfilling all criteria of GT methodology, such as not resulting in a new formalised theory.	• The extent to which findings can be used directly to inform practice in non-German contexts remains unclear (p1031). • The extent to which interviewer and participant biases has influenced the data collected.

Appendix C- Example Quantitative Appraisal Tool

Evaluative Tool for Quantitative Research- I:

Long, Godfrey, Randall, Brettle and Grant (2002)

Review Area	Answer
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(1) STUDY OVERVIEW

Bibliographic Details	Author: Charla J. Curtis Title: Working with Transgender and Gender-Variant Youth: Teacher Knowledge, Attitudes, and Perceived Competence Source: Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine Year: 2019
Purpose	This research aims to examine the knowledge, attitudes and perceived levels of competence with educators working with transgender CYP. There is a particular focus on how perceptions of school and district inclusivity policies, training and professional development influences the educator's ability to effectively support and advocate for CYP with diverse gender identities. The aims are focused on three research questions which are as follows: 1) What kinds of policies and practices are schools implementing to support transgender and gender-variant students? 2) How does training relate to teachers' knowledge about, attitude towards, and perceived competence for working with transgender and gender-variant students? 3) How does experience with gender minorities relate to teachers' knowledge about, attitude towards, and perceived competence for working with transgender and gender variant students?
Key Findings	The findings aligned with the three research questions and are clearly outlined. The first research question found a weak positive correlation between school inclusivity and teacher knowledge, as well as a moderate positive correlation between inclusivity and perceived competence. For the second research question, a series of one way ANOVAs showed that training increase knowledge, attitudes and competence, but the differences between training groups were not statistically significant. For the third research question a series of independent t-tests showed that greater experience with trans-spectrum individuals is associated with higher levels of perceived competence.
Evaluative Summary	This research's findings do add to an unexplored area of research and offers some practical insights for teacher training programs and school inclusivity practices. There are valuable contributions made to how inclusivity policies, training, and experience impact teachers' ability to support transgender and gender-variant students. However, there is little known however about the long term impacts of the identified applications or the impact of systemic policy changes suggested. Moreover, the limited sample size and distinct geographic focus of the greater Philadelphia Metropolitan area impacts the generalisability of these findings and its suggested implications. The lack of significant findings also limits the broader applicability. The reliance on self-reported data through the survey also introduces some potential biases which aren't addressed fully. Overall, while the study has several strengths, including its focus on a critical issue, its limitations (e.g., small sample size, lack of significant findings) reduce its generalisability and impact.

(2) STUDY, SETTING, SAMPLE AND ETHICS

The Study	This research uses quantitative methodology through a survey and then uses quantitative analysis and descriptive statistics. The research is clearly explained, and justifications are made for the research methodology. Although, the methodology limits the perspectives shared by the participants and it is unclear to what extent the participants responses are being influenced by this. It is unclear to what extent the teachers can share their own subjective perspectives and experiences.
Setting	This research was conducted in schools in Philadelphia. Participants were from both public and private K-12 institutions.
Sample	• Source Population: 76 Teachers with a variety of levels of experience (public and private) who are currently employed in the greater Philadelphia Metropolitan area. • Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: Teachers must be working in the designated area, have a valid teaching certificate and must have been employed as classroom teachers in public or private school serving students between kindergarten and 12th grade. Teachers would be excluded if they did not have direct student contact or those who work in early childhood or post-secondary education. • Sample Adequacy: While appropriate to the study's aims, the small sample size and limitation to the greater Philadelphia Metropolitan area limits generalisability. Also, although applicable to the study's aims the choice to focus solely on teachers does reduce certain variables, but a large number of school staff who have an important role in support and advocacy for CYP in schools.

(3) ETHICS

Ethics	Ethical approval was obtained from the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. Ethical considerations were adequately addressed, including voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and support for participants discussing sensitive topics.
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(4) GROUP COMPARABILITY AND OUTCOME MEASUREMENT

Comparable Groups	No explicit comparison groups are involved in this research. The analysis focuses on variations in teacher training and experience levels. The survey was designed to measure each of the variables of the study. Independent variables being the perceptions of inclusivity (via policies and practices), training and experience. The dependent variables being the knowledge about, attitude towards and perceived competence for working with transgender youth.
Outcome Measurement	The outcome measures in this research are survey's which measure teacher knowledge, attitudes and perceived competence. The measures used are relevant to the research's aims and research questions, however there could be a greater breadth of perspective widening the measurement to all school staff. Moreover, the measures/survey was designed/formed by the researcher and therefore despite coming from previous research/methodology, this measure is not well validated. Overall, the measures were relevant and appropriate to the research aims but lacked robust validation for broader application.

Time Scale of Measurement	This research measures at a single point in time/cross sectional study. There is no follow up to examine the long term changes in knowledge, attitudes or competence. This could be a limitation/potential development point, however, is understandable in the context of being a doctoral thesis.
(5) POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS	
Implications	This research highlights opportunities for the implications for policy and practice, such as emphasising the need for mandatory teacher training on gender inclusivity and comprehensive school policies supporting transgender students. Moreover, highlighting the importance of direct experience with transgender individuals in building teacher competence. However, these implications are only generalisable to similar schools in urban/suburban settings in Philadelphia and may not be applicable to other rural or international contexts.
(6) OTHER COMMENTS	
Other Comments	The research includes an extensive reference list that situates the study within the broader literature on LGBTQ education and teacher training. This not published literature can therefore has not gone through a typical peer-review process but has been assessed by a viva board and examination.
Reviewer	Charlotte Ridley- August 2024

Appendix D- Example Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool

Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT)- J:

School Staff's Views Regarding Transgender Pupils and the Role of the Educational Psychologists (Lowri Charlton, Doctoral Thesis, University of Cardiff, 2020)						
Category of Study Designs	Methodological Criteria	Quality	Y	N	?	Comments
Screening Questions	Are there clear research questions?	X				This research aims to understand the perspectives of school staff about transgender young people and identify the potential role of an educational psychologist. The three research questions are clearly communicated as: 1) What are the most prevalent issues for teachers in Wales in regarding to supporting transgender pupils? 2) What types of support do teachers feel would be useful to receive? 3) What role might be appropriate for EPs to undertake?
	Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?	X				The research used a mixed-methods design consisting of an online questionnaire for phase one (quantitative) and semi-structured interviews for phase two (qualitative) to answer the research questions.
Mixed Methods	Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?	X				The research provides the justification that using both the quantitative and qualitative methods allows for a deeper understanding of the complex phenomena in our social world. The questionnaire was used to aid collaborative enquiry to explore whether secondary school teachers would be the most appropriate people to interview and whether they shared similar concerns to those highlighted in the wider research. Overall, the mixed methods approach is justified to capture both

				the breadth (through surveys) and depth (through interviews) of school staff's views and experiences, allowing for a comprehensive understanding.
	Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question?	X		The researcher clearly presents and discusses each of the different quantitative and qualitative components. There is a clear connection to how the data collected from the questionnaire led to the interviews. For example, the questionnaires were used to understand what participants would be appropriate and what would be appropriate to explore within the interviews. Despite the components being discussed, the integration of these could be more explicit, especially in synthesising insights to draw broader conclusions.
	Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted?	X		The researcher clearly presents the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative elements of the methodology. There is some discussion around how the findings from the survey informed how the interviews were conducted, however the researcher does not appear to sufficiently explore how these findings complement or diverge from one another. Overall, the findings are adequately interpreted.
	Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?		X	The research does highlight some inconsistencies found in the quantitative and qualitative data. For example, the participants differing views or systemic barriers, however it does not consider or describe why these discrepancies might exist or how they could be reconciled. The research would benefit from considering this further.
	Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?	X		Both components of the methodology adhere to the appropriate quality traditions. For example, the descriptive statistics of the survey data is used effectively, however inferential statistics may have added to the depth of the analysis.

