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Transgender and gender non-conforming leaders and leadership:

A foundational and integrative review

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Abstract

Gender and leadership research has traditionally employed a binary framework, overlooking the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) leaders and forcing leaders of all genders and intersectional identities into a dichotomous frame. This paper reviewed interdisciplinary literature using a robust search strategy in three academic databases and Google Scholar, as well as across eight leadership studies journals. Sixteen sources involving 440 leaders' experiences were found. The author conducted a thematic analysis to explore how TGNC leaders' experiences challenge and advance leadership theories, deepen understanding of discrimination, and offer ways to support their emergence and success. TGNC leaders' experiences bring new perspectives to the areas of identity development, leader emergence, leadership style, and workplace discrimination. By exploring these areas with a more inclusive conception of gender and from the vantage point of an exceptionally marginalized group, this work proposes ways to increase the validity of future research questions and bolster ongoing efforts toward greater diversity, equity, and inclusion for all people.

Transgender and gender non-conforming leaders and leadership:

A foundational and integrative review

For more than 50 years, scholars have explored the topic of gender and leadership. Substantial research has helped us analyze how different leaders lead, how perceptions influence outcomes for leaders, and how masculine stereotypes and prejudice against female leaders have presented enduring barriers to advancement for women (Eagly et al., 1992; Eagly et al., 2003; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly et al., 1995; Koenig et al., 2011). This research has produced essential knowledge in pursuit of women's uplift amidst men's dominance in societal power, but gender stereotypes and discrimination persist (Eagly & Heilman, 2016). Recent reviews of the literature suggest a robust gender and leadership research agenda will continue (Shen & Joseph, 2021).

Across this work, researchers have taken binary approaches to sex and gender. Intersex, transgender, nonbinary, and other transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) people are almost entirely invisible despite theoretical challenges to the binary gender paradigm (Fassinger et al., 2010; Jourian, 2014; Köllen & Rumens, 2022). Furthermore, the idea of a universal gender (i.e., consistent across race and other social categories) persists despite being thoroughly debunked by extensive research, for example, with male and female leaders of color (Bass, 2020; Breslin et al, 2017; Liu, 2019; Livingston et al., 2012; Parker, 2005; Rosette et al., 2016; Sims et al., 2021). Tan and DeFrank-Cole (2023) identified two crucial next steps for gender and leadership research: disrupting this universal, gender-binary paradigm, and focusing on holistic changes that will address systemic problems. TGNC leaders' experiences and perspectives are essential to include in this work, especially as more than 5% of young adults (ages 18-29) in the U.S. identify with a gender other than their sex assigned at birth (Brown, 2022).

By focusing on TGNC leaders, I do not mean to imply that terms like “transgender” or “nonbinary” serve as overarching categories defining a person's leadership (Vicente, 2021), nor to

downplay the influence of intersectional identities (Pastrana, 2010). However, TGNC people seem to have been categorically excluded from previous research, and thus received the focus of this paper.

Including TGNC leaders does not simply mean adding categories for gender. Anti-trans bias and violence contests the very existence of TGNC people in the United States (Brightman et al., 2023), with 2023 marking the fourth consecutive record-breaking year for anti-trans bills considered in the U.S. (Trans Legislation Tracker, 2023). TGNC employees daily endure discrimination, harassment, assault, barriers to advancement, non-inclusive policies, binary expectations, isolation, silencing, and microaggressions (Davidson, 2016; Goryunova et al., 2022; Gut et al., 2018; Köllen & Rumens, 2022; Mizock et al., 2018). We need to understand TGNC leaders' experiences to cultivate safer work environments and support their development, emergence, and flourishing. Seeing themselves in the leadership literature would further a shared sense of history, community, and purpose and help TGNC leaders build counter-narratives to forces that stigmatize and exclude them. Supporting TGNC leaders means not only broadening our conception of gender, but also understanding how gender discrimination, homophobia, transphobia, stigma, cisnormativity, and heteronormativity affect everyone's potential for leadership success. Such activity builds on previous waves of liberation movements (e.g., feminism, civil rights) and efforts to center marginalized voices in leadership studies (Breslin, 2017; Chin & Trimble, 2014; Parker, 2015; Tan & DeFrank-Cole, 2023).

This paper aims to expose the dearth of research with TGNC people in leadership studies and raise the visibility of existing work. Including TGNC leaders' experiences would expand, challenge, and progress gender and leadership theories and point to ways gender variables can be created with greater nuance and validity. TGNC leaders' experiences offer further nuances to our understanding of discrimination and provide strategies for supporting their emergence and flourishing. Toward this end, the author conducted a literature review of English-language research studies on TGNC leaders' experiences, extending previous work by Fagan and Short (2023). The fact that only 16 sources were found shows great opportunity for future research, while the richness of the experiences of the 440 leaders involved confirm TGNC perspectives are critical for inclusion in "mainstream" research studies.

What does the needed conceptual change to gender entail? Leadership studies scholars have long been differentiating gender as a social construct from sex as a biological construct (Koenig et al., 2011; Wood & Eagly, 2015), but generally use both sex and gender to group people into only two categories. But biological sex is not a binary or static variable (Einstein, 2011), more than two genders are created by combinations of biology and social construction; and both sex and gender can change over time (Glick, 2018; Coleman, 2022). Restriction to the masculine-feminine binary is costly for all, as the “permutations of gender which do not fit the binary are as much a part of gender as its most normative instance” (Butler, 2004, p. 42). Because leadership is socially and performatively constructed (Fine, 2016; Ford et al., 2008), gender is also usefully seen as performatively constituted by actions and language, where the very *doing* of behaviors construct gender rather than gender being something we learn about ourselves (Butler, 2004). Gender also combines with other identity journeys involving race, class, sexual orientation, and ability in ways that affect leadership development, emergence, and success (Breslin et al., 2017). As Parker noted, combining a performative perspective with consideration of social context permits an emphasis on *both* human agency and social deconstruction, allowing the standpoints of marginalized people to see “not only their own positions, but the dominant system as a whole” (2005, p. 15).

Queer theory (QT) may help us to review these points of entry more clearly. While QT has mainly been used in management and organizational studies to contest heteronormative alignments between sex, gender, and sexuality, this paper follows Rumens et al. (2019) in regarding queer as “against the normal rather than the heterosexual” (Warner, 1993, p. xxvi). QT can be used to analyze “majority” identities by resisting categorization, critiquing social practices that sexualize identities, and challenging universalism and essentialism, thus opening minds to how TGNC experiences illuminate the experiences of all genders. How might our views change if we regard the “queer” or “deviant” as the default, or normal, and question what is commonly considered to be the “normal” (e.g., heterosexual, cisgender)? For example, if we look through QT glasses at men who demonstrate caring, “feminine” behaviors at work (including cismen, Black men, and trans men), we can evaluate those behaviors as normative for all people rather than transgressive to a “majority-view” idea of masculinity. QT can also reveal how

categorizations contribute to unjust power relations, whereby heterosexual and cisgender identities offer privileges and advantages due to the social power those identities entail (Gamboa et al., 2021).

