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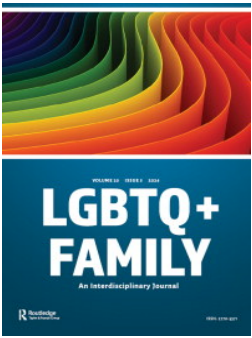
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Nonbinary Young Adults Without Children Explore Past, Present, and Future Family Relationship Intentions Through Family Maps

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ABSTRACT



Minimal research has explored how nonbinary people narrate past and present family relationships and their family building desires, despite growing awareness of the distinct needs of nonbinary people. Five nonbinary young adults (aged 22-30 years) participated in a semi-structured interview and family mapping exercise (FME). Visual and verbal qualitative findings were analyzed using thematic analysis with a life course theory lens (Elder, 1998). All participants reported challenging relationships with their family of origin, emphasizing experiences of emotional distance and invalidation plus concealment of their gender identity. Friends and chosen family networks – particularly within the LGBTQ+ community – compensated for emotional needs left unmet by family of origin. Most participants envisaged a childfree future family life and were not currently interested in parenting. Parenthood was conceptualized as a series of challenges linked to a complex array of life course considerations, particularly in relation to family background and risks associated with gender dysphoria, misgendering, and other challenges related to being a nonbinary parent. Although their current conditions did not support nonbinary parenthood, most participants considered that parenthood might be a future option if their context and circumstances changed.

KEYWORDS

Nonbinary prospective parenting family relationships genograms young adulthood life course theory

Previous studies have explored the relationships transgender people had with their family of origin (e.g. Bockting et al., 2016; Platt et al., 2022) and their contemporary network of family of choice relationships (e.g. Jackson Levin et al., 2020). Likewise, studies have begun to explore the prospective vision of parenting held by transgender people (e.g. Doussa et al., 2015) and the terrain of transgender parenting (e.g. Imrie et al., 2021). However, few studies have considered how transgender people's future thinking about parenting children or remaining childfree might be related to past and contemporary experiences of family life by taking a life course theory perspective (Elder, 1998).

The number of people identifying as nonbinary¹ continues to grow and become mainstreamed in popular culture as seen in the use of they/them pronouns. Nevertheless, nonbinary identities have remained largely underexplored in research studies (Rahilly, 2022). Although studies exploring transgender people's family relationships often include nonbinary participants, a lack of data disaggregation is often acknowledged as a limitation (e.g., Riggs et al., 2016). When data are disaggregated, the lack of comparable studies renders these results largely exploratory (e.g., Bockting et al., 2016). Therefore, the aim of the current paper is to examine the views of nonbinary people regarding family relationships in terms of their previous family of origin

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experiences, their current family relationship experiences, and their future family of formation vision. Below we review relevant literature by considering: 1) transgender young adults' relationships with their family of origin, 2) their current view of their contemporary family network (including important relationships with peers and their intimate relationship partner/s as they begin to form their own family, plus their ongoing relationships with their family of origin members) and 3) their vision of future family relationships in their future family of formation, which may or may not include their own parenthood plans.

Transgender young adults and relationships with their families of origin

Negative experiences with family of origin have been commonly reported by binary trans and nonbinary people in research studies; familial rejection rates reached as high as 57%, with 19% reporting family violence (Bockting et al., 2016; Platt et al., 2022). Early gender variance is a recorded risk factor for childhood abuse (Kramer, 2020) and young gender nonconforming people are more likely to experience verbal or physical abuse from parents than those with a gender-typical presentation (Platt et al., 2022). Cissexism (in the sense of not acknowledging trans identities) can take its toll in family contexts as well as in wider society with non-affirmation leading to trans and gender diverse people (sic) feeling marginalized (Puckett et al., 2023). Further familial rejection in various forms may decrease resilience in the face of discrimination and is associated with increased rates of suicide attempts (by a magnitude of 3.5) and substance misuse (by a magnitude of 2.5), when compared with the rates of those transgender or gender nonconforming people (sic) facing little to no rejection (Klein & Golub, 2016). In contrast, strong and supportive relationships with family of origin may mitigate both the impact of discrimination on psychological health and distress, plus increase life satisfaction and resilience (Bockting et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2020; Fuller & Riggs, 2018; Platt et al., 2022).

The existing quality of family relationships also impacts upon the future family formation plans of transgender young adults. Stark et al. (2021) found that family members played a key role in avowing the reproductive identities of transgender and gender-expansive adolescents (sic). Furthermore, support from family of origin has been associated with increased encouragement to parent and the desire to have children (Doussa et al., 2015; Riggs et al., 2016) and subsequently with a positive adjustment to parenting and family functioning (Hafford-Letchfield et al., 2019; Riggs et al., 2016; Zazzarino et al., 2020).

Within the limited literature that exists, some important distinctions have been made between the binary trans and nonbinary communities in relation to family relationships. Previous research has shown that nonbinary people report lower levels of gender-related family support than either cisgender or binary trans people (Bradford & Catalpa, 2019; Fuller & Riggs, 2018; Worthen & Herbolsheimer, 2022). Nonbinary people can face additional challenges when navigating family relationships, due to their traditionally highly gendered nature (McGoldrick et al., 2015). In addition, Doussa et al. (2020) emphasized the challenges faced by everyone in the family unit when nonbinary people came out due to a lack of available information about nonbinary identities.

Transgender young adults and the salience of contemporary social networks, friendships, and romantic relationships

Social relationships and friendships potentially have increased importance for people in the LGBTQ+ community in the face of marginalization and rejection from traditional support systems and have been shown to buffer against stigma, isolation, and minority stress, to promote positive identity, and to improve health and wellbeing outcomes (Boyer & Galupo, 2018; Galupo et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2021). LGBTQ+ friends and communities can take on a vital familial role in the lives of LGBTQ+ people, especially where people have been excluded from traditional family units, and may be designated as 'chosen family' (Weston, 1997).

Furthermore, these friends and communities may provide role modeling, guidance, and peer-to-peer emotional support (Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017; Galupo et al., 2014; Boyer & Galupo, 2018).

Chosen families have been described as a ‘mechanism for transmitting values, norms, knowledge, rituals, and survival skills’ (Ashton, 2015, p. 142), and emphasize choice and mutual and reciprocal selection over genetic or legal ties (Boyer & Galupo, 2018; Jackson Levin et al., 2020). Connection to the LGBTQ+ community has been identified as one of several positive aspects of transgender identity (Boyer & Galupo, 2018). Jackson Levin et al. (2020) found that chosen families were utilized by young adult LGBTQ+ people in order to navigate medical systems, provide informal care, and offer mutual aid through the sharing of resources.

The limited body of research investigating transgender people’s romantic relationships has centered on relationship dissolution rather than on relationship dynamics or stability (Platt & Bolland, 2018; Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017). Cross-category relationships between cisgender and transgender people entail an unequal division of societal power that may be maintained to the detriment of the transgender partner (Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017). Within romantic relationships, gender non-conforming people (sic) were more likely than binary trans people to note micro-aggressions of gendered expectations (Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017). In contrast, microaffirmations from romantic partners had positive impacts on nonbinary people’s interpersonal relationships (Galupo et al., 2019). Other positive experiences for transgender people in relationships overall included emotional support provided by partners in the face of discrimination, enjoyment of higher rates of identity affirmation than from family of origin, and lower levels of depression than for single trans people (Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017).

Prospective family of formation relationships: future parenthood or childfree families?

A significant number of binary trans and nonbinary adults express a desire to pursue parenthood: approximately half of trans people surveyed want or have wanted to have biologically related children (Pfeffer & Jones, 2020, Riggs et al., 2016). Nevertheless, studies have indicated that not all trans people want to have children, some remain undecided, and others state a clear decision to remain childfree (Tasker & Gato, 2020). The reasons trans people give for remaining childfree sometimes parallel those given in mainstream research studies on the general population: not wanting to have children, or postponing decision making on parenthood due to not having met a suitable partner to co-parent with, or to a lesser extent for financial or career reasons (Berrington, 2017). Additionally, several specific reasons why trans people may or may not become parents have been delineated: these involve issues accessing fertility preservation and treatment, or stigma concerns around navigating the heavily gendered expectations including the social policing of adoptive parenthood. We discuss each of these reasons in turn in relation to existing research on trans people and consider the extent to which these may influence the future family formation plans of nonbinary young adults.