Appendix E- Extraction Form

One- Extraction Form

Date extracted by: August 2024	Date: 30/08/2024	Ref ID:
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Question		If Yes	If No
1	Does the study report on the results of an empirical study and is it peer reviewed?	Continue	Exclude
2	Does the study explore the views and experience of school staff who work with trans young people?	Continue	Exclude
3	Was the research conducted in UK schools?	Continue	Exclude
4	Was the research conducted and/or published after 2010?	Continue	Exclude

Title of review – What are school staff’s experiences of working with trans-spectrum young people?		
Publication details- Routledge- Taylor and Francis Group		
Reference number- DOI: 10.1080/13573322.2023.2221693		
Author (s)- Johannes Müller & Nicola Böhlke		Year- 2023
Title of article- ‘Those students who are really self-confident about their homo- sexuality usually have considerably fewer problems’: how physical education teachers perceive sexual and gender diversity in P.E.		
Title of journal- Sport, Education and Society		
Volume- 28	Issue- 9	Pages- 1021-1033

Study Details			
Location	Germany		
Research question and objectives	- How do P.E. teachers perceive sexual and gender diversity in P.E.? - How do P.E. teachers reflect on classmates' interactions with LGBTQ+ students?		
Participants			
Population	13 P.E. Teachers		
Age (Mean/Range)	26-55 years		
Gender	Male (n)- 6	Female (n)- 7	Not specified (n)
Sexuality	1 Lesbian	1 Gay	11 Heterosexual
Ethnicity	German (not specified)		
Recruitment and sampling	- Four study participants were recruited through personal contacts and nine participants through the snowball method. - The selection of the interviewees followed a 'theoretical sampling', which based on both theoretical considerations and (preliminary) analysis. - Assuming that P.E. teacher from one school is embedded in a specific school culture, teachers from different secondary schools were interviewed.		
Data Collection			

Method (e.g., survey, focus group, interviews)	- Constructivist epistemological perspective is adopted ('according to this perspective, people think and act against the background of social, cultural and personal experiences, further following the view that schools is where personal experiences arise which are crucial in constructing gender and sexual identities). - Qualitative methods were applied with extensive, semi-structured, in-depth interviews using- Witzel, A., & Reiter, H. (2010). The problem-centred interview. Interviews were conducted Jan-April 2021, they lasted between 45-60 mins. Confidentiality was assured to all participants; the names included are pseudonyms.
Validation and recording	All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.
Data Analysis	
Method (e.g., descriptive statistics; analysis of transcripts employing a stated method?)	- Analysed using Grounded Theory (GT) approach. The data analysis was adapted to the explorative- an intentionally open approach of the study. - In a later phase, the 'school gender climate' emerged as relevant, so they used this as an orienting background foil for the later analyses, while maintaining an openness to further inductively generated themes. - Particularly two phases in the course of the analysis can be distinguished: the initial and focused coding. During the initial open coding significant core themes were identified that emerged from the data. In the subsequent focused coding, core categories were further developed and refined by thoroughly relating and comparing smaller pieces of data to these codes (Charmaz, 2006). The analysis and interpretation of the data involved systematic, inductive processes, circling back-and- forth between data and theory (Bryman, 2012). Both authors were initially involved in the coding of the data independently of each other. The consistency of the authors' interpretations reinforces the data presented in this paper. Although our study is in line with the Straussian approach to GT (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994), it does not fulfil all criteria of a GT methodology, as for instance, listed by Weed (2009, 2017). Weed (2017) criticises qualitative researchers of making 'incomplete use' of the GT methodology. Despite the fact that our study comes up with theoretically saturated interpretations, it may attract criticism for not resulting in a new formalised theory in the narrower sense, as requested by Weed.
Findings (data must be verbatim quotes, author's statements or authors statements supported by verbatim quotes)	
How are the results presented?	Results are presented over three themes all pertaining to how P.E teachers reflect on interactions between LGBTQ+ students and classmates
Theme 1	Perception of classmates' tolerance and openness towards LGBTQ + students- All interviewed P.E. teachers reported an increase in sexual and gender diversity in their schools. Teachers mostly refer to gay and lesbian students (sexuality) rather than trans*, intersex or CYP having non-gender stereotypical behaviour (in terms of clothing, moving behaviour). The researcher notes how striking it is that the teacher interviewed distinguish between gay/lesbian/bisexual and trans* students when saying that 'queer' students are accepting within the class having no negative impact to them. The acceptance of trans* students seem to be more preconditioned in the perception of the P.E. teachers. Here, the teachers spoke less of acceptance but rather of

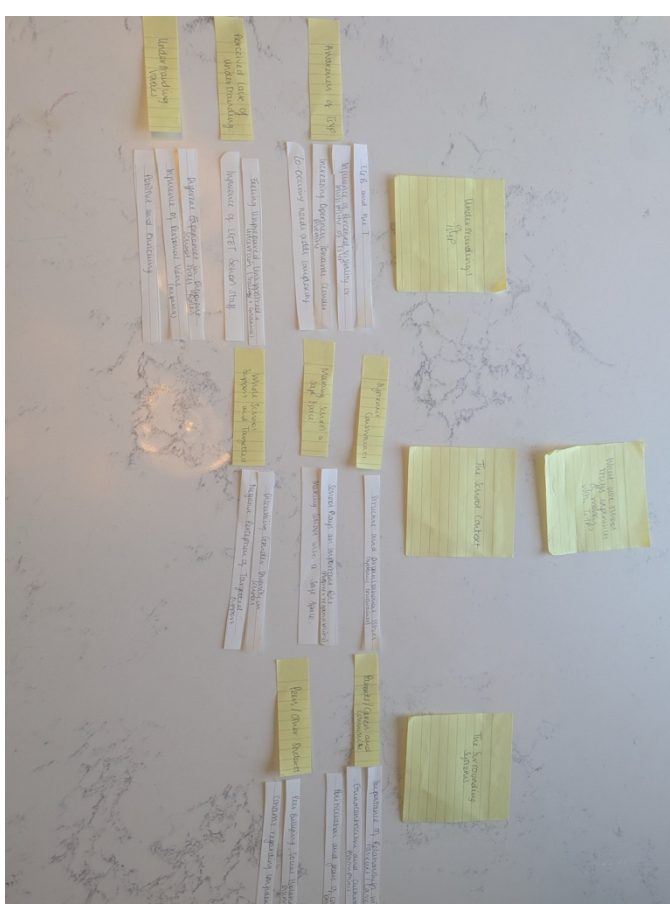
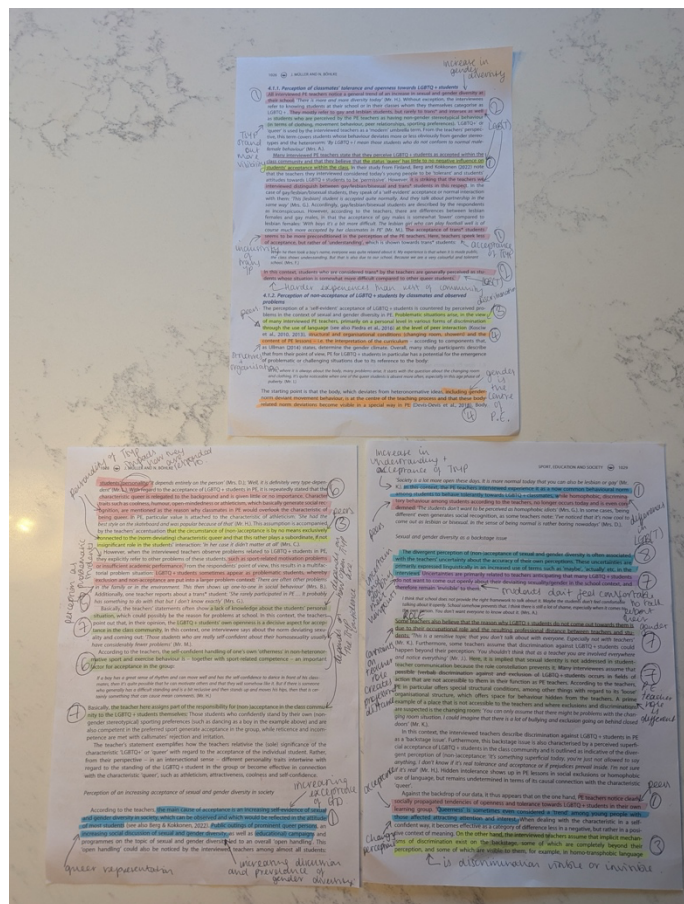
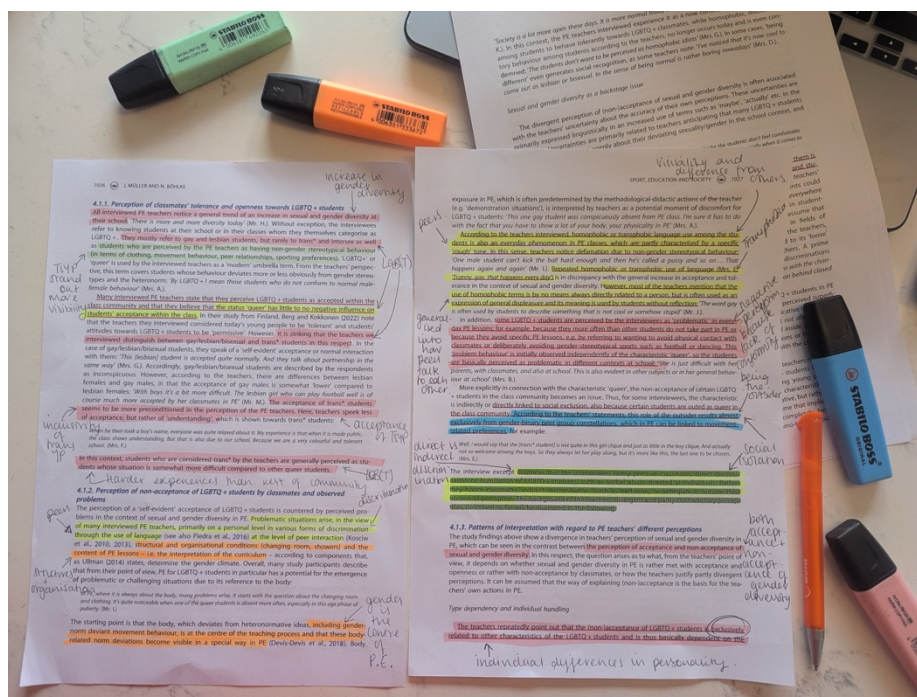
	'understanding' which is shown towards trans* students. In this context, students who are considered trans* by the teachers are generally perceived as students whose situation is somewhat more difficult compared to other queer students.
Theme 2	Perception of non-acceptance of LGBTQ + students by classmates and observed problems- They found that P.E. teachers felt problematic situations arise primarily on a personal level in various forms of discrimination through the use of language, at the level of peer interaction and structural and organisational conditions (changing room, showers). P.E. teachers highlight that in P.E. the body in the centre of the teaching process and that these body-related norm deviations become visible in special way in P.E which can cause discomfort for LGBTQ+ students. Teachers highlighted that students using homophobic and transphobic language was an everyday phenomenon in classes, however this language was not typically directly related to a person, but is often used as an expression of general displeasure. Some teachers perceived LGBTQ+ students as problematic as they were described as more likely to not take part in P.E. or avoid specific P.E. lessons (e.g., by referring to wanting to avoid physical contact with classmates or deliberately avoiding gender-stereotypical sports such as football or dancing). From some interviewees the role of the outsider results almost exclusively from gender-binary peer group constellations, which in P.E. can be linked to movement related preferences. Teachers rarely perceived classmates' direct discrimination or humiliation of LGBTQ+ students (e.g., verbal abuse directed at individuals). Rather they notice classmates' indirect discrimination (such as exclusion) or anticipate it outside their horizon of perception.
Theme 3	Patterns of interpretation with regard to PE teachers' different perception- Type dependency and individual handling- The teacher here assigns part of the responsibility for (non-) acceptance in the class community to the LGBTQ+ students themselves. They highlight that the LGBTQ+ students' own openness and self-confident handling of one's own 'otherness' in non-heteronormative sport and exercise is a decisive acceptance in the class community. Furthermore, teachers observe problems related to LGBTQ+ students in P.E., they explicitly refer to other problems of these students, such as sport -related motivation problems or insufficient academic performance. From the respondents point of view, this results in a multifactorial problem situation: LGBTQ+ students sometimes appear as a problematic students, whereby exclusion and non-acceptance are put into a larger problem context. Perception of an increasing acceptance of sexual and gender diversity in society- Teacher highlighted the main cause of acceptance is increasing representation and gender diversity in society, educational campaigns were also highlighted as important (however they do not reference trans* young people). Sexual and gender diversity as a backstage issue- The divergent perception of sexual and gender diversity was associated with teachers' uncertainty about the accuracy of their own perceptions (e.g., maybe, actually). due to things being unknown and invisible to them possibly due to their occupational role resulting in professional distance between teachers and students, adding that school does not provide the right framework to talk about these topics, noting that it appears there are a lot of shame. They also noted that discrimination could be occurring without them noticing or seeing it. They noted that P.E. in particular offers 'special structural conditions' regarding its loose organisational structure, for example in the changing rooms. When being confidently LGBTQ+ teachers commented on the positives for CYP but interviewed teachers assumed that implicit mechanisms of discrimination exist on the backstage, some of which are completely beyond their perception, and some of which are visible to them, for