It is time for the vast and vibrant gender and leadership literature to begin using a more complex definition of gender that supports inclusion of TGNC people as well as intersectional identities, and to re-examine how longstanding dilemmas in the field may have been created by the assumption of universal and binary genders. The leadership studies field also needs to acknowledge and support TGNC leaders' presence and contributions as part of its agenda for diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice.

Definition of Gender-Related Terms

This paper uses transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) to include all genders other than cisgender, which is used to describe people whose gender aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender (or trans) describes those whose gender identity differs from their birth-assigned sex (GLAAD, 2022). Gender non-conforming (GNC) or nonbinary (NB) encompasses those who do not conform to categories of man or woman; their gender may involve multiple identities, no gender, a neutral or blended gender, a distinct gender neither male nor female, evolving genders, or combinations thereof (Coleman, et al., 2022, p. 580; Dembroff, 2020). Trans people may or may not consider themselves gender non-conforming, as they may wish to be perceived as their gender with or without also being known as a trans person. GNC / NB people may or may not also identify as transgender. People may use multiple identifiers, including combinations of transgender, nonbinary, genderfluid, genderqueer, gender non-conforming, man, woman, feminine, masculine, or other terms.

Search Methods and Results

This review looked for research exploring TGNC leaders' experiences. Although the intent was to find sources within leadership studies, searches were conducted broadly in anticipation of scarcity. No date, format, or peer-reviewed limits were applied. Between December 2022-July 2023, the following searches were entered into the academic databases Business Source Complete, PsycINFO, and SocINDEX:

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- (“gender nonconforming” OR “gender non-conforming”) AND leader*
- (genderqueer OR genderfluid) AND leader*
- (nonbinary OR non-binary) AND leader*
- transgender* N10 leader*
- (transman OR transmen OR “trans man” OR “trans men” OR “trans woman” OR “trans women” OR transmasculine OR transfeminine OR “trans masculine” OR “trans feminine”) AND leader*

The N10 operator, which finds terms within 10 words of one another, was used with the transgender* search because of the large number of sources related to TGNC employees, patients, and students. All searches were double-checked July-August 2023. Table 1 shows the number of results found for each academic database search, and the number of sources initially retained after reviewing titles and abstracts.

Table 1. Academic Database Searches and Results

Database Name	Search Terms	Results	Retained
Business Source Complete	("gender nonconforming" ...) AND leader*	6	3
	(genderqueer OR genderfluid) AND leader*	1	
	(nonbinary OR non-binary) AND leader*	16	
	transgender* N10 leader*	38	
	(transman OR ...) AND leader*	5	
PsycInfo	("gender nonconforming" ...) AND leader*	47	8
	(genderqueer OR genderfluid) AND leader*	4	
	(nonbinary OR non-binary) AND leader*	29	
	transgender* N10 leader*	63	
	(transman OR ...) AND leader*	14	
SocINDEX	("gender nonconforming" ...) AND leader*	5	3
	(genderqueer OR genderfluid) AND leader*	2	
	(nonbinary OR non-binary) AND leader*	10	
	transgender* N10 leader*	23	
	(transman OR ...) AND leader*	9	

From May-August 2023, the sources retained from the three databases were searched in Google Scholar to find sources that had since cited them (i.e., using Google Scholar’s “Cited By” feature). Newly found relevant sources were also searched, for a total of 28 citation searches in Google Scholar, from which 119 additional sources were reviewed in more detail. Google Scholar’s default search was also queried using the following string, which retrieved about 84,800 results.

leadership transgender OR transman OR transmen OR “trans man” OR “trans men” OR “trans woman” OR “trans women” OR transmasculine OR transfeminine OR “trans masculine” OR “trans feminine” OR genderfluid OR “gender queer” OR “gender fluid” OR non-binary OR nonbinary OR “gender non-conforming” OR “gender nonconforming”

The top 100 results were reviewed, and no new relevant results were found. The bibliographies of relevant sources found across all searches were also examined, and two additional items were found.

A series of 32 searches was also conducted in May-August 2023 for interest in TGNC people across eight leadership journals. The following four searches were used:

- (genderqueer OR genderfluid OR “gender queer” OR “gender fluid”)
- “gender nonconforming” OR “gender non-conforming”
- nonbinary OR “non-binary”
- transgender* OR transman OR transmen OR “trans man” OR “trans men” OR “trans woman” OR “trans women” OR transmasculine OR transfeminine OR “trans masculine” OR “trans feminine”

Only five of the nine journals had any results for these searches whatsoever, and only two of the journals had published articles concerning the *leadership* of TGNC people (Table 2). These articles had been previously found, and the rest did not meet this review’s scope.

After thoroughly reviewing the potentially relevant sources, only 16 results were found that focused on TGNC leader experiences. One of the 16 sources was found in both SocINDEX and PsycInfo; eight were found in PsycInfo and Google Scholar, and seven were found only in Google Scholar.

Common topics in the results but outside the scope of this review included sources about leadership in settings where TGNC concerns are common, such as schools and health care, sources about LGBTQ+ leaders that did not focus on gender identity, and studies of TGNC employees’ experiences.

Eleven of the 16 sources featured research questions specific to TGNC people, while five focused on LGBTQ+ people but reported results separately for TGNC participants. Four of the 16 used a quantitative approach, and 12 used a qualitative approach. Phenomenological interviews and heuristic approaches were commonly used to identify common themes and experiences. Fourteen of the 16 studies had trans participants, while only six had nonbinary or genderqueer/genderfluid participants. In one study (Joksimović, 2020), four of the eight trans participants also identified as nonbinary and were counted in

both categories, and in Alimchandani (2015), two of the 10 trans participants also identified as genderqueer.