Despite the significant numbers of trans people wishing to pursue parenthood, several barriers to biological parenthood have been described in the literature and a low uptake of fertility preservation by transgender people has been highlighted (Chen et al., 2018). This has been linked to the desire to prioritize (or avoid delaying) gender-affirming treatment, plus managing the additional demands of time, expense, and stress entailed in fertility preservation during young adulthood (Guss et al., 2021; Stark et al., 2021; Tasker & Gato, 2020). Studies of binary trans and nonbinary people have noted concerns around the potential for gender dysphoria induced by pregnancy and fertility preservation (Guss et al., 2021; Stark et al., 2021; Tasker & Gato, 2020). Furthermore, gatekeeping enacted by healthcare professionals can leave trans people vulnerable to decision making by others both for and against fertility preservation with the effect of undermining informed decision making (Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2020; Tasker & Gato, 2020). Nevertheless, fewer nonbinary than binary trans people choose to undergo medical and/or surgical transition thus some are less affected by fertility preservation

issues (Brown & Rogers, 2020). Previous studies have indicated that nonbinary people may be more likely to consider biological parenthood than binary trans people (Chen et al., 2018; Tasker & Gato, 2020).

Despite the number of trans parent families growing in number and visibility, transgender parents still experience entrenched cultural suspicion and misunderstanding from the general public and face discrimination both within and outside their family of origin (Doussa et al., 2015; Petit et al., 2018; Pfeffer & Jones, 2020). Cisheteronormative parenthood expectations can lead to exclusion from parenting support and education networks, with isolation being compounded by use of gendered language around pregnancy (Worthen & Herbolsheimer, 2022). Furthermore, trans parents have reported difficulties aligning parental status based on birth-assigned sex with current gender identity (Dierckx et al., 2018). Discriminatory societal contexts and social distrust of trans and gender diverse people's parenthood intentions mean that transgender and gender diverse people may face limited encouragement to pursue either biological or non-biological parenthood, which in turn can become internalized (Riggs et al., 2016; Brown & Rogers, 2020). A frequent concern of transgender and gender expansive adolescents is the impact of stigma on future parenthood goals and reported discrimination is negatively correlated with the desire to have children (Chen et al., 2018; Stark et al., 2021). Trans people also have reported discrimination and cissexism by adoption agencies, or anticipated that this would be a barrier to their eligibility as an adoptive parent or foster carer (Brown & Rogers, 2020; Stark et al., 2021; Tasker & Gato, 2020).

Overall, the highly gendered cultural construction of parenthood may also limit the accessibility of creative discourses around alternative parenthood curtailing visions of future transgender parenthood (Hafford-Letchfield et al., 2019) which may particularly influence envisioning non-binary parenthood. Doussa et al. (2015) found that possibilities for imagining parenthood among transgender adults were often intrinsically linked to preferred gender and closely aligned with normative practices, meaning that the relationship between being both transgender and becoming a parent often did not sit comfortably. Nevertheless, participants in Doussa et al.'s study sometimes resisted dominant cultural scripts and re-worked them through imagining parenthood and family formation in alternative forms that aligned more comfortably with transgender identity, such as through step-parenthood, foster parenthood, or queer parenthood. Given the heavily gendered expectations surrounding parenthood, compounded by what Fiani and Han (2019) term the relative absence of a frame of reference for nonbinary adult roles generally, envisioning nonbinary parenthood can represent a significant obstacle (Worthen & Herbolsheimer, 2022).

Research aim and the theoretical lens of life course theory

The purpose of the current study was to build on prior research regarding nonbinary young adults' family relationships and family building desires through employing a Life Course Theory (LCT) framework (Elder, 1998). We considered how the five principles of LCT (Elder et al., 2003) manifested in our data in terms of nonbinary young adults perspectives on their family relationship development: 1) how family relationships connected through the mutual influences upon each other's development (linked lives); 2) time and place societal and local social factors that contextualized decision making for this particular cohort of young adults and for their family relationships; 3) effects that young adults experienced depending on their own individual developmental timing; 4) the creation and reevaluation of family relationships that took place over an individual's life span; and 5) the extent to which an individual experienced a degree of agency with which to make family relationship decisions both in the short-term and in conjunction with their appraisal of past experiences and their long-term goals. Thus, Life Course Theory principles can illuminate how continued relationships with family of origin are retrospectively transformed in the minds of nonbinary young adults within a particular context to meld into contemporary and projected future family of formation networks that may, or may not, include becoming a parent. In summary, our study addressed the research question: how

have past and present family relationships informed nonbinary people's views of their future family configurations regarding parenthood or remaining childfree?

Method

Our research investigation collected visual and verbal data using a Family Mapping Exercise (FME) (Tasker et al., 2020). We followed the qualitative research principles of transparency and contextualization when designing the study as outlined below to specify a) participants, b) procedure, c) interview measures, d) researcher positionality, and e) data analysis (Levitt et al., 2018). In our final check on data analysis, we asked an external auditor to review the analysis trail from interview transcripts and family map files through to the final thematic iteration.

Participants

Participants were recruited using snowball sampling *via* individual contacts and networks. A recruitment flyer was shared on the first author's social media accounts and among their friends and LGBTQ+ networks on WhatsApp. The research flyer specified that the participants must be 18-35 years old and identify as nonbinary (including, but not limited to; nonbinary, agender, gender fluid, bigender, genderqueer). Previous researchers have noted a recruitment limitation engendered by the use of rigid or limited labels used to recruit nonbinary participants (Lewis et al., 2021; Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017). Recruitment and interviewing took place during 2021 in the UK when tensions in the trans community had increased amid National Health Service inquiries into the practice of gender identity development services.

After consenting to participate in the study, participants completed a short demographic questionnaire. The sample of five nonbinary young adults ranged in ages from 22-30 years. Participants relayed gender fluid and agender experiences in their interviews, but all described themselves as nonbinary when asked to self-define their gender identity on their demographic questionnaire, including one participant who specified trans nonbinary. Only 2 out of 5 of the participants in this study responded yes when asked if they currently identified as trans (the remaining 3 participants responded no, prefer not to say, or declined to respond). Other details regarding gender identity, sexual orientation, and relationship status are specified in Table 1. One of the participants had engaged in gender affirming surgery at the time of interview. Two participants described their sexual orientation as lesbian, one as gay, one as bisexual, and one as queer. Only one participant was involved in an intimate relationship at the time of the study. None of the participants currently had children or saw themselves as being a stepparent to a child. As far as they were aware, four participants had the reproductive capability to carry a baby, and one participant questioned if their endometriosis diagnosis would affect their fertility. All five participants currently lived in the UK. Four participants identified as white: three

Table 1. Participant demographics.

Pseudonym	Age band (years)	Ethnic Background	Gender identity	Pronouns	Sexual identity	Engaged in any form of gender affirming hormone therapy or surgery as of yet?	Relationship status
Bryant	26-30	White British	Nonbinary	She /they	Gay	No	Single
Jen	21-25	White European	Nonbinary	She /they	Lesbian	No	Single
Crocode	21-25	East Asian	Nonbinary	They /them	Queer	No	Single
Stevie	26-30	White British	Trans Nonbinary	They /them	Bisexual	No	Single
Mo	21-25	White British	Nonbinary	They /them	Queer	Yes	In a relationship

identified as British and another participant grew up in Eastern Europe. The fifth participant was from East Asia. All five participants had at least undergraduate qualifications. Four of the five participants identified as having a long-term physical or mental health condition or disability.

Procedure

Participants were sent further information about the study, including the interview schedule, to review before confirming their participation and scheduling an interview. Participants also created their own pseudonym and supplied their preferred pronouns prior to interview. They were instructed to choose a convenient location with adequate privacy and a good internet connection for the online interview. Interviews lasted an hour to an hour and a half and were recorded with each participant's consent. The study and all associated procedures were given ethical approval by a university institutional review board and followed the British Psychological Society guidelines (the British Psychological Society, 2021a, 2021b).