	example, in homo-transphobic language or in covert exclusions within peer groups. This particularly affects students whose acceptance in the group is per se more difficult because of other characteristics (such as shyness or close-mindedness).
--	---

Author's conclusions

Comments	
Limitations, reviewer comments etc.	• Limitations surrounding the use of grounded theory • Through the majority of the findings there is a focus on the students, how are the students interacting, particularly the heterosexual/cisgender students and their homosexual/transgender peers. There appears to be a clear lack of exploration into the interaction of the teacher in this dynamic and learning about the teachers more personal experiences. The findings feel surface level and therefore the findings are not particularly helpful to the field. • Limitations surrounding the use of semi-structured interviews • The quotes that are provided by the respondents largely refer to gay and lesbian students and not trans young people but then there are generalisations made to the whole of the LGBT+ community. • There is no information provided to the frequency of what is being said as fact. • Strengths they highlight is interviewing heterogenous PE teachers (in terms of age, gender, sexuality, teaching experience) and including different schools in rural and urban regions. • Limitations include that they only include schools in Germany secondary schools.
References	
Possible new includes	None found
Background papers	None found

Appendix F- Image of Thematic Literature Review



Appendix G- Email Sent to School Headteacher

Dear (Headteacher's name),

My name is Charlotte Ridley, a Trainee Educational Psychologist from the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust completing a doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology. As part of my training, I am completing a two-year supervised placement with XXX Educational Psychology Service where I am undertaking a **research project with aims to explore school staff's experiences of working with trans-spectrum (transgender and gender non-conforming) young people.**

This study aims to contribute to a limited evidence base and inform future policy and practice in schools by privileging school staff's psychological and social experiences of working with trans-spectrum young people.

The opportunity to be involved in this research is open to **all school staff members** who have had experience of working with/alongside trans-spectrum young people and will involve **two, one hour interviews a week apart**. All identifiable information will be kept anonymous.

Please reply to this email if you consent to your school staff being invited to participate in this research and then please forward your school staff the attached information sheet.

If you have any particular school staff in mind who may be interested in participating in this research, please let me know.

Your support is greatly appreciated.

Kind regards,

Charlotte Ridley | She / Her

Appendix H- Participant Information Sheet

Exploring school staff's experiences of working with trans-spectrum young people who are transitioning: a psychosocial perspective

Researcher- Charlotte Ridley (cridley@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

Research Supervisor- Dr Katy Cole (kcole@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

This is an invitation to participate in a research study exploring school staff's experiences of working with trans-spectrum young people. Before you agree, it is important that you understand what your participation would involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. The researcher has received formal approval from the Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee.

Who am I?

My name is Charlotte Ridley, a Trainee Educational Psychologist from the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust completing a doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology. As part of my training, I am completing a two-year supervised placement with XXX Educational Psychology Service where I am undertaking a research project which aims to explore school staff's experiences.

This information has been shared with you because I am seeking your support to participate in this research project. I have included information regarding the project below, however, if you would like further information or have any questions about the research, please do not hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor Dr Katy Cole via the contact details above.

What is the research?

This research aims to explore school staff's experiences of working with trans-spectrum/transgender young people who are socially transitioning with the purpose of adding to the literature and informing future practice in schools. This research aims to be exploratory, accounting for the distinct lack of existing research which privileges school staff's experiences, which considers both the psychological and social aspects of experience.

Are you eligible to participate?

You are invited to participate in this study if you have a role in a secondary school and have been involved in work with/alongside a trans-spectrum young person who is socially transitioning.

What will your participation involve?

As a participant in this research, you will be asked to share your experiences via two semi-structured interviews. The first interview will allow the discussion of your experiences of working

with trans-spectrum young people. The second interview allows for further depth of information to be obtained through thinking about what was discussed in the first meeting. The interviews will be a one to one with the researcher. The data will then be analysed, by considering your experience as a whole; it will attend to what you have noted as important and consider the emotional impact of this experience. Once the research has concluded, the researcher can return to speak with you to share the findings and discuss your experiences of taking part in the research.

Interviews will take place in a quiet, confidential space in the school or setting where you are employed. If this is not possible, local authority office space is available. The two in-person interviews will be one to two weeks apart from one another and one hour in duration.

Your taking part will be safe and confidential

Your privacy and safety will be respected at all times. Although the conversations will be audio recorded, no one but myself will have access to the recordings. Consent forms and transcripts (a written version of the audio recording) will be kept separate to prevent participants from being identified. Furthermore, while I write up what emerges from our conversation, neither you or your school will be identified.

All data collected will be anonymised and you will be asked to select your own pseudonym. Electronic data will be password protected and kept on a secure device; handwritten notes will use pseudonyms with identifying details removed. Only I will have access to the research data, and this will be discussed with my research supervisor and supervision group. Once the research study is complete, the data will be securely stored for six to ten years after which electronic data will be safely removed and deleted from devices and handwritten notes shredded. Due to the small number of participants your contribution has a chance of being identifiable, meaning this may have implications for confidentiality, however all efforts will be made to anonymise the data throughout. Additionally, confidentiality may need to be breached if there is a risk of harm to self, harm to other, or a breach of law, however this will be discussed with you first.

Data generated in the course of the research will be retained in accordance with the Trusts Data Protection and handling policies.: <https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/>

What if you want to withdraw?

Involvement in this research will have no impact on the service provided by XXX Educational Psychology Service. You are not obliged to take part in this study and are free to withdraw at any time up to the point of data analysis. Should you choose to withdraw from the programme, you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason.

Contact details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you!

If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the programme in which you are being asked to participate, please contact:

Paru Jeram, Trust Quality Assurance Officer pjeram@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Appendix I- Email Sent to School Staff

Good morning,

My name is Charlotte Ridley, a Trainee Educational Psychologist from the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust completing a doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology. As part of my training, I am completing a two-year supervised placement with XXX Educational Psychology Service where I am undertaking a **research project with aims to explore school staff's experiences of working with trans-spectrum (transgender and gender non-conforming) young people.**

This study aims to contribute to a limited evidence base and inform future policy and practice in schools by privileging school staff's psychological and social experiences of working with trans-spectrum young people.