Table 2. Journals Searched and Results Retrieved

Journal	Search Platform and Dates of Coverage	Search Terms	Results	Relevant
<i>Gender in Management</i> Emerald, 1985-present		genderfluid search string	5	2
		GNC search string	6	1
		non-binary OR nonbinary	11	2
		transgender search string	26	3
Total Relevant in this Journal				3
<i>Gender, Work and Organization</i> Wiley, 1994-present	BSC, 1998-present	genderfluid search string	2	0
		GNC search string	3	0
		non-binary OR nonbinary	7	0
		transgender search string	16	0
Total Relevant in this Journal				0
<i>International Leadership Journal</i> TST, Inc., 2008-present	BSC, 2014-present	genderfluid search string	0	0
		GNC search string	2	0
		non-binary OR nonbinary	0	0
		transgender search string	0	0
Total Relevant in this Journal				0
<i>Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies</i> Sage, 1993-present	BSC, 2002-present	genderfluid search string	0	0
		GNC search string	0	0
		non-binary OR nonbinary	0	0
		transgender search string	0	0
Total Relevant in this Journal				0
<i>Journal of Leadership Studies</i> Wiley, 2007-present	BSC, 2009-present	genderfluid search string	0	0
		GNC search string	0	0
		non-binary OR nonbinary	0	0
		transgender search string	0	0
Total Relevant in this Journal				0
<i>Leadership</i> Sage, 2005-present	PSYCInfo, 2005-present	genderfluid search string	0	0
		GNC search string	0	0
		non-binary OR nonbinary	0	0
		transgender search string	2	2
Total Relevant in this Journal				2
<i>Leadership & Organization Development Journal</i> Emerald, 1980-present	Emerald, 1980-present	genderfluid search string	0	0
		GNC search string	1	0
		non-binary OR nonbinary	0	0
		transgender search string	1	0
Total Relevant in this Journal				0
<i>Leadership Quarterly</i> Elsevier, 1990-present	BSC, 1996-present	genderfluid search string	0	0
		GNC search string	0	0
		non-binary OR nonbinary	0	0
		transgender search string	0	0
Total Relevant in this Journal				0

Five of the 16 sources were articles in the journals *Journal of Business Venturing Insights*, *Journal of College Student Development*, *Journal of LGBT Youth*, and *Leadership* (Table 3). There were also nine dissertations, one book, and one thesis (Table 4). Michelle Hamilton-Page's dissertation portfolio includes a presentation (2021) and podcast (2023) and these were counted as one study. Results were published between 2015 and 2023, inclusive, about one per year, with four appearing in 2022.

These 16 sources were hidden and generally disconnected from one another. None were found in Business Source Complete, a major academic database, and almost half the sources were only found in Google Scholar. Eleven of the 16 sources have been cited two or fewer times, even though five of these appeared prior to 2020. These findings and the results of the journal searches suggest the leadership studies field is not yet inclusive of TGNC leaders or their experiences. This paper brings these 16 sources together for the first time to analyze what we might learn from TGNC leaders' experiences and how the findings suggest implications for future research.

Table 3. Title: Relevant Journal Articles Found in Academic Databases and Google Scholar

Authors	Year	Title	Journal Title	Cited By*	Focus and Method	NB Participants	Trans Participants
Beck	2020	“It began with me”: An exploration of exemplary school counselor and principal experiences with LGBT students	<i>Journal of LGBT Youth</i>	12	LGBTQ+ Qualitative	0	1
Darden et al.	2022	Entrepreneurial fear of failure: Transgender versus cis-gender entrepreneurs	<i>Journal of Business Venturing Insights</i>	0	TGNC Quantitative	83	38
Dugan et al.	2012	Transgender college students: An exploratory study of perceptions, engagement, and educational outcomes	<i>Journal of College Student Development</i>	258	TGNC Quantitative	0	91
Gamboa, Ilac, Carangan, & Agida	2021	Queering public leadership: The case of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender leaders in the Philippines	<i>Leadership</i>	12	LGBTQ+ Qualitative	0	2
Muhr & Sullivan	2013	'None so queer as folk': Gendered expectations and transgressive bodies in leadership	<i>Leadership</i>	125	TGNC Qualitative	0	1

Note. * Indicates the number of citations in Google Scholar citing the article.

Table 4. Relevant Monographs Found in Academic Databases and Google Scholar

Authors	Year	Document Type	Title	Author Department	Author Institution	Cited By*	Focus and Method	NB Participants	Trans Participants
Alimchandani	2015	Dissertation	An exploration of community-level agency among transgender and gender nonconforming people of color	Applied Psychology	New York University	2	TGNC Qualitative	2*	10
Brewer	2016	Dissertation	The social expectations of masculinity and female-to-male transgender leaders: A heuristic study	Leadership Development	Chicago School of Professional Psychology	2	TGNC Qualitative	0	4
Bruce	2022	Dissertation	Authentic truth at work: A case study of the lived professional experiences of a transgender educational leader through the lens of the synergistic leadership theory	Educational Administration	The University of Nebraska - Lincoln	0	TGNC Qualitative	0	1
Hamilton-Page	2021, 2023	Dissertation Portfolio	Unbound leadership: How gender non-conforming, or non-binary lesbians navigate the workplace from a place of visibility	Social Sciences	Royal Roads University	0	TGNC Qualitative	25	0
Huelskamp	2022	Dissertation	Queering Christian leadership: a narrative inquiry into the leadership of LGBTQIA+ church leaders	Educational Leadership	University of the Cumberlands	0	LGBTQ+ Qualitative	8**	0
Hurley	2016	Dissertation	I am because we are: Exploring the relationships between mentorship, involvement in LGBTQ student organizations, resiliency, and leadership efficacy of queer students of color	Teacher Education and Higher Education	The University of North Carolina at Greensboro	2	LGBTQ+ Quantitative	0	124
Joksimović	2020	Book	Activist identity development of transgender social justice activists and educators	Human Sciences	University of Verona	2	TGNC Qualitative	4***	8
Musick	2018	Thesis	Androgynous leadership as performed by queer leaders	Department of Communication	University of Colorado Colorado Springs	1	TGNC Qualitative	0	6
Schueler	2022	Dissertation	Transgender organizational leaders in the workplace: A generic qualitative investigation	School of Social and Behavioral Sciences	Capella University	0	TGNC Qualitative	2	6
Serjoie	2019	Dissertation	Examining the relationship between participation in youth leadership development and leadership styles of undergraduate college student leaders	School of Education	Colorado State University	3	LGBTQ+ Quantitative	0	6
Shakespeare	2017	Dissertation	Gender castaways: A hermeneutic phenomenological study about African American transmen and organizational culture	Industrial/Organizational Psychology	University of Phoenix	2	TGNC Qualitative	0	20

Note. * two of the 10 transgender participants also identified as genderqueer, for a total of 10 participants. ** three of the participants identified as nonbinary; five used other gender non-conforming identifiers. *** four of the eight trans participants also identified as nonbinary, for a total of eight participants