Interview measures

A two-part semi-structured interview schedule was devised for the study: in the first part of the interview participants were encouraged to talk about their developing sense of their gender identity and in the second part of the interview participants drew and talked about a map of their family relationships. In the first part of the interview participants were asked four relatively broad and open-ended questions. Follow up questions were used if the participant was struggling to answer in adequate detail and simply asked for further clarification or for an example. The four main questions were:

1. 'Please tell me a little bit about yourself. This doesn't have to be anything in particular and there are no right or wrong answers, I am just keen to get to know you a little better.'
2. 'Please tell me about your gender journey from past to present. This can include your views on gender and how they might have changed over time, aspects of transition, or anything you feel is appropriate to share. There are no right or wrong answers and please only tell me as much of your story as you feel comfortable sharing.'
3. 'What are your thoughts about your gender journey going into the future?'
4. 'What are your plans for the future?'

In the second half of their interview participants were asked to draw a diagram of their family following the adult Family Mapping Exercise (FME) protocol (Tasker et al., 2020). Family mapping exercises are a type of genogram; a tool that generates rich data about individual, relationship and family histories, functions, and behaviors providing visual-graphic representation of family relationships (Zazzarino et al., 2020). Traditional genograms have often been researcher led and focused on bio-legal ties, thus underestimating the importance of family of choice networks for LGBTQ+ people. Family maps are participant led and considered more expansive and less constrained by cisheteronormative structuring as they allow participants to explore their self-definition of family and provide the freedom to depict systems and resources (Tasker et al., 2020). Previously FME's have successfully elucidated family relationship networks and resources in complex family forms among bisexual mothers (Tasker & Delvoye, 2018).

In the current study participants were asked to draw a visual depiction of their family and advised that they were free to interpret this as broadly as they wished. The interviewer made a note of the order in which people were placed on the map. While a participant was drawing, they were also asked to verbally describe their family map plus appropriate follow-up questions to describe the relationships depicted (e.g. What is this person like? What sort of things do they say to you? What activities do you do together?). In addition, participants were

encouraged to draw a picture or symbolize identity objects that were important to them in terms of their identity or family (see Wheeler & Bechler, 2021, who illustrate the capacity for objects to represent identity and/or be symbolic of important life events).

Participants were prompted to reflect and say how the family relationships they had drawn and described now would have changed from when they were growing up. Participants also were asked to consider how their family relationships might develop or change in the future. If a participant did not spontaneously mention plans for either having children, or remaining childfree, then the interviewer asked whether becoming a parent was something that they had thought about or whether they wanted to remain childfree in the future.

Verbal data from both the first and second half of the interview were manually transcribed by the first author with the assistance of the online software O-Transcribe. Nonverbal cues such as laughing, sighing and notable physical actions (e.g., air quotes) were noted in the transcript to preserve the richness and context of the data, and punctuation was added to ensure the data remained true to its original nature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Names were substituted with pseudonyms and personally identifying information removed during the process of transcription. Participants were provided with a copy of their own transcript and given two weeks to amend or withdraw any aspect of their data. Each interview recording was destroyed upon completion of the participant's transcript review process. Each participant's hand drawn family map was digitized into Microsoft Word format by the first author.

Researcher positionality

The first author, who identifies as a queer transmasculine nonbinary person, led the data analysis process and had disclosed their positionality to participants prior to interviewing them. The second author identifies as a cisgender woman and has a background in both qualitative data analyses and LGBTQ+ family research. The audit was conducted by an experienced qualitative researcher who identifies as a trans woman. We considered our positionality and how it would affect our data gathering and analyses processes, particularly in relation to simultaneously occupying both 'insider' and 'outsider' positions in relation to research with nonbinary people. Darwin Holmes (2020) identified various advantages and disadvantages associated with both insider and outsider positions. On the one hand, being a community insider can enhance rapport leading to a more open and successful interview plus minimize the data analysis risk of missing nuance or of misunderstandings. On the other hand, there is also the risk of assumed similarity of experience such that a participant might not explain something fully or that a community insider might impute meaning beyond the given data.

Data analysis

Verbal data from both the first and second half of the interview were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022). RTA is a method that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) across an entire data set to locate repeated patterns of meaning. The RTA procedure of familiarization and reflexive notetaking across each transcript was then followed by line-by-line open coding. Thus, the first author generated the initial set of open codes by generating a short phrase that captured each piece of meaning conveyed by the participant in a manner congruent with the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The open codes were then reviewed by the second author. Subsequently, the emergent themes were refined through successive thematic map iterations and consensus agreement between the two authors. The final iteration produced the three main themes and their associated subthemes as stated in Table 2. The family maps drawn by participants have been used to illustrate and amplify important aspects of the family systems that interviewees experienced in relation to each of the RTA themes generated from the verbal data.

The three main themes together with all the data files were scrutinized through an independent audit procedure following the guidance given in Akkerman et al. (2008). Four additional points regarding sub-theme formation were raised in the audit and incorporated into the final iteration of our results.

Results

The three themes delineated are detailed in the subsections below and summarized here: 1) Family has not been easy: self as an automatic but unknown member of my family of origin; 2) My self-supporters, cheerleaders, advocates, and identity objects: creating networks of friends, partner/s, and chosen family plus other resources to fulfill needs unmet by family of origin; 3) Future family uncertainty: prospective parenthood as a risky challenge but I'm not completely committed to childfreedom. The themes, and the sub-themes that contributed to them, are displayed in an abridged table (Table 2) and detailed below.

Theme 1: Family has not been easy: Self as an automatic but unknown member of my family of origin

All five participants described difficult relationships within their family of origin, both during their childhoods and currently as young adults. For Bryant, this led to total estrangement from their family of origin. The other four participants maintained contact with different family members to varying degrees. All participants included at least some biological and affinal extended family relationships in their conceptualization of their family of origin. Difficult relationships with family of origin had been profoundly influential and emotionally impactful for participants. Salient manifestations of these difficult relationships were seen in two sub-themes: 1) emotional distance; 2) problematic behavior from one or more family members leading to concealment and/or invalidation of gender identity.

Emotional distance

All participants described the emotional distance they felt between themselves and their family of origin. Emotional distance was reflected in family maps through family of origin being placed further away or through the insertion of barriers, as can be seen below in Mo's map (Figure 1). Interestingly, despite strained relationships, all the participants included their family of origin on their family map, highlighting the pervasive role of biological-legal relatives in conceptualizations of family.

Table 2. Abridged theme/sub-theme table.

Theme	Sub-theme
1. Family has not been easy: self as an automatic but unknown member of my family of origin	1.1 Emotional distance 1.2 Problematic behavior from one or more family members leading into concealment and/or invalidation of gender identity
2. My self-supporters, cheerleaders, advocates, and identity objects: Creating networks of friends, partner/s and chosen family plus other resources to fulfill needs unmet by family of origin	2.1 Validates nonbinary identity 2.2 They are on my side: Listens to me and can be trusted to support and advocate for me
3. Future family uncertainty: Prospective parenthood as a risky challenge, but I'm not completely committed to childfreedom.	3.1 Challenges associated with being a nonbinary parent 3.2 Anticipated risks to my nonbinary identity if parenthood was pursued: managing gender dysphoria and/or managing others misgendering me 3.3. Risks to child from family of origin factors 3.4 The conditions for parenthood aren't right – but that could change