The opportunity to be involved in this research is open to **all school staff members** who have had experience of working with/alongside trans-spectrum young people and will involve **two, one hour interviews a week apart**. However, this can be flexible where needed. All identifiable information will be kept anonymous.

Please contact me via email (charlotte.ridley@XXX.gov.uk) if you would be interested in taking part in this research.

Your support is greatly appreciated.

Kind regards,
Charlotte Ridley

Appendix J- Participant Consent Form

Consent to Participate in an Experimental Programme Involving the Use of Human Participants

Exploring school staff's experiences of working with trans-spectrum young people who are transitioning: a psychosocial perspective.

I have read the information leaflet relating to the above programme of research in which I have been asked to participate and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the experimental programme has been completed.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent, I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the programme, until the point of analysis, without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS):

.....

Participant's Signature:

.....

Investigator's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS):

.....

Investigator's Signature:

.....

Date:

Appendix K- Reflexive Field Notes Example

REFLEXIVE DIARY

Participant:		Interview number:	
Date:		Time: (duration)	

General

1. Describe the interview briefly:

2. Anything particular or unusual you would like to mention?

3. Did you like interviewing this participant?
 - I liked it very much
 - It was okay
 - I'm indifferent
 - I did not like it much
 - I did not like it at all

Interview Detail

4. How did the participant respond to the interview questions?

5. Are there any specific words, phrases or experiences that stand out?

6. Did the interview generate any salient thoughts, feelings or images for you?
7. Did the interview experience remind you of any other people or events in your life?

Post Interview

Please comment on any thoughts, images or feelings that have arisen following the meeting in relation to the interview:

Date	Context	Comment
	<i>e.g. supervision, lecture, work activity, dream, conversation</i>	

Appendix L- Question Sheet

Interview Planning:

Pre-first Interview

- Complete a reflexive diary entry documenting feelings before the interviews begin

The First Interview

- Setting up the space and getting the recording devices ready
- Participant arrives and there are introductions- relationship building
- Having a conversation about what to expect from their interview (referring to the information sheet) they have already been provided with.
- Obtaining written consent via the consent form and sharing guidance as to how they may wish to maintain anonymity of the young people discussed.
- Starting the recording. Zooms transcribing digital recording device
- Asking them how they're feeling about the interviews and answer any questions they may have.
- Conduct the interview (approx 60 minutes)
- Asking them how they're feeling (exploring experiences of the process).

Post First Interview

- Complete the reflexive diary entry, documenting feelings during the interview session.

The Second Interview

- Participant arrives and there are re-introductions
- Starting the recording. Zooms transcribing digital recording device
- Asking them how they're feeling since the previous interview (well-being check in) and how they're feeling about the interviews. Ask if they have any reflections. Answer any questions they may have.
- Conduct the interview (approx 60 minutes)
- Asking them how they're feeling (exploring experiences of the process).
- Participants will be provided with a short questionnaire which contains demographic questions (e.g., age, gender, sexuality).
- Provided with the debriefing document including the researchers contact details and other support services they can access.

Post Second Interview

- Complete the reflexive diary entry, documenting feelings during the interview session.
- Write up the pen-portraits of the participants

Further Debriefing

- Inform the participant that they can receive a written copy of the findings or have a discussion with the researcher.

- Provide an opportunity for them to discuss their experiences of taking part in the research.

Appendix M- Demographic Questions

Demographic Questions

1. Age: 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65+
2. Gender:
3. Sexuality:
4. Ethnicity:
5. School role:
6. Number of years working in school:

Appendix N- Debrief Form

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Research Participant Debrief Form

Thank you for taking the time to take part my research project. While guidance does exist for schools to support transgender students, there is very little research exploring school staff's experiences of working with transgender young people. It is hoped that, by exploring these experiences with you and listening to what you have shared, a better understanding can be developed, adding to the literature, and informing future practice in schools.

As was discussed before you participated, all of your personal details (including your name and school) will be kept confidential and stored securely. Additionally, the information you have shared will be anonymised and kept separately from your personal information to ensure that your privacy and security is maintained. If at any time after participation you feel you would no longer like to be involved, you are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. However, if you withdraw up until the point of my analysis of the data, I will reserve the right to use material that you provide.

Thank you again for participating in my research. I hope you found it both interesting and enjoyable. However, if you have any concerns about the research itself, please do not hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor at the addresses below. If anything, we have discussed has affected you, included below are suggestions of places which you can reach out and access different resources and support networks.

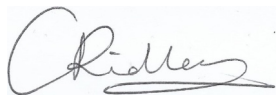
Contact Details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me, Charlotte Ridley, at cridley@tavi-port.nhs.uk or my supervisor, Katy Cole, at kcole@tavi-port.nhs.uk

See the other side of this page for places to find further support if needed.

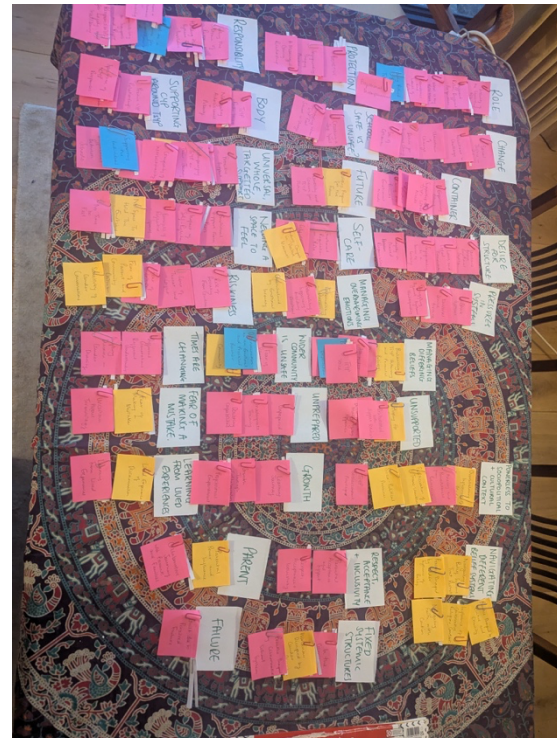
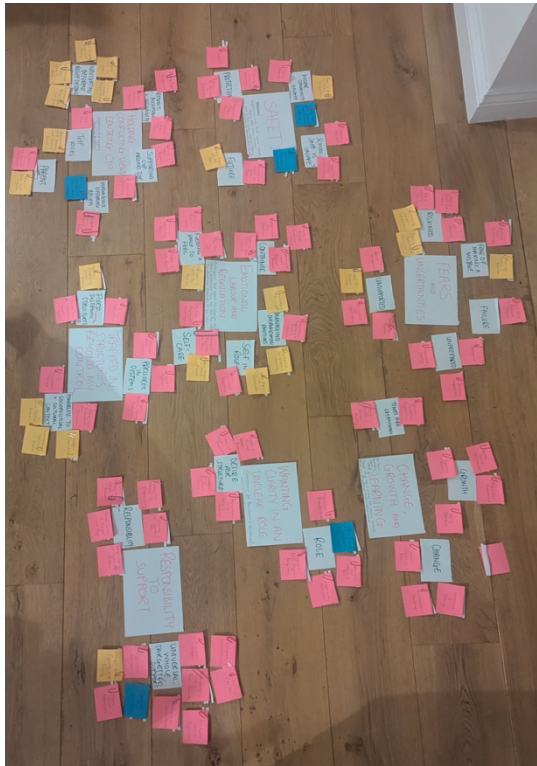
Thank you again.

Kind regards,



Charlotte Ridley
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Appendix O- Image of Thematic Review Process



Appendix P- Ethical Approval Form

The Tavistock and Portman 

NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699

<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/>

Charlotte Ridley

By Email

01 July 2024

Dear Charlotte,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: *'Exploring school staff experiences of working with trans-spectrum young people who are transitioning: a psychosocial perspective'.*

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

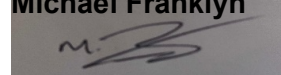
Please be advised that any changes to the project design including changes to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Franklyn


Academic Governance and Quality Officer

T: 020 938 2699

E: academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

cc. Course Lead, Supervisor, Research Lead

Appendix Q- Ethics Application Form

Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC) APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW OF STUDENT RESEARCH PROJECTS

This application should be submitted alongside copies of any supporting documentation which will be handed to participants, including a participant information sheet, consent form, self-completion survey or questionnaire.

Where a form is submitted and sections are incomplete, the form will not be considered by TREC and will be returned to the applicant for completion.

For further guidance please contact Paru Jeram (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

FOR ALL APPLICANTS

If you already have ethical approval from another body (including HRA/IRAS) please submit the application form and outcome letters. You need only complete sections of the TREC form which are NOT covered in your existing approval.