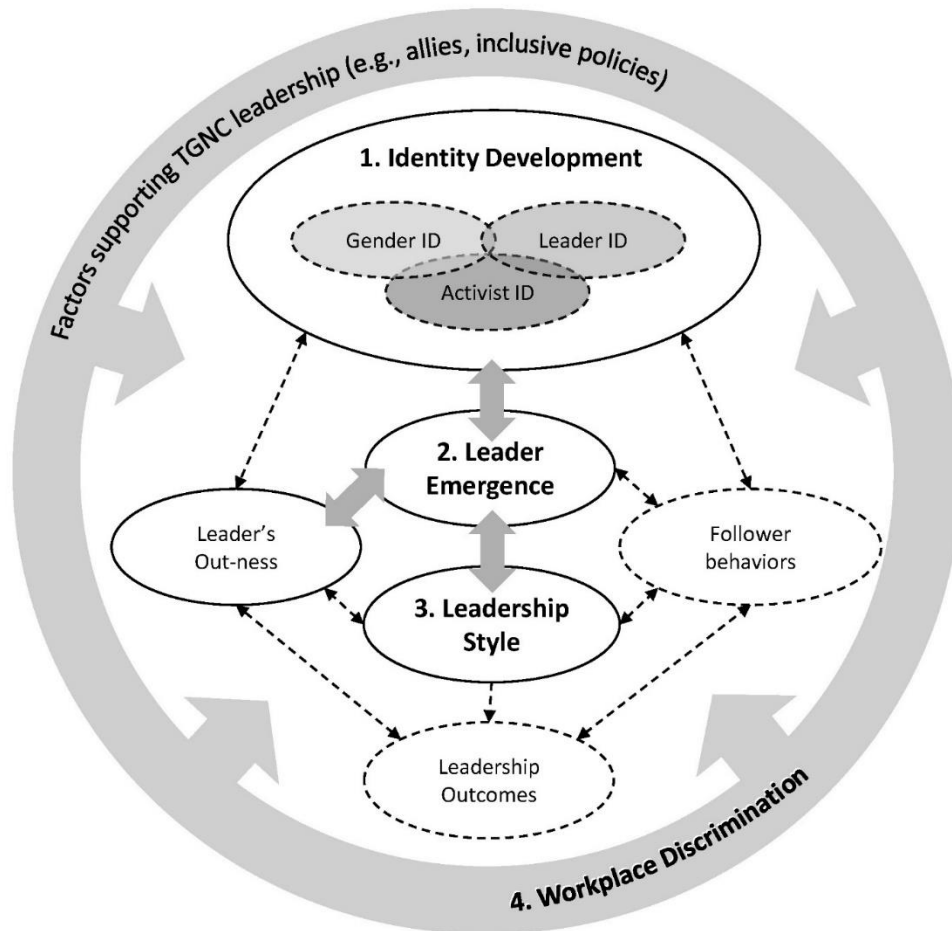
Theoretical Analysis

Figure 1 presents a diagram of themes found in the 16 sources and is followed by sections for each theme that situate findings within leadership theories and suggest future research. Themes were identified from common TGNC experiences while also considering areas of high interest to the leadership studies field: 1) identity development (which for TGNC leaders includes aspects of gender, leadership, and activism), 2) leader emergence, 3) leadership style, and 4) workplace discrimination.

The leader's "outness" (i.e., public disclosure of identities) is discussed in the context of leader emergence, while factors supporting TGNC leadership (e.g., allies, mentoring, and inclusive policies) are primarily discussed in the identity development and leader emergence sections, as these are the sections where relevant findings were most prominent. However, these concepts were glimpsed in other areas and merit future exploration. Follower behaviors and leadership outcomes are shown on the diagram with dotted lines because these were not central themes within this corpus but are implicitly present in leaders' experiences and foreshadow the need for future research.

Figure 1

Thematic Diagram of Common TGNC Leader Experiences Across 16 Studies



1. Identity Development

“I am a privileged transwoman. Who’s Latina. ...with that, I think, with privilege, I think it’s also an opportunity” —out, trans woman program director, fundraiser, policy co-chair, community organizer, and advocate (Alimchandani, 2005)

“I think coming to terms more with my gender identity has made me think more about how women and femme people aren’t listened to and [removed from] decision-making processes. I think that has gotten me to start understanding my own femininity a little bit more and connecting it to the experiences of like women broadly. That has changed the way I think about leadership” —white nonbinary minister candidate, not fully out at work (Huelskamp, 2022, pp. 188-189).

Scholars identify leader identity development as a critical area for research (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Epitropaki et al., 2017; Marchiondo et al., 2015). Sinclair (2011) identified two approaches in the field: a self-help approach supporting individual leaders in conforming to prototypical standards and a

social justice approach informing systematic resistance to oppression. These 16 studies suggest TGNC leaders' experiences bridge these approaches in a similar way to those of leaders from other marginalized groups (Bass, 2020; Hinton, 2020; Lanier, et al., 2022).

The development of TGNC gender identity, leader identity, and activist identity are intertwined (Musick, 2018, p. 26), and racial, cultural, and spiritual identities may also be part of their journeys (Alimchandani, 2016; Gamboa et al., 2021; Hurley, 2016; Huelskamp, 2022; Shakespeare, 2017). Previous research suggests that a new leader's ability to integrate multiple identities serves as a predictor of leader success (Yip et al. 2020, as cited in Schueler, 2022).

TGNC leaders must make greater efforts than cis leaders to develop and exercise the self-confidence which consistently shows up as a leadership trait (Judge et al., 2002) because their internal or overt transgressions of the gender binary likely do not match followers' ingroup prototypes for leaders (Hogg et al., 2012), and because their own fears may be exacerbated by a history of others' judgments and stigma (Darden et al., 2022). The TGNC leaders in these studies engaged in extensive self-reflection that resulted in groundedness and self-actualization, self-awareness, self-development, personal growth, and learning (Alimchandani, 2015; Beck, 2020; Brewer, 2016; Joksimović, 2020; Musick, 2018). Self-discovery seems related to a "search for belonging" (Musick, 2018, p. 35) and the development of resilience, which requires and includes self-care (Alimchandani, 2015; Bruce, 2022), "creative problem-solving" (Hamilton-Page, 2021, 2023), code switching (Gamboa et al., 2021), and self-protection (Bruce, 2022, Musick, 2018). TGNC leaders also frequently demonstrated humility and acknowledged the importance of external support such as mentoring, TGNC role models, and leadership development programs (Alimchandani, 2016; Bruce, 2022; Musick, 2018).

Three of the studies focused directly on leaders in activist roles (Alimchandani, 2015; Gamboa et al., 2021; Joksimović, 2020), and most others showed connections between leader and activist identities, supporting previous findings with LGBT leaders (Pryor, 2017; Renn, 2007). Even the trans woman leader who said, "I'm not an activist by any means," added "either by choice or by force, [my transition is] putting me in a place to help make things better for other LGBT people" (Schueler, 2022, p. 79). TGNC

leaders developed empathy for individuals from other marginalized groups due to their own experiences of being marginalized (Alimchandani, 2015; Bruce, 2022; Huelskamp, 2022). Awareness of privilege was heightened by their experiences (Brewer, 2016; Huelskamp, 2022; Musick, 2018; Shakespeare, 2017). As one trans woman said,

My worldview has changed because I've seen what it's like to be a man in leadership versus being a woman in leadership versus being transgender in leadership, and even I can tell right off the bat if someone thinks I'm a man or a woman or transgender based on something as small as a handshake. And so it really kind of made me aware of how wrong so many things are and how there would be opportunities that would present themselves when I was cisgender male versus a transgender woman..." (Schueler, 2022, p. 83).