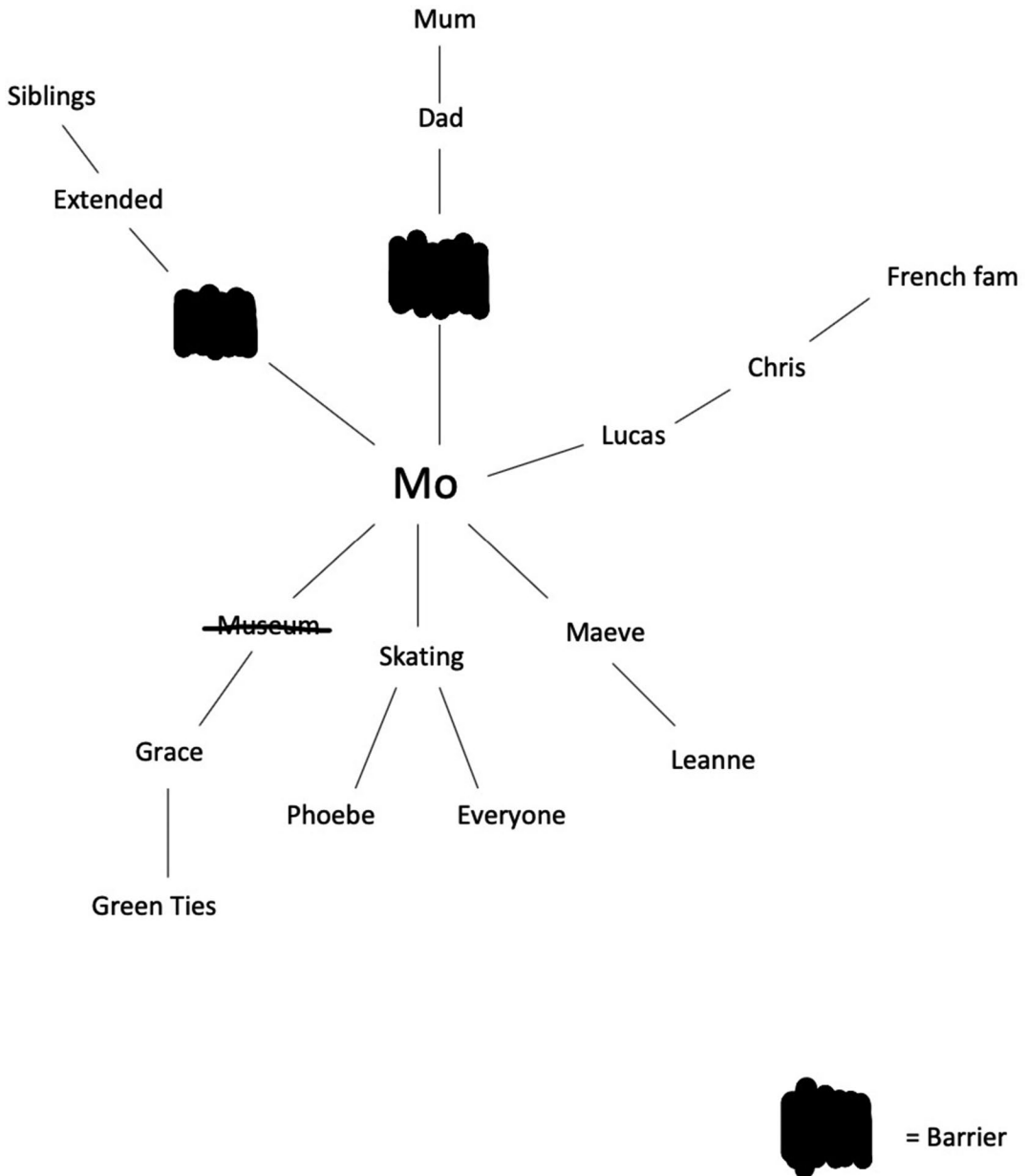


Figure 1. Mo's family map.

Even in the face of financial or material support (which often led to participants feeling indebted) there was an apparent psychological detachment or lack of meaningful psychological connection between participants and their families of origin. As Crocode said:

I really loved my aunts when I was a kid. They treat me really well, but they only give me money and they assume what I need is good clothes, eating well, something like that. They don't care about me, like they don't care about my personality and [about me] spiritually.

Much of what participants said reflected on the impact of the distance and not the distance itself. As Crocode described it: "I'm not close to my parents, but they are all I got, like, no matter what happens to me." Crocode's words conveyed a feeling of sadness around emotionally

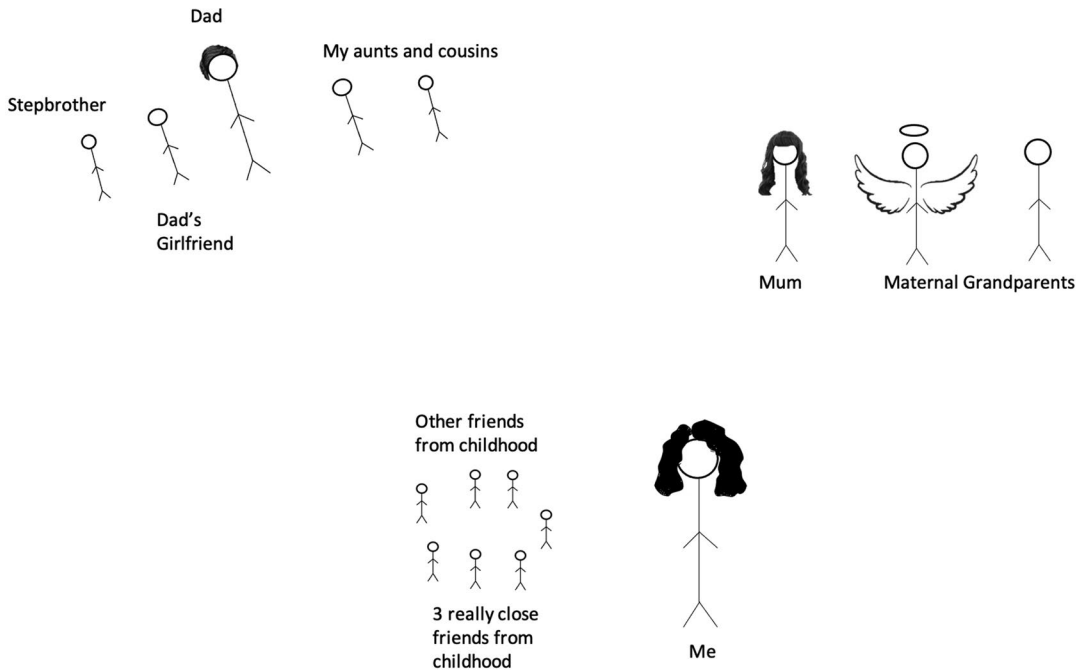


Figure 2. Crocodile's family map.

hollow family relationships despite practical connection, which was coupled with their spacious family map in which neither connections nor barriers are drawn (see Figure 2).

Problematic behavior from one or more family members leading to concealment and/or invalidation of gender identity

Problematic behavior from family members was frequently cited by participants, often leading to participants distancing themselves emotionally from family members. Particularly common were direct experiences of cissexism, misogyny, and implicit and explicit experiences of transphobia. Mo described the hurtful impact of the transphobia they saw perpetuated by their family of origin:

I was really close with my family up until, like, my 20s. And then I came out [as nonbinary] ...all of a sudden it was like, they just turned around one day and were like, we don't approve of your lifestyle, like, out of nowhere. I didn't really see it coming. And then, ever since then, I've really struggled with them.

All of the participants reported either having to conceal their gender identity (or some aspects of it) from at least some members of their family of origin else they risked experiencing an invalidation of their gender identity through cissexism or transphobia. At best, participants who were 'out' and accepted as nonbinary were still met with limited understanding and family members not really 'getting it' (cissexism). At worst, participants were met with complete invalidation or even hostility. For example, Mo further reflected upon coming out as nonbinary and how this led to their parents not supporting their lifestyle. Mo described their parents' reaction in the following way:

My family...they're transphobic but also, they just don't understand, it's like a complete lack of acknowledgement, erasure... I feel like, at this point I've come out so many times, they'll never get my pronouns right. I've just kind of given up on that front.