Is your project considered as 'research' according to the HRA tool? (http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/research/index.html)	Yes
Will your project involve participants who are under 18 or who are classed as vulnerable? (see section 7)	No
Will your project include data collection outside of the UK?	No

SECTION A: PROJECT DETAILS

Project title	Exploring school staff experiences of working with trans-spectrum young people who are transitioning: a psychosocial perspective		
Proposed project start date	22/04/2024	Anticipated project end date	12/05/2025
Principal Investigator (normally your Research Supervisor): Katy Cole			
Please note: TREC approval will only be given for the length of the project as stated above up to a maximum of 6 years. Projects exceeding these timeframes will need additional ethical approval			
Has NHS or other approval been sought for this research including through submission via Research Application System (IRAS) or to the Health Research Authority (HRA)?	YES (NRES approval) ☐ YES (HRA approval) ☐ Other ☐ NO ☒		
If you already have ethical approval from another body (including HRA/IRAS) please submit the application form and outcome letters.			

SECTION B: APPLICANT DETAILS

Name of Researcher	Charlotte Ridley
Programme of Study and Target Award	Professional Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology (M4)
Email address	cridley@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Contact telephone number	07807411976
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SECTION C: CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

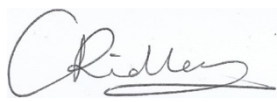
Will any of the researchers or their institutions receive any other benefits or incentives for taking part in this research over and above their normal salary package or the costs of undertaking the research? YES ☐ NO ☒ If YES , please detail below:	
Is there any further possibility for conflict of interest? YES ☐ NO ☒	
Are you proposing to conduct this work in a location where you work or have a placement? YES ☒ NO ☐ If YES , please detail below outline how you will avoid issues arising around colleagues being involved in this project: This research will be conducted in XXX where I am on placement. Colleagues may have some involvement via the participant recruitment process of highlighting potential schools to the researcher to contact. This will be the extent of their involvement which does not present immediate issues/concerns. In the process of this research it will be made clear to schools that participating in this research will not affect any other services provided by the EPS.	
Is your project being commissioned by and/or carried out on behalf of a body external to the Trust? (for example; commissioned by a local authority, school, care home, other NHS Trust or other organisation). *Please note that 'external' is defined as an organisation which is external to the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust (Trust) If YES , please add details here:	YES ☐ NO ☒
Will you be required to get further ethical approval after receiving TREC approval? If YES , please supply details of the ethical approval bodies below AND include any letters of approval from the ethical approval bodies (letters received after receiving TREC approval should be submitted to complete your record):	YES ☐ NO ☒
If your project is being undertaken with one or more clinical services or organisations external to the Trust, please provide details of these: I have sought permission from XXX XXX, the Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) of XXX LA. This can be found in the appendix 4. In XXX the PEP has the authority to make this decision. There are currently no internal ethics boards or internal processes surrounding ethical approval. If you still need to agree these arrangements or if you can only approach organisations after you have ethical approval, please identify the types of organisations (e.g. schools or clinical services) you wish to approach:	
Do you have approval from the organisations detailed above? (this includes R&D approval where relevant) Please attach approval letters to this application. Any approval letters received after TREC approval has been granted MUST be submitted to be appended to your record	YES ☐ NO ☐ NA ☒

SECTION D: SIGNATURES AND DECLARATIONS

APPLICANT DECLARATION

I confirm that:

- The information contained in this application is, to the best of my knowledge, correct and up to date.
- I have attempted to identify all risks related to the research.
- I acknowledge my obligations and commitment to upholding ethical principles and to keep my supervisor updated with the progress of my research
- I am aware that for cases of proven misconduct, it may result in formal disciplinary proceedings and/or the cancellation of the proposed research.
- I understand that if my project design, methodology or method of data collection changes I must seek an amendment to my ethical approvals as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.

Applicant (print name)	CHARLOTTE RIDLEY
Signed	
Date	14/04/2024, 27/06/24 (updated TREC)

FOR RESEARCH DEGREE STUDENT APPLICANTS ONLY

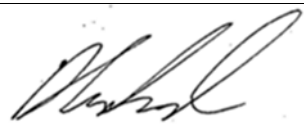
Name of Supervisor/Principal Investigator	Dr Katy Cole (research supervisor)
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Supervisor –

- Does the student have the necessary skills to carry out the research?
YES ☒ **NO** ☐
- Is the participant information sheet, consent form and any other documentation appropriate?
YES ☒ **NO** ☐
- Are the procedures for recruitment of participants and obtaining informed consent suitable and sufficient?
YES ☒ **NO** ☐
- Where required, does the researcher have current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance?
YES ☒ **NO** ☐

Signed	
Date	12/04/24 , 27/06/24 (updated TREC)

COURSE LEAD/RESEARCH LEADDoes the proposed research as detailed herein have your support to proceed? YES ☐ NO ☐

Signed	
Date	28/07/24 (updated application)

SECTION E: DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

1. Provide a brief description of the proposed research, including the requirements of participants. This must be in lay terms and free from technical or discipline specific terminology or jargon. If such terms are required, please ensure they are adequately explained (Do not exceed 500 words)

This research seeks to explore school staff's experiences of working with trans-spectrum young people who are socially transitioning. I am seeking to interview 4-6 adults who have experience with supporting trans-spectrum young people in their work in secondary schools. I intend to recruit participants from secondary schools in XXX, where I currently am on placement as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP).

The school staff will be accessed through their workplace, with the permission of the senior leadership team and the Local Authority (LA). All participants will be working in a secondary school. A clear explanation of the research and research aims, along with what will be required of the participants will be provided in writing (appendix one) with the researcher's email address to answer any questions they may have and to register their interest in taking part in the research. Consent will then be obtained in writing via the consent form (appendix two) and a conversation will be had with the participant about what they expect from taking part. Participants will be required to share their experiences via two semi-structured individual interviews. The first interview will allow participants to share their experiences of working with trans-spectrum young people with open questions and prompts (appendix six). The second interview allows for further depth of information to be obtained through exploring further what was discussed in the first meeting. The interviews will be approximately 60 minutes in duration and ideally be a week apart from each other. Interviews will take place in a quiet room in the school where the school staff member is employed. There will be the opportunity to use LA office space if required/preferred. The time for the interviews will be planned for in advance and arrangements made for any work requirements the participants have. Once the research has concluded, the participant will have the opportunity to receive information about the findings in a written copy or through discussion with the researcher. They will also have the opportunity to discuss their experiences of taking part in the research.

2. Provide a statement on the aims and significance of the proposed research, including potential impact to knowledge and understanding in the field (where appropriate, indicate the associated hypothesis which will be tested). This should be a clear justification of the proposed research, why it should proceed and a statement on any anticipated benefits to the community. (Do not exceed 700 words)

In the United Kingdom (UK), there is a growing awareness of the population of trans-spectrum young people (YP) of secondary school age, with an estimated 1% of 16-24 year olds having a different gender from the one they were assigned at birth (ONS, 2023). XXX was found to have a significantly higher trans population than the rest of the country and the LA, where this research is based, was found to have the largest trans-spectrum population in the country (ONS, 2023). Despite the population size, surveys suggest that it is challenging being part of the trans community in the UK. The National LGBT Survey (2019) found transgender people had the lowest comfortability scores with living in the UK. 82% of transgender individuals had considered killing themselves and 40% had attempted suicide, with suicidality highest among transgender young people (YP) (Austin, 2022). Evidently, this is a population group which require consideration at each systemic level and aims to consider how are we supporting the wellbeing of these individuals, particularly in an area where the population is so high.

In education, trans-spectrum YP continue to experience inequality (Children's Right Alliance for England, 2016). Stonewall (2017) found that 64% of trans-spectrum YP are bullied at school for being part of the LGBTQIA+ community, with 46% hearing transphobic language regularly and 9% receiving death threats at school. Overall, schools are highly gendered orientated systems (Leonard, 2019) and schools' approaches to supporting trans-spectrum YP remains inconsistent and highly variable (Horton, 2020). Not having a nationally recognised guidance contributes to this inconsistency. The Department for Education (DfE) have recently published a long awaited guidance to schools on how to respond to trans-spectrum YP social transitioning (DfE, 2023), however this has met significant critique for being discriminatory and putting YP at risk (Mermaids, 2023). Horton (2022) emphasises that further research in this area has significant implications for policy and practice as it highlights institutional cisnormativity and what actions are effective in dismantling the current structures in place. Therefore, this research will aim to add to the research in this area through considering the experience of school staff in responding to gender diversity in YP.

Research suggests that school staff are implicated in the marginalisation of trans-spectrum YP, with only 29% of respondents answering that teachers would intervene when present during transphobic bullying and 68% reporting that school staff rarely challenge transphobia (Stonewall, 2017). Markland, Sargeant and Wright (2023) found that the support offered to trans-spectrum YP has been

suggested to be influenced by teachers' confidence, attitudes, and knowledge. With the significant role the teacher plays in the support offered, there is a notable dearth of literature exploring school staff's experiences of working with trans-spectrum YP. However, the limited research (1 published paper & 1 doctoral thesis) suggests that teachers, when supporting trans-spectrum YP, report feelings of anxiety, inadequacy, and fear and are cautious about the language they use because they are afraid to offend or don't feel knowledgeable enough (Charlton, 2000 & Markland et al, 2023). Both papers highlighted how these uncomfortable feelings hindered teachers from addressing transphobia and makes them less likely to seek support from those around them, including senior leadership teams. Evidently, school staff's thoughts and feelings have an impact on trans-spectrum YP's lives and therefore this research aims to privilege school staff's experiences (both psychological and social) to make sense of the current school context and inform future practice.