Accordingly, many TGNC leaders used their leadership positions and skills to work for safer, inclusive, equitable, and affirming environments (Alimchandani, 2015; Beck, 2020; Bruce, 2022; Gamboa et al., 2021; Hamilton-Page, 2021, 2023; Huelskamp, 2022; Joksimović, 2020; Musick, 2018; Schueler, 2022). For TGNC leaders of color, Alimchandani proposed that activism may be "an integral part of emotional healing for individuals struggling with internalized oppression" that helps TGNC leaders see themselves as leaders (2016, p244). However, discrimination meant that some identity journeys resulted in some TGNC leaders remaining closeted (Shakespeare, 2017) and/or declining social responsibility towards a society that doesn't include them (Dugan et al., 2012).

TGNC or LGBTQ+ role models, mentors, and leadership development programs were shown to be critically helpful for TGNC leaders' gender and leadership identity development (Alimchandani, 2015; Beck, 2020; Huelskamp, 2022). However, local mentorship and guidance were often inaccessible to TGNC people (Bruce, 2022; Hamilton-Page, 2021, 2023; Hurley, 2016; Muhr & Sullivan, 2013) with Dugan et al. (2012) finding trans women and intersexed students were less mentored by faculty than were trans men students.

Future Research: Identity Development

TGNC leaders have distinctive experiences with shaping "provisional selves" (Ibarra, 1999) that inform the claims and grants found to be critical during leader identity construction (DeRue & Ashford, 2010, p. 630), raising intriguing opportunities for future research. Scholars have proposed creating safe,

judgement-free organizational environments conducive to “identity work” (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Epitropaki et al., 2017), and TGNC leaders have demonstrated expertise in creating such environments (Beck, 2020; Bruce, 2022; Huelskamp, 2022). Enhancing leadership development programs to be inclusive of TGNC leaders’ experiences seems beneficial for fostering greater sensitivity, resilience, and inclusion in leaders of all genders. A shift in attention from leader traits to leader identities can aid leaders and followers in recognizing their biases and promoting organizational outcomes and leadership effectiveness free from these biases (Chin & Trimble, 2014, p. 88).

Future research is also needed to support TGNC leaders combating discrimination (Joksimović, 2020). How do internalized oppression and microaggressions affect the leader’s identity journey and how does resilience influence leadership self-efficacy (Alimchandani, 2015; Hurley, 2016)? What is the nature of TGNC leadership networks, communities, and historical knowledge, and how do those provide support (Alimchandani, 2015), perhaps in ways similar to the experiences of women and marginalized groups (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Parker, 2005)? How does gender transition at different career stages or in different generational cohorts affect TGNC leaders’ journeys (Musick, 2018; Shakespeare, 2017)?

2. Leader Emergence

“I had to prove that I deserve a seat at the table. And that was the hardest part. I had to continually prove myself. I didn’t have to do that before transition, but I had to do that after transition”—out, trans woman leader (Schueler, 2022, p. 76).

“Prior to transition I was recognized as a leader because I stood out as somebody who was bold, somebody who was a risk taker, because I was defiant. ... I’m a social worker, so men are in the minority in social work. ...I don’t get the same kinds of offers anymore for leadership. It just doesn’t happen.” trans man, not openly transgender at work (Brewer, 2016, pp. 84-85)

Leader emergence has been defined as “the process through which an individual becomes influential to relevant others in a manner that involves the implicit or explicit granting of the leader role” (Badura et al., 2022). TGNC leaders must not only make *leadership* claims on individual, relational, and collective levels (De Rue & Ashford, 2010), but must simultaneously make *gender* claims at each of the three levels, in ways that may be familiar to African American women (Parker, 2015), and to cis men in cis woman-dominated workplaces (Simpson, 2014). For example, a trans woman manager’s subordinates

accepted her leadership claims (“she is just as good at cutting through the bullshit and pushing her own agenda as when she was John,”) but without always accepting her gender claims— “once in a while I can see that there is a John behind Claire. John isn’t completely gone” (Muhr & Sullivan, 2013, p. 428).

Aligning with Butler’s theory of doing gender, therefore, TGNC leaders are “not simply struggling for rights that attach to [their] person, but [they] are struggling to be conceived as persons” (2004, p. 32)

Significant research has explored variance in “communal” (female) and “agentic” (male) traits, with the latter found to predict leader emergence more strongly (Badura et al, 2018; Badura et al., 2020; Shen & Joseph, 2021). Variations in socialization experiences may create entirely different manifestations of agency and communion with TGNC leaders (Alimchandani, 2015; Musick, 2018), aligning with research with African American women (Parker, 2015). Such variations may also be present for white and/or cis women and men if they were studied outside a binary construct.

Trans women’s leadership claims may be rejected due to the “backlash effect” previously found with ciswomen (Williams & Tiedens, 2016), who are “perceived more negatively for displaying the same agentic behaviors as men” (Badura et al. 2022) as well as (cis) male leaders who display gender-transgressive behaviors (Bosak et al., 2016; Moss-Racusin et al., 2010; Saint-Michel, 2018). A trans woman of color received new comments from followers about being a “bitchy manager,” noting “when I was a guy these issues did not happen” (Musick, 2018, p. 43, p. 35). Some trans men also experienced a form of backlash in female-dominated workplaces, as agentic behaviors they exerted pre-transition were read as “hegemonic” or “domineering” after transitioning (Musick, 2018, p. 33). While evidence from nonbinary leaders is sparse, Hamilton-Page’s (2021) research found supervisors asked NB lesbians to comply with female dress codes but to use more masculine leadership behaviors. TGNC emergence experiences collectively illustrate how the backlash effect might be rooted in sexism that hinders everyone.

Social identity theory (SIT) describes how people who do not fit in-group prototypes are less likely to emerge (Hogg et al., 2012), which can present serious challenges to non-dominant social groups. TGNC leaders were sometimes able to overcome SIT’s barriers by demonstrating adaptive skills,

situational discernment, and effective actions for the good of a group. Additionally, the empathy, resilience, courage, and gratitude developed as part of their identity journeys helped some form a strong relational identity with a group; this dynamic may also provide resistance to the “dark side of leadership” effect of SIT described by Hogg et al. (2012, p. 286). TGNC strategies in overcoming SIT’s barriers should continue to be explored alongside the experiences of other marginalized groups to support both their individual empowerment as well as to help all of us see and mitigate systemic discrimination.