In all cases, parents or siblings were responsible for these experiences, and two participants attributed their most explicit experiences of transphobia to their male siblings. Dissatisfaction with family of origin also occurred when other family members failed to defend the nonbinary participant from mistreatment by another family member. Bryant and Jen each attributed their

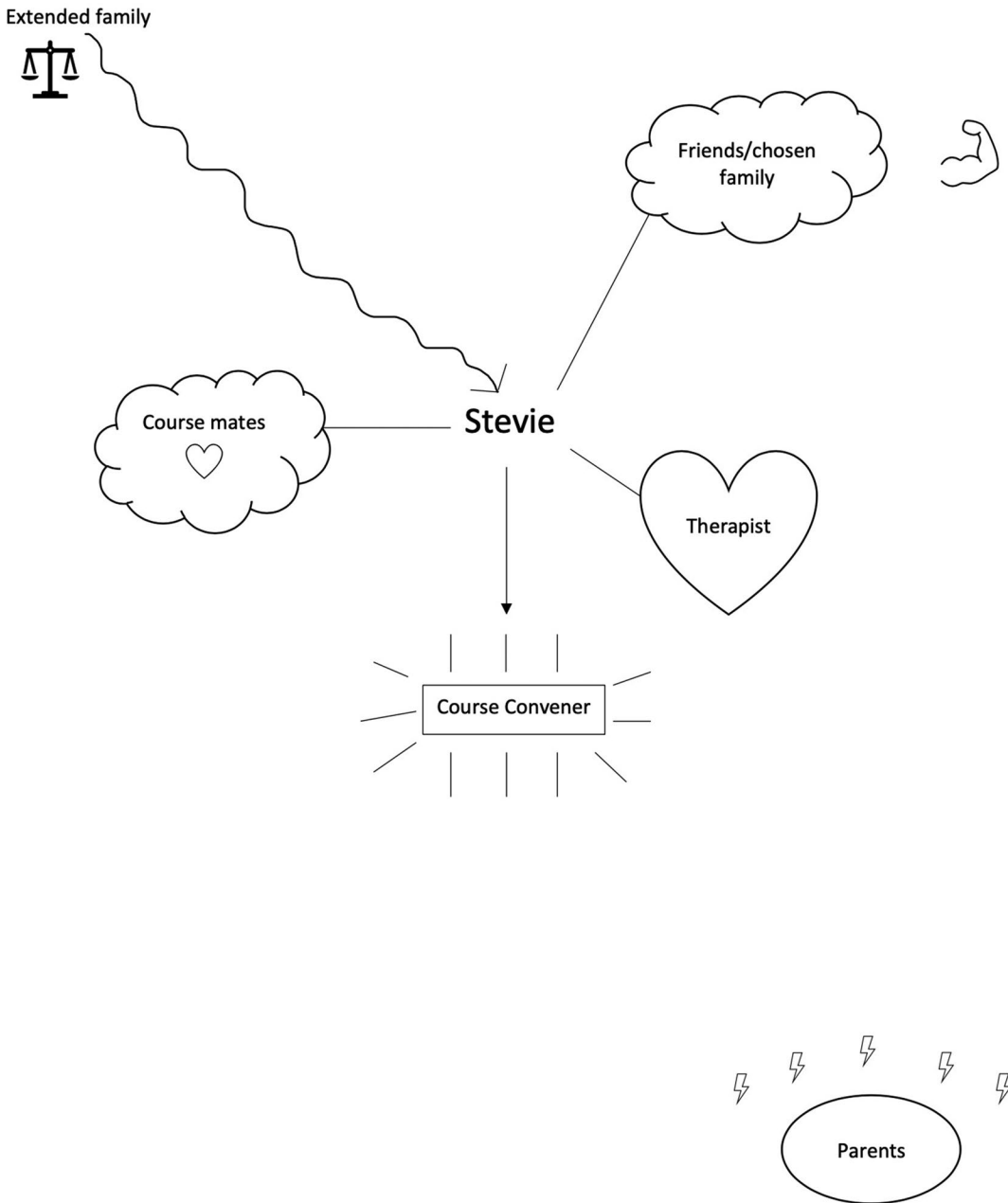


Figure 3. Stevie's family map.

mental health diagnoses to problematic behavior from family of origin members, and Stevie described feeling unsafe in the family home. Stevie drew lightning bolts around their parents on their family map to visually depict their problematic behavior (Figure 3). Stevie also drew scales next to their extended family, who despite still behaving in some problematic ways, had provided balance and support and were seen by Stevie as the reason “[I] survived my childhood.” Stevie had felt a particularly acute need to self-protect through nondisclosure when living at home:

I've kind of told myself that when I'm at a point where I can afford to move out again, then, it's fine, because I can go and have my own space. But I just don't want to be treated like an alien in my own home.

In turn nondisclosure was associated with feeling unseen (unrecognized) by their family of origin giving rise to a process cycle of contact being further withdrawn, discussion of emotional issues avoided, plus intensified self-concealment: “[they] think they know me, and they don’t, and I think that’s quite sad...that, like, you know, some days, I’m like, I’m great, and you should [Stevie’s emphasis] know me. But you, you don’t deserve to. And that’s...frustrating.” Thus, in Stevie’s case this process of minimization and withholding was linked to further self-questioning whether life would be easier if they were binary trans:

I have days where I’m like, would it be easier if I was literally a trans man? Because I feel like if I was still in the binary somewhere, would that be easier, more palatable for people to deal with?

Participants often directly addressed how their past interactions with family of origin members contributed to their developing sense of their own gender identity and how this then framed their ongoing relationships with their family of origin members currently. For example, participants experienced serious difficulties when disclosing their nonbinary identity, and some had deliberately postponed gender identity disclosure, or even medical transition in one case, in the face of persistent family invalidation. As Mo said; “I was always considered, like, as a kid, very overdramatic, so people said I was lying about stuff when I wasn’t. And then that led to, later in life when I came out, people not believing me.” In turn, gender identity invalidation from family of origin imbued an emotional quality to family relationships with long-lasting effects that characterized their current relationship with family members. For example, in relation to cutting contact with their family of origin, Bryant said:

I found it stressful at first, but then made my peace with it. I kind of felt like there was a storm inside me at all times, and now that storm is quiet a lot of the time. Not always, but clearly that was a good thing, that I did.

Theme 2: My self-supporters, cheerleaders, advocates, and identity objects: Creating networks of friends, partner/s and chosen family plus other resources to fulfill needs unmet by family of origin

Participants reported creating their current family networks and resources in part to fulfill emotional needs left unmet by family of origin. Created networks included partners, friends, social contacts, LGBTQ+ networks, therapists, colleagues and course conveners—all figures who offered a safe haven from the widespread experiences of discrimination, transphobia, misgendering, and lack of access within workplaces, higher education, and healthcare settings. Thus, these created family support networks seemed to provide something which families of origin appeared unable to give. Some participants referred to certain figures as chosen family or simply ‘family’. Even where the participants did not explicitly use the word family or chosen family, the authors were struck by the inclusion of friends, networks and other nontraditional figures on all five family maps drawn in the study. Considering the exercise was so clearly family oriented in its label, participants’ conceptualizations of their family were unanimously expansive and nontraditional.

Congruent with the heightened importance of elected relationships in LGBTQ+ family networks, we found that chosen family relationships were given a higher priority than family of origin relationships in the order of their inclusion on family maps in some cases. Bryant, Stevie, and Mo drew chosen family members before depicting any of their family of origin members. Participants also often quickly drew family of choice connections on their family map, but seemed hesitant when depicting family of origin members on their family map. For instance, Jen initially included their father on their family map, paused, and then followed up by drawing a question mark next to this representation (see [Figure 4](#)).

Pictographic markers (icons or identity objects, Wheeler & Bechler, 2021) were used on family maps to depict emotionally reliable figures. On Bryant’s family map a chosen family member,