3. Provide an outline of the methodology for the proposed research, including proposed method of data collection, tasks assigned to participants of the research and the proposed method and duration of data analysis. If the proposed research makes use of pre-established and generally accepted techniques, please make this clear. (Do not exceed 500 words)

Psycho-social research methods will be employed in this study as a means of exploring both psychological and social phenomena together. This methodology fits with the research aims as it is understood that the psychological and social aspects of experience cannot be separated, particularly in a research area where there is such a significant current social/political context.

The psycho-social methodology of this research will be using an adaptation of the Free Association Narrative Interview Method (FANIM) (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000), as a psychoanalytically informed method of data collection and analysis. As briefly outlined in question one, for data collection, the 4-6 participants will be asked to share their experiences via two semi-structured interviews. The first interview will allow participants to share their experiences of working with trans-spectrum young people with the researcher limiting their contributions to open questions, clarifying questions and prompts (appendix four). The researcher will limit their contributions to open ended and clarifying questions and comments, aimed at decreasing the impact the researcher has on responses and thickening the narrative of the participant through encouraging elaboration. Additional to these, the researcher may use questions to elicit responses which reveal more about the participants internal experiences, such as thoughts and feelings. The second interview allows for further depth of information to be obtained through thinking about what was discussed in the first meeting. Each interview will be approximately 60 minutes in duration. The interviews will be conducted in person but recorded using Zoom as a digital recording device. Zoom allows for secure recording and provides transcription for near accurate recording. As the recording is not precise, recoded transcripts will be checked against the audio recording enabling errors to be amended. Non-verbal communications and interactions will also be noted through using in-depth, 'process' notes compiled after each interview, which will be used to add depth to the data collected and support data analysis. At the end of the second interview, participants will be provided with a short questionnaire which contains demographic questions (e.g., age, gender, sexuality). Participants will be informed that they do not have to complete this form and do not have to complete every question, it is their choice as to what information they share (see appendix six). Participant perspectives regarding the research and research process will be gained pre and post interviews to explore their experiences of the process. Once the research has concluded, the researcher will return to speak with the participants to share the findings and discuss their experiences of taking part in the research.

Data analysis will follow the guidelines set out by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) for conducting psycho-social research as well as some aspects of reflexive thematic analysis. Pen portraits (a descriptive summary of an individual) will be created for each participant to aid understanding of the data; identifiable details will be taken out of any write ups to protect anonymity. Data will be analysed through triangulation of interview transcripts, field notes, and the researcher's reflections from their reflexive diary (appendix two) to achieve a holistic interpretation of the data. This then includes a write up organised around themes from a holistic analysis of the data. Attention will be paid not just to what data was shared by the participants, but how this data was shared, in line with Hollway and Jefferson's psychosocial research method. For example, attending to inconsistencies, contradictions and changes of tone to make sense of what is said in the context of how it is said. Therefore, data will be analysed, by considering the participant's experience as a whole; it will attend to what they have noted as important and consider the emotional impact of this experience. Supervision will be used throughout the data analysis process.

SECTION F: PARTICIPANT DETAILS

4. Provide an explanation detailing how you will identify, approach and recruit the participants for the proposed research, including clarification on sample size and location. Please provide justification for the exclusion/inclusion criteria for this study (i.e. who will be allowed to / not allowed to participate) and explain briefly, in lay terms, why these criteria are in place. (Do not exceed 500 words)

The sample size for this research will be 4-6 participants. This number has been used in other psychosocial studies and Hollway (2004) suggests that five participants is the ideal number for in depth analyses such as these. I intend to recruit school staff from mainstream secondary schools. Given that some education provisions may not have any school staff who meet the inclusion criteria and wish to participate, this study will have a further recruitment strategy. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the participants are as follows:

- School staff must be currently working in a mainstream secondary setting in XXX. The XXX Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) named XXX XXX, has provided written consent to approach XXX schools (see appendix four).
- School staff must have been involved in supporting a trans-spectrum young person who is transitioning and be aware/involved with the support provided within the school they work in. This involvement must be direct in nature but can vary.
- Any school staff roles will be considered as participants. (e.g., headteacher, SENCo, teacher, pastoral role, learning support assistants).
- School staff must be able to communicate in English.

Recruitment process:

- The researcher will contact the headteacher of each secondary school in XXX by sending an email describing the research, its benefits and outlining the organisational impact it involves, such as two hours for two interviews (see appendix seven). The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) will be carbon copied (CC'd) into this email.
- The headteacher will be asked to reply to the email via a reply or by voting on the included poll (e.g., I do consent... and I do not consent...) to register their interest and consent to the organisational impact (see appendix seven). They will also be asked to forward the attached information sheet to school staff. A clear explanation of the research and research aims, along with what will be required of the participants will be provided in writing (appendix one) with the researcher's email address to answer any questions they may have and to register their interest in taking part in the research.
- A follow up phone call will be made to headteachers and SENCo if there has been no response from the previous email.
- If there is still no response and a lack of participants, LA educational psychologists will be approached to suggest schools and staff members who may be interested in taking part.
- Another email will be sent directly to the school staff member by the EP (see appendix seven). Headteachers will also be contacted, following the above process, to ensure they consent to the participation.
- Participant places will be assigned on a 'first come first serve' basis.
- The information sheet (appendix one) will be forwarded to those school staff who have registered their interest and who meet the inclusion criteria.
- If it is not possible for interviews to take place in the school day or on the school premises, there will be the option of using a local authority office to meet.
- Consent will be obtained by all participants in writing via the consent form (appendix two) and a conversation will be had with the participant about what they expect from taking part.

Wider search:

- If there are not enough individuals showing interest in being a participant within XXX, a wider search will be conducted in neighbouring boroughs of XXX XXX, XXX and XXX and XXX. Approval will be sourced from the Principal Educational Psychologist of these local authorities, and all secondary schools will be emailed, following the same process outlined above.
- Participant places will be assigned on a 'first come first serve' basis.

5. Please state the location(s) of the proposed research including the location of any interviews. Please provide a Risk Assessment if required. Consideration should be given to lone working, visiting private residences, conducting research outside working hours or any other non-standard arrangements.

If any data collection is to be done online, please identify the platforms to be used.

Interviews will take place in a quiet room in the school or setting where the school staff member is employed. There is the option of using a local authority office to meet. Audio recording will be made on the Tavistock and Portman Zoom account.

6. Will the participants be from any of the following groups?(Tick as appropriate)

- ☐ Students or Staff of the Trust or Partner delivering your programme.
☒ Adults (over the age of 18 years with mental capacity to give consent to participate in the research).
☐ Children or legal minors (anyone under the age of 16 years)¹
☐ Adults who are unconscious, severely ill or have a terminal illness.
☐ Adults who may lose mental capacity to consent during the course of the research.
☐ Adults in emergency situations.
☐ Adults² with mental illness - particularly those detained under the Mental Health Act (1983 & 2007).
☐ Participants who may lack capacity to consent to participate in the research under the research requirements of the Mental Capacity Act (2005).
☐ Prisoners, where ethical approval may be required from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).
☐ Young Offenders, where ethical approval may be required from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).
☐ Healthy volunteers (in high risk intervention studies).
☐ Participants who may be considered to have a pre-existing and potentially dependent³ relationship with the investigator (e.g. those in care homes, students, colleagues, service-users, patients).
☐ Other vulnerable groups (see Question 6).
☐ Adults who are in custody, custodial care, or for whom a court has assumed responsibility.
☐ Participants who are members of the Armed Forces.

¹If the proposed research involves children or adults who meet the Police Act (1997) definition of vulnerability³, any researchers who will have contact with participants must have current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance.

² 'Adults with a learning or physical disability, a physical or mental illness, or a reduction in physical or mental capacity, and living in a care home or home for people with learning difficulties or receiving care in their own home, or receiving hospital or social care services.' (Police Act, 1997)

³ Proposed research involving participants with whom the investigator or researcher(s) shares a dependent or unequal relationships (e.g. teacher/student, clinical therapist/service-user) may compromise the ability to give informed consent which is free from any form of pressure (real or implied) arising from this relationship. TREC recommends that, wherever practicable, investigators choose participants with whom they have no dependent relationship. Following due scrutiny, if the investigator is confident that the research involving participants in dependent relationships is vital and defensible, TREC will require additional information setting out the case and detailing how risks inherent in the dependent relationship will be managed. TREC will also need to be reassured that refusal to participate will not result in any discrimination or penalty.

7. Will the study involve participants who are vulnerable? YES ☐ NO ☒

For the purposes of research, 'vulnerable' participants may be adults whose ability to protect their own interests are impaired or reduced in comparison to that of the broader population. Vulnerability may arise from:

- the participant's personal characteristics (e.g. mental or physical impairment)
- their social environment, context and/or disadvantage (e.g. socio-economic mobility, educational attainment, resources, substance dependence, displacement, or homelessness).
- where prospective participants are at high risk of consenting under duress, or as a result of manipulation or coercion, they must also be considered as vulnerable.
- children are automatically presumed to be vulnerable.