TGNC leaders may face a mid-career leadership re-emergence after coming out, sharing similarities with LGB experiences. Three trans leaders remaining in the same organization pre- and post-transition were “no longer viewed as the same person” due to their gender presentation (Musick, 2018, p. 28). Increased visibility alongside stigma meant they had to work harder to maintain respect and to be included in decision-making (Schueler, 2022). Coming out strained peer relationships (Bruce, 2022), and some leaders lost responsibilities or were moved out of public-facing positions (Schueler, 2022). Positive aspects of coming out included greater congruence between private and professional lives, boosting self-confidence and authenticity and easing fear of discovery (Alimchandani, 2015; Brewer, 2016; Muhr & Sullivan, 2013; Schueler, 2022). Some began to be seen as champions for equity and were able to expand related networks (Bruce, 2022). Some found their teams trusted them more after coming out (Schueler, 2002), emphasizing the potential importance to followers of deep traits over surface perceptions (Kalish & Luria, 2021).

Leader emergence of closeted TGNC people is also affected by their identities. Closeted leaders may adopt behaviors that don’t feel natural to them to comply with sex-role expectations (Brewer, 2016), and avoid stigma (Adams & Webster, 2017; Hamilton-Page, 2021; Schueler, 2022). Disclosing gender identities is influenced by regional context (Brewer, 2016) and organizational culture. For example, church organizations may alternatively value or exclude diverse identities (Huelskamp, 2022). Shakespeare’s (2017) study highlighted how African American trans men remained closeted to avoid dual discrimination against both trans identities *and* Black male stereotypes. Remaining closeted leads to stress, anxiety, and the constant need to manage behaviors to align with others’ gender expectations

(Brewer, 2016), potentially limiting people's ability to take "agentic" behaviors found important for leader emergence (Badura et al., 2020).

Attributes of leaders' bodies, including masculinity, have been found relevant to leader emergence (Bell & Kenny, 2011; Meriläinen et al., 2015; Sinclair, 2011). TGNC leaders encountered resistance to and policing of their embodiments due to binary gender expectations and stigma. Bathrooms and dress codes were frequently mentioned (Hamilton-Page, 2021; Muhr & Sullivan, 2013, Musick, 2018; Schueler, 2022), but other factors included vocabulary, syntax, grammar, gestures, clothing, body size, physical voice, use of physical force, hairstyles, and decisions related to gender-confirming surgery. One trans woman's followers expect her to wear makeup every day, saying, "it is a lot easier for us to understand that you are a Claire when you look like a Claire" (Muhr & Sullivan, 2013, p. 425). Another trans woman described her lack of Adam's apple and feminine speech patterns as "ill-received" in the military setting pre-transition, but as advantages post-transition (Musick, 2018, p. 48). White trans men leaders' changes in privilege related to perceived masculinity. For example, Ryan noted as soon as his voice changed, he "never got read as feminine ever again" (Musick, 2018, p. 51), and now has to be careful not to come across as "domineering or mansplaining" (p. 33). Others described practicing physically masculine behaviors to live up to social expectations (Brewer, 2016, p. 73, p. 81), raising the question of the extent to which cis men might also intentionally perform their genders. Several of Huelskamp's (2022) NB leaders strategically adjusted their physical presentation, reinforcing or hiding their identity to support perceived effectiveness.

Future Research: Leader Emergence

A primary reason given for studying emergence is to avoid investment in "individuals who do not have the temperament or motivation to emerge into and persist in leadership positions" (Badura et al. 2022, p. 2091). Yet history has shown unjust barriers persist for leaders from subordinate social groups who have valuable and needed skills, highlighting the critical need to involve leaders of all genders in future research. Including TGNC sub identities is important. Dugan et al. (2012) found trans women college students had lower perceptions of their leadership capacity and efficacy and were less likely to

take positional leadership roles than trans men (p. 731), similar to cis women (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Future research questions could explore root causes for these effects with cis and trans women, while distinct questions could focus on unique experiences of trans women, such as the impact of losing male privilege (Dugan et al., 2012, p. 730; Schueler, 2022, p. 83). Researching variations in coming out and transition processes and timing for TGNC sub-identities, and how these affect emergence, is also needed (Adams & Webster, 2017; Bruce, 2022; Schueler, 2022).

TGNC leaders' resilience against SIT-identified barriers, gender stereotypes, and prejudice about leaders' bodies raise questions to inform systemic change. How can we elevate a justice-oriented mindset using SIT (Sinclair, 2011)? How can leaders use "norm talk" and shared values to expand prototypical notions, avoiding scapegoating marginalized identities (Hogg et al., 2012, p. 277)? More research is also needed about how TGNC leaders (alongside leaders from other marginalized groups) might compensate for being non-prototypical. TGNC leaders may also find gender differences matter less in gender-diverse environments (Gloor et al., 2020) or where their TGNC identity is prototypical of the group, as with churches declaring themselves to be inclusive (Huelskamp, 2022), and some activist organizations (Alimchandani, 2016). To what extent do liberation movements already align with these issues, and in what ways might a distinctive focus be needed to support TGNC leaders specifically (Pastrana, 2010)? Features of TGNC leaders' identity development and emergence seem formative in their leadership style, which will be discussed next.

3. Leadership Style

"The only time I'm likely to use an authoritative approach is if all else failed. Or it is a true emergency . . . it's not a sustainable model of leadership. It's alienating, it's hurtful . . . I think it squelches creativity and innovation and honestly, reduces vulnerability and authentic communicating" —out, trans man superintendent (Bruce, 2022, p. 98)

"I feel like a chameleon or like 'Deadpool' I have all the abilities"— out, trans woman teacher (Musick, 2018: 36-37)

Of these 16 studies, three focused primarily on leadership style, including androgynous (Musick, 2018), authentic (Musick, 2018), synergistic (Bruce, 2022), and transformational leadership (Serjoie,

2019), while others referenced leadership style indirectly (Brewer, 2016; Gamboa et al., 2021; Hamilton-Page, 2021; Huelskamp, 2022; Muhr & Sullivan, 2013).

Androgynous leadership models examine the use of task-oriented (masculine) and relations-oriented (feminine) behaviors based on situational needs (Hardaker et al., 2023; Park, 1996). TGNC leaders demonstrated fluency with both styles (Musick, 2018, p. 41) and drew from behaviors learned in previous gender socializations (Brewer, 2016; Muhr & Sullivan, 2013; Musick, 2018), combining “female strengths and male strengths” (Gamboa et al., 2021). However, this balancing act comes with a cost, as people attempt to avoid misgendering (Musick, 2018, p. 28). A trans man described suppressing a natural relational approach in settings where it might portray him as less masculine, and a trans woman said she “completely disengages assertiveness to better pass as female in a specific space” (2018, p28). The trans woman in Muhr and Sullivan’s study said, “to succeed in my leadership role, I have to behave more like the man I don’t want to be” (2013, p. 427). TGNC experiences thus further explicate and nuance sexist biases which hamper leadership in general.