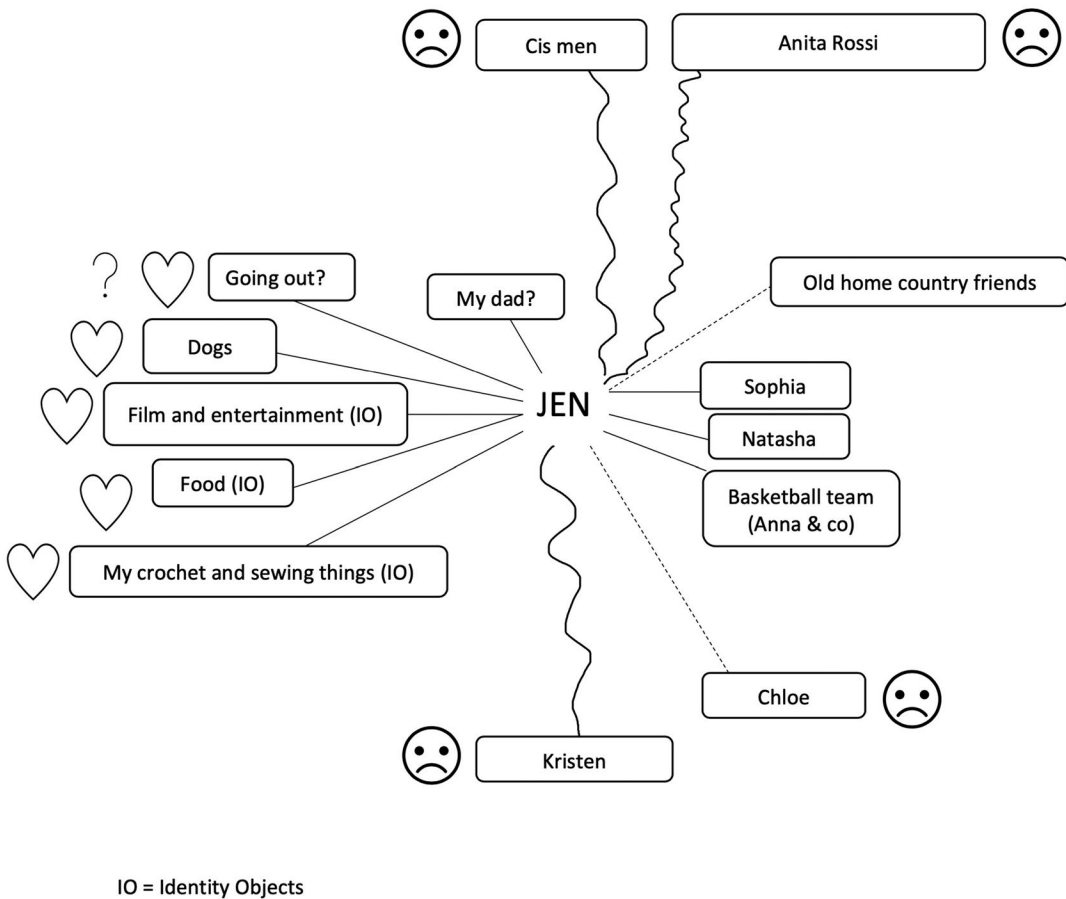


Figure 4. Jen's family map.

Liv, was depicted with an anchor (Figure 5). Jen's family map (see Figure 4) included not only people (with drawings next to them) but also comforting resources such as food and hobbies, reflecting important aspects of their identity that functioned as identity objects that "never let you down." LGBTQ+ networks, or 'places to be me', were represented on Jen's map—they included going out to LGBTQ+ spaces and their LGBTQ+ basketball team.

Validates my nonbinary identity

The Thematic Analysis of the verbal data collected gave some indication of participants' reasons for including particular people and objects on their family maps. A key aspect of current family formation was that the included person validated the participant's nonbinary identity. For Jen, sharing the coming out process with nonbinary friends provided reassurance in terms of shared nonbinary experiences:

I used to have ...two friends, that were going through a very similar thing at the same time. And we went, ok, what pronouns do you wanna use? And we all realized, oh my God. We're the same. We're fine. We were just...terrified [Jen's emphasis].

Where participants lacked nonbinary friends, all desired to have more nonbinary friends within their networks. Wider queer networks also facilitated sharing gender and sexual minority experiences generally. Family of choice members and networks made nonbinary young adults feel seen and validated and moved with the form and direction their gender identity and

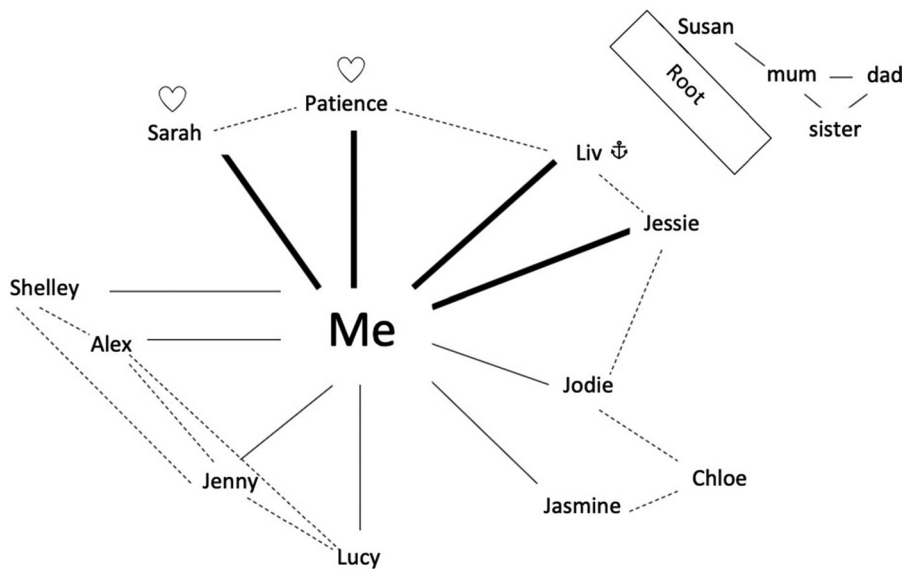


Figure 5. Bryant's family map.

expression took. In contrast, acceptance of nonbinary expression might at best be seen as being limited or bounded, even within otherwise accepting or at best neutral family of origin relationships. Being accepted as authentic, improved the nonbinary person's wellbeing and the quality and depth of these relationships in participant's created networks. In turn, having a healthy self-image gave participants room to explore their gender expression safely. As Stevie said of their course mates:

They've been a huge source of support for me. And just in terms of, when I'm worried about like, oh, God, am I being a pain for like, asking you to respect my gender. And they're like, obviously not, no, we love you, this is great. And I'm like, oh, that's cool. So, it's that reassurance of like, oh ok, you can express these things, and you're not going to get rejected for it.

They are on my side: Listens to me and can be trusted to support and advocate for me

Participants' current close relationships were populated by people who gave the participant a general sense of being emotionally supported both in relation to their nonbinary identity and in a general sense. There were several examples of participants alluding to the importance of a variety of shared life experiences in general as the basis for their inclusion (such as a common experience of a mental health issue or past or ongoing difficulties with family of origin relationships). Shared experience contributed to a feeling of mutual understanding and support. Nevertheless, above all else, the key aspect appeared to be an appreciation of being listened to and supported. Figures in participant created networks were depicted as mental health supporters and cheerleaders who sustained, promoted, or advocated for the participant's healthy self-view including the participant's nonbinary identity but not exclusive to their gender identity. The emphasis participants placed on advocates meant that not only close friends and partners were included in contemporary family networks but also therapists, college course mates, and tutors too. Thus, members of participants' current family networks were included because they alleviated some of the burden and labor associated with self-advocating, and functioned as mental health supporters and cheerleaders by encouraging a healthier self-image generally including acceptance of nonbinary identity expression. As Mo put it: "I value in my personal life, people believing me, like, hearing me, and listening to me and me being heard...It's kind of been a big theme throughout my life that I've never really been listened to." Emotional support from trustworthy

and reliable figures in their created networks were contrasted with feelings of being unsupported, let down, or at worst betrayed by family of origin members. For example, Crocode mentioned their childhood friends:

As for my friends, they are all the other people who I can talk to when I feel the need. Because, like, I don't talk to my parents about anything. So, my friends instead, um, because they are my friends from childhood, when I'm suffering from my family, they know about me and they will never betray me.

Theme 3: Future family uncertainty: Prospective parenthood as a risky challenge, but I'm not completely committed to childfreedom

When asked about what their family might look like in the future participants plans tended to be situated around continued exploration of their present circumstances, plus some uncertainty as to what family relationships might be formed in the future. The participants often simply wanted to form more meaningful family relationships than they currently had. Participants initial focus in answering the interview question on future family relationships did not mention either an orientation toward parenthood or childfreedom in the future. For example, Stevie said: "In the long term, I hope to get in a [committed romantic] relationship with like, someone (laughs), not just anyone, but like, a good person."

None of the participants represented future parenthood possibilities on their family map, and only one participant spoke of being certain that they wanted to pursue parenthood. Another participant was unsure about parenthood, although open to the possibility of adoptive parenthood. The remaining three participants reported that they were not interested in pursuing parenthood and could see ways to pursue their hoped for future family relationships without necessarily having children. Nevertheless, among the three participants who stated they were not interested in parenthood, there were sometimes indications of uncertainty in their narratives suggesting this could change in the future with the right conditions. For all five participants, visions of future family were linked to a complex set of challenges, often conceptualized in terms of risk. Four sub-themes emerged related to the challenges and risks associated with future family uncertainty specifically regarding parenthood possibilities.