7.1. If YES, what special arrangements are in place to protect vulnerable participants' interests?

If YES, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check **within the last three years** is required.

Please provide details of the "clear disclosure":

Date of disclosure:

Type of disclosure:
Organisation that requested disclosure:
DBS certificate number:

(NOTE: information concerning activities which require DBS checks can be found via <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/db-check-eligible-positions-guidance>). Please **do not** include a copy of your DBS certificate with your application

8. Do you propose to make any form of payment or incentive available to participants of the research?
YES ☐ NO ☒

If **YES**, please provide details taking into account that any payment or incentive should be representative of reasonable remuneration for participation and may not be of a value that could be coercive or exerting undue influence on potential participants' decision to take part in the research. Wherever possible, remuneration in a monetary form should be avoided and substituted with vouchers, coupons or equivalent. Any payment made to research participants may have benefit or HMRC implications and participants should be alerted to this in the participant information sheet as they may wish to choose to decline payment.

9. What special arrangements are in place for eliciting informed consent from participants who may not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information provided in English; where participants have special communication needs; where participants have limited literacy; or where children are involved in the research? (Do not exceed 200 words)

There will be a requirement for proficiency in the English language. Special arrangements will not be required in this circumstance as the literacy skills required are typical of their role as professionals working within a school.

SECTION F: RISK ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT

10. Does the proposed research involve any of the following? (Tick as appropriate)

- ☐ use of a questionnaire, self-completion survey or data-collection instrument (attach copy)
- ☐ use of emails or the internet as a means of data collection
- ☐ use of written or computerised tests
- ☒ interviews (attach interview questions)
- ☒ diaries (attach diary record form)
- ☐ participant observation
- ☐ participant observation (in a non-public place) without their knowledge / covert research
- ☒ audio-recording interviewees or events
- ☐ video-recording interviewees or events
- ☐ access to personal and/or sensitive data (i.e. student, patient, client or service-user data) without the participant's informed consent for use of these data for research purposes
- ☐ administration of any questions, tasks, investigations, procedures or stimuli which may be experienced by participants as physically or mentally painful, stressful or unpleasant during or after the research process
- ☐ performance of any acts which might diminish the self-esteem of participants or cause them to experience discomfiture, regret or any other adverse emotional or psychological reaction
- ☐ Themes around extremism or radicalisation
- ☐ investigation of participants involved in illegal or illicit activities (e.g. use of illegal drugs)
- ☐ procedures that involve the deception of participants
- ☐ administration of any substance or agent
- ☐ use of non-treatment of placebo control conditions
- ☐ participation in a clinical trial
- ☐ research undertaken at an off-campus location (risk assessment attached)
- ☐ research overseas (please ensure Section G is complete)

11. Does the proposed research involve any specific or anticipated risks (e.g. physical, psychological, social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life?

YES ☐ NO ☒

If YES, please describe below including details of precautionary measures.

12. Where the procedures involve potential hazards and/or discomfort or distress for participants, please state what previous experience the investigator or researcher(s) have had in conducting this type of research.

Due to the topic area of this research, there may be some difficult conversations and challenging feelings that arise from exploring the participants' experiences. The researcher poses the skills to respond appropriately to the participants, which have been developed through training on the professional doctorate of child, community and educational psychology. As part of this training, the researcher is required to conduct consultations with staff, parents and child and young people. These are often around emotive topics or situations that feel stuck. The researcher has attended a year-long module on consultation, receives weekly supervision on their practice and attends reflexive groups to consider relational dynamics.

13. Provide an explanation of any potential benefits to participants. Please ensure this is framed within the overall contribution of the proposed research to knowledge or practice. (Do not exceed 400 words)

NOTE: Where the proposed research involves students, they should be assured that accepting the offer to participate or choosing to decline will have no impact on their assessments or learning experience. Similarly, it should be made clear to participants who are patients, service-users and/or receiving any form of treatment or medication that they are not invited to participate in the belief that participation in the research will result in some relief or improvement in their condition.

The potential benefits to the research participants are that, although anonymously, they will be able to contribute to the development of research evidence which will add to the understanding and knowledge around trans-spectrum YP's lives and may impact future school and communities' policies and practice. Additionally, by engaging in a research project in which their voice is privileged, and a reflective space is provided, there is an opportunity for them to make sense of their experiences which may empower them to continue to use their voice and reflect on practice moving forward. There may also be some learning that occurs from being involved in this project which could be perceived as part of their continuing professional development (CPD). It is anticipated that the benefits for participants will outweigh the possible negatives and they will be asked to reflect on their engagement in the research process at the beginning and the end of the research.

14. Provide an outline of any measures you have in place in the event of adverse or unexpected outcomes and the potential impact this may have on participants involved in the proposed research. (Do not exceed 300 words)

While exploring the participants' experiences, they may recall or discuss uncomfortable emotions. This will be discussed in the pre and post conversations of the interviews. For example, these potential uncomfortable feelings will be acknowledged, and we will discuss that if it becomes more distressing participants will have the opportunity to break, stop or reschedule the interview and research process at any time. They will also be informed that they can withdraw their data before the start of the data analysis phase. We will have wellbeing check-ins at the beginning and end of the interview when the audio recording is turned off. The researcher will also keep the participant's wellbeing in mind and will suggest a break if required. All school staff who take part in the study will receive a debrief form (appendix five) with the researcher's contact details and other support services they can access.

If there are significant concerns in terms of safeguarding and professionals' ethics, supervision will be utilised to discuss these areas of concern and next steps will be agreed. Overall, safeguarding procedures will be followed in which participants will be assured that their contributions are confidential, but if a disclosure poses a risk to themselves or others, or is a breach of law, the information will need to be passed onto the relevant person or body (such as the school designated safeguarding lead). The participant would be informed prior to confidentiality being breached.

As school staff will be discussing their experiences, they may wish to discuss specific young people. Maintaining the confidentiality of the young people in the interviews is therefore an important consideration. Participants will be provided with guidance (at the beginning of the interviews) on how

to maintain anonymity of the young people discussed. See appendix six. Furthermore, in the analysis and write up stages of the research, anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained by changing identifiable details or choosing not to share parts of the data which would directly implicate their young person's confidentiality and their identities being safeguarded.

15. Provide an outline of your debriefing, support and feedback protocol for participants involved in the proposed research. This should include, for example, where participants may feel the need to discuss thoughts or feelings brought about following their participation in the research. This may involve referral to an external support or counseling service, where participation in the research has caused specific issues for participants.

Participants will be provided with support through check-ins at each stage of the data collection phase and they will also be debriefed when the interviews have concluded. The debrief will consist of a debrief form (appendix five) with an email address to contact the researcher and the contact details of external support services. The participant may also wish to have another meeting either in person or virtually if they would benefit from an additional debrief discussion.

Once the research has been completed, analysed and finalised, an anonymised summary of the main findings of the research will be shared with participants if this is requested. The participant will also have the option of a visit in person or a call if they wish to discuss the findings further. Feedback will also be sort from the participants for them to share their thoughts on the research.

16. Please provide the names and nature of any external support or counselling organizations that will be suggested to participants if participation in the research has potential to raise specific issues for participants.

School Organisational Support

- Line manager and/or headteacher- for any concerns around the role or wellbeing
- Designated safeguarding lead- for any concerns around safeguarding
- Senior mental health lead- for any concerns around mental health and wellbeing

National Wellbeing Services

- Mind- <https://www.mind.org.uk>
- Samaritans- <https://www.samaritans.org>

XXX Specific Wellbeing Services

- XXX XXX, XXX and XXX Mind- XXX
- XXX XXX- XXX
- XXX in XXX- XXX
- In the event of the recruitment strategy expanding to the surrounding XXX boroughs, local wellbeing services will be explored.

LGBTQIA+ Specific Wellbeing Services/Charities

- Mermaids- <https://mermaidsuk.org.uk>
- Gendered Intelligence- <https://genderedintelligence.co.uk>
- Stonewall- <https://www.stonewall.org.uk>
- London Friend- <https://londonfriend.org.uk>
- FFLAG- <https://www.fflag.org.uk>

17. Where medical aftercare may be necessary, this should include details of the treatment available to participants. Debriefing may involve the disclosure of further information on the aims of the research, the participant's performance and/or the results of the research. (Do not exceed 500 words)

n/a

FOR RESEARCH UNDERTAKEN OUTSIDE THE UK

18. Does the proposed research involve travel outside of the UK?☐YES ☒ NO

If YES, please confirm:

- ☐ I have consulted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website for guidance/travel advice? <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/>
- ☐ I have completed a RISK Assessment covering all aspects of the project including consideration of the location of the data collection and risks to participants.

All overseas project data collection will need approval from the Deputy Director of Education and Training or their nominee. Normally this will be done based on the information provided in this form. All projects approved through the TREC process will be indemnified by the Trust against claims made by third parties.