Authentic leadership emphasizes congruence between the leader’s self-concept and followers’ perceptions of the leader (Gardner et al., 2011). However, it has faced criticism for not considering social and historical forces on leaders (Gardiner, 2011, p. 99) such as those encountered by GNC lesbians harassed and policed for not aligning with historical assumptions of heteronormativity and the gender binary (Hamilton-Page, 2021, 2023). Scholars question whether AL’s concept of a “true self” is helpful because it creates “paradoxes and tensions” (Ladkin & Taylor, 2010), and these are especially relevant to TGNC experiences (Fine, 2017; Jourian, 2014). Musick (2018) found that transitioning at work brought six trans leaders more personal authenticity but, in many cases, less leadership authenticity as gendered scripts negated some of their natural acts (Musick, 2018, p. 27). A nonbinary participant in Huelskamp’s (2022) study mentioned moderating their authentic gender expression to avoid jeopardizing political projects. Using the lens of QT, TGNC leaders’ experiences could help everyone ask, “do I bring all of myself to work” (Chin & Trimble, 2014, p. 114) and to encourage the exploration of conditions for “authentic otherness” to thrive (Gardiner, 2017, p. 475).

Synergistic leadership theory (SLT) was intentionally developed to include women's experiences and external forces such as hegemonic structures, community cultures, and regulation (Irby et al., 2002, p. 316). Bruce concluded that SLT could be "a useful tool for examining leaders and leadership regardless of gender identity" (2022, p. 137) as it was a good fit for a trans man superintendent's leadership, encompassing his experiences in evolving from an authentic leader to a transformational leader, then shifting to a servant leadership model during the 2020 pandemic.

Serjoie's study on six transgender leaders using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire revealed strengths in transformational leadership, particularly in Intellectual Stimulation, emphasizing their role in challenging the status quo and inspiring alternative strategies (2019, pp. 128-129). TGNC leaders' adaptive meaning-making abilities may be foundational to their leadership skills (Alimchandani, 2015), aligning with proposals that those from marginalized groups gain a sense of cognitive flexibility from experience seeing different perspectives and shifting between and translating across groups (Chin & Trimble, 2014, p. 103). Trans people in Serjoie's study (2019) also scored higher than men or women on Idealized Influence *behaviors*, but lower than women or men on Idealized Influence *attributions* of followers, pointing to possible discrimination. This aligns with how women (who score higher than men on both dimensions) outperform men to a greater degree on behavior than attribution (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The role of transformational leadership in easing gender-role incongruity (Eagly et al., 2003) should be further explored with TGNC leaders.

TGNC leaders did not always foreground the role of gender in discussing their leadership. While Schueler's participants all reported gender discrimination, they did not see their leadership style or achievements as related to their gender (2022, p. 76). In Brewer's study (2016), one trans man deemed his trans identity irrelevant because he fully transitioned prior to his first job. As TGNC identities become more visible, and hopefully, accepted, one hopes leaders will be able to focus less frequently on their gender in developing and explaining their leadership.

Future Research: Leadership Style

Additional leadership models show promise for research with TGNC leaders. Given the displays of empathy and follower-orientation in these studies, servant leadership (Eva et al., 2019; Hogue, 2016; Liu, 2017; Politis and Politis, 2018) and followership theories seem intriguing for further exploration (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). TGNC leaders' experiences would also support research into leadership models that prioritize diversity and inclusion (Chin & Trimble, 2014; Gotsis & Grimani, 2016, p. 254). No research was found connecting TGNC leadership style with outcomes or effectiveness, which are regularly called for by gender and leadership research agendas (Shen & Joseph, 2021).

4. Workplace Discrimination

“I can't be truthful. I don't want to be truthful, it's not safe” —nonbinary feminine trans leader speaking about why they are not out at work. (Schueler, 2022, p. 73)

“Having awareness of living in a female role makes me more alert to the pressures female members of staff are under – and quick to recognize sexism” —out trans man (Brewer, 2016, p. 90)

A 2020 U.S. Supreme Court ruling affirmed protection against workplace discrimination for trans people (*Bostock v. Clayton County*, 2020). However, all 16 studies showed TGNC leaders experience similar hostility and discrimination akin to that experienced by TGNC employees (Köllen & Rumens, 2022), especially TGNC leaders of color (Alimchandani, 2015; Hurley, 2016; Shakespeare, 2017). The TGNC leaders in these studies daily experienced transphobic discrimination, harassment, assault, barriers to advancement, non-inclusive policies, binary expectations, isolation, silencing, and microaggressions.

TGNC leaders also experienced sexism and genderism, echoing previous research with women (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and men (Saint-Michel, 2018). As the trans woman in Muhr and Sullivan's study noted, “it is like I have changed teams ... now that I am a woman, it is suddenly okay to interrupt me and ignore me” (2013, p. 427). Aligning with Eagly and Karau's work (2002), context matters: predominantly female spaces were more welcoming to trans women than male or less gender-segregated settings (Musick, 2018; Schueler, 2022). While white trans men sometimes experienced greater privilege after transition (Alimchandani, 2015; Brewer, 2016; Bruce, 2020; Musick, 2018), in predominantly female

environments, some felt their energy was misinterpreted post-transition as “hegemonic” or patriarchal (Brewer, 2016), or they were considered “just another dumb guy” (Musick, 2018, p. 84). In contrast, African American trans men were categorically unable to be open about their transitions (Shakespeare, 2017, p. 82).

TGNC leaders reported some positive experiences in the workplace. For example, gender transitions were sometimes supported by allied managers, leaders’ own ability to set the tone, and the increased confidence from aligning identity and expression (Schueler, 2022). Some participants felt empowered by using their leadership roles to combat discrimination (Alimchandani, 2015; Beck, 2020; Bruce, 2022). Two trans school leaders intentionally crafted teaching responses to uphold dignity as a norm (e.g., “Let me sit you down and tell you how you hurt my feelings when you said that” (Beck, 2020, p. 441; Bruce, 2022). In inclusive environments, TGNC leaders sometimes gained leadership opportunities because their identities were valued as supportive to DEI efforts (Alimchandani, 2015; Huelskamp, 2022; Musick, 2018), though these advantages were seen as vulnerable to changes in the political climate (Huelskamp, 2022).

Future Research: Workplace Discrimination

21st-century diversity leadership paradigms hold leaders responsible for eliminating discrimination, injustice, and unfairness in their organizations while fostering safer work environments (Chin & Trimble, 2014). Although themes of discrimination were pervasive in these 16 studies, there is not yet direct research into TGNC leaders’ experiences with discrimination and policing, and how that affects their leadership style, behavior, and outcomes. These studies suggested exploring the effects of social dominance theory (Darden et al., 2022), social capital and privileges and internalized oppression of TGNC leaders with intersectional identities (Alimchandani, 2015; Hurley, 2016), and the potential for mentorship, role modeling and leadership development programs to support TGNC leaders. These studies show how TGNC leaders combat discrimination intentionally and inadvertently by “queering” leadership through their daily activities while also adapting behavior to be safe and effective (Gamboa et al., 2021). Research is therefore recommended about their decision-making regarding when to transgress or to be

compliant with heteronormative structures (Beck, 2020; Bruce, 2022; Gamboa et al., 2021; Huelskamp, 2022; Musick, 2018).