Challenges associated with being a nonbinary parent

Several challenges associated with being a nonbinary parent were identified. These challenges included the logistical challenges associated with having children *via* surrogacy or *via* adoption, when either fertility clinics or agencies might restrict access to within normative gender boundaries. Further concerns were identified in the way the school system interacted with nonbinary parents. Mo thought that having a nonbinary parent might be potentially risky for the child as the child may stand out at school because of their parent's nonbinary identity: "I don't want my kid to get, er, it's tricky ... like I wouldn't want them to be different, the one who's always sticking out, because of who their parents are." Mo also anticipated the school system being difficult to navigate as a nonbinary parent, and that they would have to 'go in fighting'.

Anticipated risks to my nonbinary identity if parenthood was pursued: managing gender dysphoria and/or managing others misgendering me

Several participants expressed concern that biological parenthood could trigger gender dysphoria, particularly if this involved pregnancy. Three of the five participants demonstrated a strong aversion to pregnancy. For Stevie, who was not certain whether they wanted to be a parent or not, adoption felt like a more suitable option since biological parenthood was linked to potential gender dysphoria:

I don't necessarily see myself having kids. At least maybe not biological. Like, the idea of adoption, I'm like, ooh, that feels good. I don't know about actually carrying a child myself. I worry about dysphoria around that, especially if I end up having top surgery. I just, I don't know how it will work.

Risks to self were also identified around the raised potential for misgendering. Mo, who was certain they wanted to carry a child, was preparing to ‘plough through’ pregnancy related gender dysphoria experiences and had researched potential solutions to gender dysphoria, such as ascertaining whether further surgery was feasible. However, Mo noted that they were not sure if being called ‘mum’ would make them feel dysphoric, although they would not necessarily feel that the mother label was being forced upon them because parenthood is something you “opt-in for [and] become.” Thus, Mo hoped that the transformative process of parenthood might not be too dysphoric if “I go about in the right way.” Mo explained:

I feel like, as well, the idea of mother and motherhood is something that, it stretches, thankfully for me it stretches, kind of, beyond a totally binary thing, especially within the queer community. So, I dunno if I can find a way to make it sit in that for me, or if it would be another thing where it would be like that for me personally, but then everyone else would just use it as an excuse to misgender me all the time.

Risks to child from family of origin factors

Prominent among these other challenges and risks associated with possible future parenthood were risks participants foresaw for a future child that stemmed from the participant’s family of origin (as noted by four out of five participants). In some cases, family background concerns featured worries about the intergenerational transmission of parenting processes. Not having a close relationship with their own parents, meant that Crocodile felt unable to trust themselves in raising a child by showing enough nurturing warmth. Mo was concerned that despite wanting to raise their child gender-neutral, the way that Mo had been brought up could still lead to Mo inadvertently reinforcing gender norms for their child. Stevie not only wanted to protect their children from having grandparents with problematic views on gender, but also was concerned about transmission of a genetic component that could underlie their parents’ undiagnosed mental health issues. Stevie wanted to prevent further suffering by seeing familial mental health issues “end with me”:

If I have kids, I want my parents having minimal access, and definitely not, like, unsupervised. I don’t think I’d ever leave my kids alone with them. Like if I could, if there was any other way, but because of the way they’ve been with me ... I would like to shelter them from those kinds of viewpoints and, you know, raise them in as much of a gender-neutral way as possible.

The conditions for parenthood aren’t right – but that could change

Participants who did not want children, or who were unsure, cited current conditions in their lives that were not suited to parenthood. Some participants also stated the importance of their own immediate goals: needing to pursue gender affirming treatment and seeking to achieve more stability in relation to gender identity. In addition, the importance of improving living situations (including home ownership), career, income and/or relationship goals (since four out of five participants were single) were salient parts of all participants’ narratives as making progress in these areas was deemed essential before firming up future plans. Even Mo’s certainty about wanting a child had less immediacy than other goals in their life plan. Jen noted they did not want to parent alone, and therefore parenthood seemed inaccessible while intimate relationships “haven’t really been working out.” Jen also mentioned an immediate need to “think about me first” in their life as incompatible with caring for a child in the near future. Nevertheless, participants were open to the idea that these conditions could change in the future, conveying a degree of flexibility and openness that their opinions about parenthood could shift. This openness to thinking again about parenthood linked to participant narratives about their general uncertainty about the future. For Bryant, the future remained unclear because of the recency of their nonbinary discovery and gender transition commencement. Bryant noted that their long-standing desire not to parent had been challenged by their recent self-acceptance as gay and nonbinary:

So since being like oh actually hang on, I’m gay. It’s like, well maybe I will end up with somebody then, because I’m like starting my dating life from the beginning again...And also, maybe I would change into

wanting children as long as I'm not the one bearing them – maybe I would be ok with that, maybe I wouldn't. Does it even really matter? I don't know yet. Like I'm gonna have to see what happens in my life.

Discussion

The present study built upon the limited previous research into nonbinary young adults' experiences and expectations of past, present and future family relationships using visual and verbal qualitative data. Past and current experiences of family of origin were marked by emotional distance and associated with problems of gender misrecognition. Current family encompassed friends, chosen family, social networks, and other resources, who all created a family support network that in part helped to meet needs left unmet by family of origin. Created family members acted as self-supporters, cheerleaders, advocates, and identity objects for participants. Nonbinary young adults were somewhat uncertain of their future family plans. Mixed views were expressed about future parenthood, which was seen as being difficult to achieve in the way the nonbinary young adult wanted and risked gender dysphoria in various ways. Nevertheless, participants noted that their present views about the incompatibility of parenthood could change in the future thus they may not decide to remain childfree.

Emotional distance and other negative experiences with family of origin

Prior research emphasized how nonbinary young people often feel emotionally distant from their family of origin, particularly in relation to having their nonbinary identity invalidated or disregarded, or having to conceal aspects of their nonbinary identity to protect themselves emotionally (Catalpa & McGuire, 2018; Doussa et al., 2020; Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018; Losty & O'Connor, 2018; Platt et al., 2022). Catalpa and McGuire (2018) attributed this emotional distance to boundary ambiguity—the absence of clarity about family membership and relationships—that led to young adults experiencing uncertainty about when and how to express their trans identity, leaving the young adult feeling unseen by their family of origin. In our findings young adult resentment had led to partial withdrawal from family of origin interactions evident in their patrolling of emotional distance and boundaries as seen in the visual family map data through barrier placement or a physical distance between depicted figures. In addition to widespread experiences of cissexism and transphobia from families of origin, four out of five of our participants identified or alluded to experiences of abuse and/or neglect that were not explicitly linked to transphobia. Further research is clearly needed to unpick the high level of familial mistreatment in this population and the complexities of this in relation to both gender identity and their current relationships with family of origin members.

Looking beyond family of origin to find emotional support and identity affirmation

Patterns in participants' family maps reflected research showing that by young adulthood chosen family had become a prominent feature of LGBTQ+ people's family, although chosen family usually supplemented rather than replaced bio-legal family (Hull & Ortyl, 2019). Our focus on the evolution of family relationships indicated that the challenging set of relationships that nonbinary young adults experienced growing up in their families of origin prompted participants to rely on friends, chosen family, social networks, and other resources to meet unmet emotional needs. For nonbinary young adults, contemporary family support took many different forms developing through informal, pastoral, professional channels, often involving those with similar life experiences (Lewis et al., 2021). As Jackson Levin et al. (2020) noted, the main mode of reciprocal informal support and care was often related to identity-based needs *via* unmediated understanding stemming from a shared identity.

Advantages of nonbinary friendships were similar to those attributed to transgender friendships seen in previous studies including providing support and allowing participants to see the full scope of possibilities regarding their gender expression through sharing knowledge and affirmation (Boyer & Galupo, 2018; Galupo et al., 2014; Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018; Lewis et al., 2021; Losty & O'Connor, 2018). Unlike Bradford and Catalpa (2019) findings our data yielded no suggestion that friend support may be deemed unreliable or be underemphasized by nonbinary people. Beyond key people who were named on participants' family maps participants also often included the source of their connection with the wider LGBTQ+ community, such as mention of LGBTQ+ sports teams.