If you have any queries regarding research outside the UK, please contact academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk:

Students are required to arrange their own travel and medical insurance to cover project work outside of the UK. Please indicate what insurance cover you have or will have in place.

19. Please evidence how compliance with all local research ethics and research governance requirements have been assessed for the country(ies) in which the research is taking place. Please also clarify how the requirements will be met:

SECTION G: PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND WITHDRAWAL

20. Have you attached a copy of your participant information sheet (this should be in *plain English*)? Where the research involves non-English speaking participants, please include translated materials.

YES ☒ NO ☐

If NO, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:

21. Have you attached a copy of your participant consent form (this should be in *plain English*)? Where the research involves non-English speaking participants, please include translated materials.

YES ☒ NO ☐

If NO, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:

22. The following is a participant information sheet checklist covering the various points that should be included in this document.

- ☒ Clear identification of the Trust as the sponsor for the research, the project title, the Researcher and Principal Investigator (your Research Supervisor) and other researchers along with relevant contact details.
- ☒ Details of what involvement in the proposed research will require (e.g., participation in interviews, completion of questionnaire, audio/video-recording of events), estimated time commitment and any risks involved.
- ☒ A statement confirming that the research has received formal approval from TREC or other ethics body.
- ☒ If the sample size is small, advice to participants that this may have implications for confidentiality / anonymity.
- ☒ A clear statement that where participants are in a dependent relationship with any of the researchers that participation in the research will have no impact on assessment / treatment / service-use or support.
- ☒ Assurance that involvement in the project is voluntary and that participants are free to withdraw consent at any time, and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
- ☒ Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.
- ☒ A statement that the data generated in the course of the research will be retained in accordance with the [Trusts's Data Protection and handling Policies](https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/): <https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/>

- ☒ Advice that if participants have any concerns about the conduct of the investigator, researcher(s) or any other aspect of this research project, they should contact Head of Academic Registry (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)
- ☒ Confirmation on any limitations in confidentiality where disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others may occur

23. The following is a consent form checklist covering the various points that should be included in this document.

- ☒ Trust letterhead or logo.
- ☒ Title of the project (with research degree projects this need not necessarily be the title of the thesis) and names of investigators.
- ☒ Confirmation that the research project is part of a degree
- ☒ Confirmation that involvement in the project is voluntary and that participants are free to withdraw at any time, or to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
- ☒ Confirmation of particular requirements of participants, including for example whether interviews are to be audio-/video-recorded, whether anonymised quotes will be used in publications advice of legal limitations to data confidentiality.
- ☒ If the sample size is small, confirmation that this may have implications for anonymity any other relevant information.
- ☒ The proposed method of publication or dissemination of the research findings.
- ☒ Details of any external contractors or partner institutions involved in the research.
- ☒ Details of any funding bodies or research councils supporting the research.
- ☒ Confirmation on any limitations in confidentiality where disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others may occur.

SECTION H: CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

24. Below is a checklist covering key points relating to the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Please indicate where relevant to the proposed research.

- ☐ Participants will be completely anonymised and their identity will not be known by the investigator or researcher(s) (i.e. the participants are part of an anonymous randomised sample and return responses with no form of personal identification)?
- ☐ The responses are anonymised or are an anonymised sample (i.e. a permanent process of coding has been carried out whereby direct and indirect identifiers have been removed from data and replaced by a code, with no record retained of how the code relates to the identifiers).
- ☒ The samples and data are de-identified (i.e. direct and indirect identifiers have been removed and replaced by a code. The investigator or researchers are able to link the code to the original identifiers and isolate the participant to whom the sample or data relates).
- ☐ Participants have the option of being identified in a publication that will arise from the research.
- ☒ Participants will be pseudo-anonymised in a publication that will arise from the research. (i.e. the researcher will endeavour to remove or alter details that would identify the participant.)
- ☐ The proposed research will make use of personal sensitive data.
- ☐ Participants consent to be identified in the study and subsequent dissemination of research findings and/or publication.

25. Participants must be made aware that the confidentiality of the information they provide is subject to legal limitations in data confidentiality (i.e. the data may be subject to a subpoena, a freedom of information request or mandated reporting by some professions). This only applies to named or de-identified data. If your participants are named or de-identified, please confirm that you will specifically state these limitations.

YES ☒ NO ☐

If NO, please indicate why this is the case below:

NOTE: WHERE THE PROPOSED RESEARCH INVOLVES A SMALL SAMPLE OR FOCUS GROUP, PARTICIPANTS SHOULD BE ADVISED THAT THERE WILL BE DISTINCT LIMITATIONS IN THE LEVEL OF ANONYMITY THEY CAN BE AFFORDED.

SECTION I: DATA ACCESS, SECURITY AND MANAGEMENT

26. Will the Researcher/Principal Investigator be responsible for the security of all data collected in connection with the proposed research?

YES ☒ NO ☐

If NO, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below.

27. In line with the 5th principle of the Data Protection Act (1998), which states that personal data shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose or those purposes for which it was collected; please state how long data will be retained for.

☐ 1-2 years ☐ 3-5 years ☒ 6-10 years ☐ 10+ years

NOTE: In line with Research Councils UK (RCUK) guidance, doctoral project data should normally be stored for 10 years and Masters level data for up to 2 years

28. Below is a checklist which relates to the management, storage and secure destruction of data for the purposes of the proposed research. Please indicate where relevant to your proposed arrangements.

- ☐ Research data, codes and all identifying information to be kept in separate locked filing cabinets.
- ☐ Research data will only be stored in the University of Essex OneDrive system and no other cloud storage location.
- ☒ Access to computer files to be available to research team by password only.
- ☐ Access to computer files to be available to individuals outside the research team by password only (See 23.1).
- ☐ Research data will be encrypted and transferred electronically within the UK.
- ☐ Research data will be encrypted and transferred electronically outside of the UK.

NOTE: Transfer of research data via third party commercial file sharing services, such as Google Docs and YouSendIt are not necessarily secure or permanent. These systems may also be located overseas and not covered by UK law. If the system is located outside the European Economic Area (EEA) or territories deemed to have sufficient standards of data protection, transfer may also breach the Data Protection Act (1998).

Essex students also have access the 'Box' service for file transfer:

<https://www.essex.ac.uk/student/it-services/box>

- ☐ Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, e-mails or telephone numbers.
- ☐ Collection and storage of personal sensitive data (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political or religious beliefs or physical or mental health or condition).
- ☒ Use of personal data in the form of audio or video recordings.
- ☒ Primary data gathered on encrypted mobile devices (i.e. laptops).

NOTE: This should be transferred to secure University of Essex OneDrive at the first opportunity.

- ☒ All electronic data will undergo secure disposal.

NOTE: For hard drives and magnetic storage devices (HDD or SSD), deleting files does not permanently erase the data on most systems, but only deletes the reference to the file. Files can be restored when deleted in this way. Research files must be overwritten to ensure they are completely irretrievable. Software is available for the secure erasing of files from hard drives which meet recognised standards to securely scramble sensitive data. Examples of this software are BC Wipe, Wipe File, DeleteOnClick and Eraser for Windows platforms. Mac users can use the standard 'secure empty trash' option; an alternative is Permanent eraser software.

- ☒ All hardcopy data will undergo secure disposal.

NOTE: For shredding research data stored in hardcopy (i.e. paper), adopting DIN 3 ensures files are cut into 2mm strips or confetti like cross-cut particles of 4x40mm. The UK government requires a minimum standard of DIN 4 for its material, which ensures cross cut particles of at least 2x15mm.

29. Please provide details of individuals outside the research team who will be given password protected access to encrypted data for the proposed research.

30. Please provide details on the regions and territories where research data will be electronically transferred that are external to the UK:

SECTION J: PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

30. How will the results of the research be reported and disseminated? (Select all that apply)

- ☒ Peer reviewed journal
- ☐ Non-peer reviewed journal
- ☐ Peer reviewed books
- ☒ Publication in media, social media or website (including Podcasts and online videos)
- ☒ Conference presentation
- ☐ Internal report
- ☐ Promotional report and materials
- ☐ Reports compiled for or on behalf of external organisations
- ☒ Dissertation/Thesis
- ☐ Other publication
- ☐ Written feedback to research participants
- ☒ Presentation to participants or relevant community groups
- ☐ Other (Please specify below)

SECTION K: OTHER ETHICAL ISSUES

31. Are there any other ethical issues that have not been addressed which you would wish to bring to the attention of Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC)?

SECTION L: CHECKLIST FOR ATTACHED DOCUMENTS

32. Please check that the following documents are attached to your application.

- ☐ Letters of approval from any external ethical approval bodies (where relevant)
- ☐ Recruitment advertisement
- ☒ Participant information sheets (including easy-read where relevant)
- ☒ Consent forms (including easy-read where relevant)
- ☐ Assent form for children (where relevant)
- ☒ Letters of approval from locations for data collection
- ☐ Questionnaire
- ☐ Interview Schedule or topic guide
- ☐ Risk Assessment (where applicable)
- ☐ Overseas travel approval (where applicable)

33. Where it is not possible to attach the above materials, please provide an explanation below.