The previous sections highlighted future research opportunities in the areas of identity development, leader emergence, leadership style, and workplace discrimination. The following section offers broader implications for future research inclusive of TGNC leaders and leadership.

Future Research

Shen and Joseph (2021, Table 2) proposed a comprehensive agenda for the gender binary. How could this agenda be expanded to include all genders, and what questions are missing entirely? Others have offered more liberatory agendas that include intersectional and critical theories (Breslin, 2017; Tan & DeFrank-Cole, 2023: Ch 2). The experiences of the 440 leaders in these studies point to the latter approach and challenge the field of leadership studies to clarify its stance on diversity, inclusion, and gender definitions (Chin & Trimble, 2014; Tan & DeFrank-Cole, 2023). The leadership studies field bears responsibility for including TGNC leaders in future research, or at least acknowledging when and why they and other groups are not included (Parker, 2005).

Using a nonbinary gender construct and untethering it from biological determinism raises new research possibilities (de Souza et al., 2016). Recent work challenges binary and universal gender constructs by acknowledging complex influences of gender socialization on adult genders (Skinner & McHale, 2022). How does recognizing all genders trouble sometimes essentialist alignments, such as agency and task-orientation with men and communion and relational-orientation with women? Using QT, how can we re-examine the gender-affirming practices of cisgender leaders such as hormonal treatment, hair replacement or removal, and voice coaching? To what extent do feminine men and trans women inform debates about the “feminine advantage” (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Korabik & Ayman, 2007)? Recent interest in critical masculinities, men’s caring and empathetic behaviors, and destructive leadership highlights the diversity in men’s leadership (Bass, 2020; Collinson et al., 2023; Connel & Messerschmidt, 2005; Elliott, 2016; Simpson, 2014, Shen & Joseph, 2021) which could be enriched by the experiences of transmasculine leaders (Brewer, 2016; Bruce, 2022; Musick, 2018). TGNC leaders have demonstrated

distinctive knowledge skills, and motivations tied to their gender identity and experience. To what extent are these traits present in all genders, and how can they be further developed?

Nonbinary leaders remain understudied, with only six of 16 studies having NB participants—a critical concern given the prevalence of NB identities among young queer people (Watson et al., 2020). Other than Hamilton-Page (2021, 2023), few studies delved into their nonbinary-ness. How does their rejection of the binary man/woman premise affect the bias associated with role-congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), and what insights does it offer regarding androgynous leadership? To what extent do nonbinary leaders categorize their leadership behaviors as masculine, feminine, non-gendered, or multi-gendered, and how are their leadership behaviors perceived by others? As research suggests that lacking gendered attributes is disadvantageous (Wolfram & Gratton, 2014), research with specifically agender sub-identities along with cis leaders who do not consider their gender salient would be useful.

Guidance concerning gender-inclusive research practices (Glick et al., 2018; Ilac, 2021) can help the field increase the validity of traditional gender measurement approaches (Wood & Eagly, 2005). Scholars suggest shifting from treating gender as a categorical, demographic variable to a continuous variable (Tan & DeFrank-Cole, 2023; Reilly, 2019). Open-ended questions are important for allowing individuals to use accurate terms and to include details relevant to them about gender transitions, level of disclosure, and salience of gender (Brewer, 2016; Dugan et al., 2012; Hurley, 2016). When using fixed-choice options, including TGNC identities should be the norm to acknowledge the validity of all genders and prevent marginalization (Dugan et al., 2012). Additionally, it's important to differentiate between gender sub-identities, as shared experiences of trans men and trans women may highlight discrimination against TGNC people, while differing experiences may reveal sexist prejudices and stereotypes. In cases where a binary male/female variable must be used (e.g., with existing datasets), researchers should openly acknowledge how this limitation affects the interpretation and validity of their findings.

While the above changes seem imperative for the field to address, it is important to recognize the necessity for continued research concerning the leadership of women (both cis and trans). Judith Gold Stitzel (2023) has identified needed research concerning violence against women in leadership and the

damaging effects that ensue when we overlook language habits, cultural differences, and physical embodiment expectations that disadvantage women.

Implications for Practice

For TGNC leaders like me, being able to read about others' experiences is affirming and helpful. These studies contribute to emergent communities of practice and help TGNC leaders build personal leadership approaches that incorporate gender identities safely and effectively. Learning more about how TGNC leaders' experiences reflect the findings of leadership theories (or not) helps us build toward new theories, following examples like Lanier et al.'s (2022) conceptual framework for Black women's leadership. The very question of how leadership itself is framed shapes the future of how TGNC leaders emerge and flourish (Jourian & Simmons, 2017, pp. 65-66).

As discussed in a previous paper (Fagan & Short, 2023), studies about TGNC leaders offer implications for practice that apply in the broadest sense. Everyone can benefit from self-reflection about how gender affects leadership. Everyone, but especially positional leaders, can work toward more inclusive spaces for people of all genders to flourish (Sangganjanavanich & Headley, 2013), and raise awareness of gender stereotypes that influence the leadership process (Saint-Michel, 2018). Organizations must respond to calls for more inclusive policies (Köllen & Rumens, 2022) and support for marginalized groups (Hurley, 2016). Leadership educators can scrutinize and challenge gender and leadership curriculum to bring more inclusive understandings of gender into the classroom (Robinson et al., 2017) and into leadership development programs (Jourian & Simmons, 2017). Leadership scholars can update methodologies, consult gender-diverse communities, ask more expansive and informed research questions, and engage with more inclusive theories as they approach their work.

Conclusion

This literature review upheld previous findings concerning the serious lack of research studies with TGNC leaders or about their leadership (Fagan & Short, 2023). Disturbingly, the searches in eight leadership studies journals suggest that awareness of or interest in non-cis-gender experiences is minimal.

Additionally, findings show TGNC leaders experience systemic discrimination and barriers to leadership akin to non-leader employees and leaders from other marginalized groups. Increasing the representation of TGNC leaders in our conception of who is interpretable and valuable as a leader is an essential part of diagnosing and combating barriers to a diverse leadership pipeline.

These 16 studies lay a robust foundation for future research, answering calls to disrupt the gender-binary paradigm and work for systemic change. The substantial proportion of dissertations implies the field is recognizing the need to address this research gap. The achievements of participants in the studies inspire hope and admiration. TGNC leaders offer needed capabilities to adapt, to reach out, to include, and to use power and privilege for and with others. Their experiences have the potential to help people of all genders counteract generations of masculine leadership stereotypes, live out gender identities more authentically, and bolster advocacy for marginalized people. Their challenge to binary, universal gender assumptions offers new directions for untangling dilemmas in the field. Everyone, including leaders, followers, leadership educators, students, and scholars, can take action to make gender more visible as a complex and fluid social construction that influences the socially constructed nature of leadership.

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