Maybe baby? Probably not, but perhaps that will change as future family evolves

Only one of our five participants was actively thinking about future parenthood in contrast to findings from Tasker and Gato (2020) and von Doussa et al. (2015) where imagined possibilities of parenthood formed an important part of trans adults narrated future life plans. Unlike those previous studies our recruitment focus was not explicitly on future parenthood plans, therefore, enlistment differences might have made the present findings correspondingly more open. Here our findings are similar to those of Guss et al. (2021) study where over half of their young adult participants did not desire children. Wider studies of the transgender community have noted that those who were planning on having children in the future reported higher levels of family support than did those who were not interested in having children (Riggs et al., 2016). Furthermore, family disruption and mental health issues can impact family building desires (Stark et al., 2021; Tasker & Gato, 2020). Thus, the lack of supportive relationships with family of origin and a high rate of psychological distress may have contributed to participants in the current study being relatively disinterested in pursuing parenthood.

Congruent with findings from existing research our participants reported concerns about parenthood both in terms of misgendering and gender dysphoria, in particular around biological parenthood and pregnancy (Carpenter & Niesen, 2021; Guss et al., 2021; Tasker & Gato, 2020). Only one participant in the current study was keen to queer parenthood despite also anticipating discomfort around their gender identity, similar to some participants in Carpenter and Niesen (2021) study. Our other participants currently ruled biological parenthood out of their reckoning for various reasons that also included potential gender dysphoria or misgendering. Adoption was seen as out of reach because gender-neutral parenthood (being a gender-neutral parent and/or raising a gender-neutral child) would be barred to them. Future research would do well to further explore the impact of misgendering on nonbinary parenthood intentions, due to the heightened capacity for misgendering within nonbinary populations and its well documented chronic and distressing nature (Barker & Iantaffi 2020; Losty & O'Connor, 2018).

Our participants also spoke of other challenges associated with being a nonbinary parent, including concerns that being a nonbinary parent may lead their children to be stigmatized or stand out in a negative way. Parents concerns regarding the transference of stigma onto their children echoed findings in a review of trans parenting by Hafford-Letchfield et al. (2019). Our findings further indicated how past negative experiences with family of origin led some participants to be concerned about family of origin pressing binary gender norms on either them as parents or their children.

Findings within a life course theory context

Our use of the family map technique focused attention on how participants past family relationships framed their present family networks and facilitated reflections on how these experiences might influence their plans for future family building. Overall, our findings were congruent with the LCT concept that human development is a life span process whereby individual decision

making (agency) regarding childfree choices and parenthood is motivated by earlier experiences, both within the family of origin and external to it (Elder et al., 2003; Petit et al., 2018). Negative experiences with family of origin in relation to the enforcing of gender norms and invalidation of gender identity led participants to be wary of parenthood. Plus, participants expressed other concerns too relating to negative influences stemming from their family of origin. In focusing our attention on family relationship considerations these were foregrounded in our data collection and in our thematic analysis too. Nevertheless, family of origin relationships contribute only a subset of 'linked lives' across the life course and we have no doubt missed linked lives influences stemming from other relationship factors.

Societal time and place considerations also contextualized our participants as increasing numbers of young adults in the UK postponed decisions about parenthood or decided to remain childfree (Office for National Statistics, 2024). Tensions were felt by many transgender people in the UK as gender identity services were stretched by increased demand while simultaneously facing continued cuts, shortages during the Covid-19 pandemic, and heightened opposition and closure (BBC News, 2021). Within gender identity service provision fertility preservation options were increasingly being discussed, although provision for government funding *via* the National Health Service funding was limited and further reduced (Guy's & St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, 2024a, 2024b; Parkin, 2023; Stonewall, 2023). Furthermore, LGBTQ+ adolescents and young adults in the UK experienced considerable sexual and gender minority stress in the school system and when entering college or starting work (Stonewall, 2017, 2020).

The lack of clarity around parenthood intentions expressed by our participants was often explained by them feeling that their present circumstances were not conducive to parenthood. However, participants were aware that their circumstances and their decision could potentially change in the future—again in line with an LCT framework of lifespan development (Elder et al., 2003). Some participants noted that their own gender identity formation was still in flux, or that they wished to pursue further medical transition before deciding. The reciprocal relationship between parenthood considerations and realization of gender identity was previously highlighted by Tasker and Gato (2020), who observed that achieving an appropriate gender or nonbinary sense of self was linked to feeling more ready for parenthood.

Parenting desires were dynamic, open to change, and continually reevaluated, particularly in light of participants learning new information or facing structural barriers. Our participants placed importance on financial, career and partnership goals, which were deemed necessary to meet before pursuing parenthood or even *considering* whether to pursue parenthood. Notably, Mo was the only participant interested in parenthood but also the only participant in a committed relationship. Therefore, this aspect—who they would parent with—was clearer for Mo than for the other participants who did not mention single parenthood as a possibility. Participants who did not desire pregnancy sometimes referenced the potential reproductive capacity of future partners. Carpenter and Niesen (2021) also noted that accommodating partner preferences, especially in relation to desire and ability to get pregnant and feelings around biological connection, were deemed more complex and challenging for nonbinary people in a relationship context than for cis-heterosexual couples.

Study strengths and limitations

Investigating both verbal and visual data from a small homogenous sample has enabled rich qualitative insights to be gathered from across cases. Furthermore, that the first author also identified as nonbinary may have led participants to feel more comfortable in sharing their experiences and contributed to a more nuanced analysis of the data. However, our verbal and visual qualitative data were collected from interviews with a small and relatively homogenous sample and are limited to this group. All five participants had been assigned female at birth,

and mostly did not have concerns about their own fertility. Only one participant had undergone gender affirming hormonal or surgical procedures. Therefore, our findings do not address the same fertility-related concerns that have dominated previous studies. Notwithstanding, to gain a deeper and more thorough understanding of the experiences and needs of nonbinary communities as a whole, future research will need to recruit participants assigned male at birth.

All our participants were white, university-educated, and able-bodied, although four of our five participants also had a long-term physical or mental health condition. Future research should also consider the experiences of people of color using an intersectional approach, as they may face qualitatively different experiences than those of white and nondisabled participants. For example, transgender people of color are at higher risk of reduced family support and are often marginalized within the wider LGBTQ+ community (Brown & Rogers, 2020; Lewis et al., 2021; Platt et al., 2022). Carpenter and Niesen (2021) also noted that an additional family formation barrier for queer cisgender women of color and nonbinary people of color assigned female at birth was the lack of ethnically and racially diverse donors. Furthermore, the importance of chosen family indicated in the present study may reflect the queering of middle/upper-class white cultures and not be more widely relevant (Jackson Levin et al., 2020). In addition, our participants were connected to the LGBTQ+ community and recruited through shared LGBTQ+ networks, limiting the incorporation of those who are not affiliated with the LGBTQ+ community, who may not have cultivated ‘chosen family’ as readily as our participants did.

Conclusions

The family mapping interview technique we used provided a blank canvas for prompting nonbinary young adults wide ranging discussion and depiction of family relationships in the past and present, as well as those they anticipated in the future. Our findings have extended existing research by highlighting the prominent role of emotional distancing within family of origin relationships and how this may motivate nonbinary young adults current and future family formation. Nonbinary young adults emphasized unique concerns in relation to future family building, particularly around the risks of misgendering during pregnancy and parenthood, plus anticipated challenges linked to gender-neutral parenting intentions. The acknowledgement of such concerns by all family members and within health and social care settings would help to allay nonbinary people’s fears and make services more accessible to this population.

Note

1. The term “nonbinary” has been used to encompass any gender identity that exists outside of the dominant societal male/female gender binary and may include having more than one gender identity, a fluctuating gender identity, no gender identity, or disagreeing with the idea of gender altogether (Clucas & Whittle, 2017; Haddock & Meier, 2020; Richards et al., 2017). For the purposes of this paper, nonbinary will be used to refer to people with any kind of gender identity that exists outside of the binary male/female system. Binary trans will be used to describe transgender people with a binary gender identity. Where the word trans or transgender appears alone it will be to locate nonbinary and binary trans people under a broader umbrella ‘trans’ community as a whole. Nevertheless in the absence of prior clarity over terms when referencing other research studies, we use the authors’ original terms when necessary.

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Disclosure statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest or benefits.

Institutional review board statement

The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Ethics Committees of Birkbeck University.

Informed consent statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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